Diversifying Intelligence: History, Discrimination and the Canadian Intelligence Community

Carleigh Cartmell,
PhD Candidate, University of Waterloo

Corresponding Author
Carleigh Cartmell, University of Waterloo
c2cartmell@uwaterloo.ca

Introduction

In 2017 the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) faced a discrimination lawsuit from five of its former employees. These employees alleged that they faced ongoing and regular discrimination based on their religion, race, ethnicity, gender and/or sexual orientation (Press, 2017). As many current and former intelligence officers can attest, the intelligence apparatus of Canada (and elsewhere) is still very much an "old boys club" (Press, 2017; DCAF, OSCE/ODIHER, and UN Women 2019, 13). This is not only problematic for those working in intelligence, especially those outwardly marked by their difference, but as reports show, can actually be detrimental to the main functioning of the intelligence agency which is the prevention, detection of terrorism and similar security threats (Intelligence and Security Council and Blears, 2015). Although increasing diversity and making intelligence more representative of Canadian society as a whole should be enough ethical justification for changes by itself, these diversity problems mean that Canadian intelligence services are not functioning as efficiently as they could.

Many intelligence agencies themselves have admitted that a lack of diversity is not only problematic but creates an active security concern (IC Equal Employment Opportunity and Diversity Office, 2017). With diversity, intelligence agencies can not only serve more people in society better, but they can also collect better intelligence from more diverse populations, and better respond to a broader range of intelligence threats. For example, gender bias, could lead to intelligence agencies underestimating and misjudging women (Chiru et al, 2022), both within their own agencies and outside of them. As the 2017 lawsuit against CSIS shows the current environment within Canadian intelligence is in many cases alienating its diverse candidates. Huda Mukbil a former CSIS employee, claimed that during her career she was treated as an insider threat and alienated as a practicing Muslim, rather than treated as a security asset (Burke and Everson, 2021). Achieving a critical mass of diverse people can help to eliminate both explicit and implicit, unacknowledged bias that can happen when all intelligence agents are all from similar background and experiences. This problem is so pervasive that some agencies have even made steps to change this. This raises the question of why this 'old boys club' organizational culture is still so pervasive and hard to combat, even when intelligence agencies themselves acknowledge the benefits of diversity.

These diversity problems are not new, intelligence communities particularly within the Anglosphere have historically been disproportionately white and male (Sethna and Hewitt 2018, 5; Chiru et al, 2022). A trend that is improving within Canada but persists today. These historical exclusionary foundations of the Canadian intelligence community have lasting impacts. This project interrogates at the historical treatment of women and minorities within the Canadian intelligence apparatus and studies how this has contributed to the diversity problems (and therefore security problems) that we see within the Canadian intelligence community today.

A Brief History

Canada is a country with a rich history of intelligence, much of which is still being uncovered. From the intelligence performed by border control services to the monitoring and analysis of foreign signals communication, whether the general Canadian public is aware, their lives are touched by intelligence. From the period following WWI until today Canada has built an active intelligence community. Unfortunately, this community has not always served in the best interest of women and minorities, and there is still a culture permeated with white, heterosexual, masculine assumptions. It is important to analyse the historical foundations these communities because these legacies still have echoes in the intelligence community (and potentially the diversity issues) of today.

Up until the creation of CSIS in July 1984, much of Canadian intelligence fell under the broader umbrella of the RCMP (Hewitt 2002). There was also the Communications Security Establishment (CSE), established during WWII that remains today responsible for signals intelligence (SIGINT) and IT Security (Communications Security Establishment 2021; Robinson 2020). The Canadian Forces also maintained an intelligence function. While there are other organisations within Canada that have intelligence functions, this brief will focus mainly on these four.

Historically, the very structures of these institutions were exclusionary which may have contributed to the diversity problem that persist today. For example, the RCMP was comprised entirely of (mostly white) males until 1974 (Sethna and Hewitt 2018, 5). The Canadian Forces also had segregated occupations following the Second World War, and their intelligence service positions were reserved for men until Susan Beharriell was the sole woman to complete the Security and Intelligence training in 1977 (Henderson 2015). Not only that but the diverse individuals who tried to break these barriers, faced intense discrimination, additional scrutiny and a host of other issues (Henderson 2015). The RCMP's 'Key Sectors' program (the one responsible for domestic intelligence and counter-subversion) became the blueprint for the counter-subversion branch of CSIS. Many of the same personnel who had worked in the 'Key Sectors' program moved to this branch of CSIS (Hewitt 2002), bringing with them the same ideals and assumptions and leaving little room for cultural change.[1]

This transition is even more problematic when one considers the RCMP's intelligence legacy of being used to monitor the domestic threats from within Canadian society itself. The people most actively scrutinized by the RCMP for the threat of 'subversion', were those seen to be a threat to the established order or the status quo (Hewitt 2002, 167). In this case 'subversion' was loosely defined and could be adapted to fit almost any person or group that was considered inconvenient by the establishment (Hewitt 2002, 167). These threats to the status quo often included women and diverse individuals fighting for greater rights. For example, women's liberation movements, Black and Red power, homosexuals, and labour unions, were just some of the groups targeted (Sethna and Hewitt 2018; Hewitt 2002). Most of these groups were the object of scrutiny by the Canadian intelligence apparatus because of the fear of the

---

[1] Unfortunately there is very little publicly available demographic data regarding CSE, so analyzing that will have to be the focus of future research.

left, and the 'red-menace', however the impact of this additional scrutiny (often with little to no proof (Hewitt 2002, 172), has left a legacy of mistrust within these communities. Greater diversity within these agencies will be harder to achieve (particularly in regard to attracting diverse individuals), if the history of these actions is not addressed.

Diverse individuals who did manage to break into these institutions were often treated with if not mere suspicion, downright harassment (see: Henderson 2015), in pursuit of an intelligence career. Through interviews with current and former intelligence workers, it is clear that although not faced with as much overt sexualization and discrimination, adaptation strategies are still required, in order to successfully navigate the world of intelligence. For example, several women talked about having to dress in a certain reserved way, lower their voices, and even make it clear they were 'not like those other women', in order to fit in and be taken seriously. Open femininity was still perceived as strange, different, and in friction with the masculinized environment of intelligence. Through these interviews it also became clear that, femininity (and more particularly masculine discomfort with femininity) can be an intelligence asset. If more communities were to commit to cultural change and embracing different perspectives and ways of being, they would not only be more effective security institutions, but they would serve more Canadians better.

Analysis

In their 2019 report, The National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians reviewed the state of diversity within the various security organizations in Canada that have an intelligence function (National Security Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians 2019). The 2019 Annual Report revealed that the state of diversity was initially promising, at least regarding gender diversity, with an average of 54.8% women across the organisations responsible for intelligence (see Figure 1.1). However, this number may not represent an accurate picture of who is working actively on intelligence or who is even intelligence adjacent, because it does not disaggregate the data based on specifically who works on intelligence within the organizations. Instead, it gives an entire workforce overview of the organizations that have at least some intelligence section or function. This is problematic because women are more likely to work in administrative, HR and secretarial roles (DCAF, OSCE/ODIHER, and UN Women 2019, 11). Between the two organisations with a majority of intelligence responsibilities, CSE and CSIS, the average number of women drops to 42.9%. The numbers in Canada, of women who specifically work in intelligence are most likely similar to that of the UK, who show that 53% of civil servants who are women, that number drops for intelligence to 37% (Intelligence and Security Council and Blears, 2015). This data also shows that while at the base level numbers for women are improving, the numbers for visible minorities and people with disabilities is well below the market availability. This report also highlights an additional issue of women and minorities in positions of management (as shown by the EX columns).

Departments and Agencies		Women				Aboriginal Peoples				Members of Visible Minorities				Persons with Disabilities			
Public Service Average		Workforce Availability (WFA)		Current		WFA		Current		WFA		Current		WFA		Current	
		52.5%		54.8%		3.4%		5.1%		13%		15.7%		4.4%		5.3%	
Organizations Under Review		WFA	Current	EX WFA	EX Current	WFA	Current	EX WFA	EX Current	WFA	Current	EX WFA	EX Current	WFA	Current	EX WFA	EX Current
Canadian Armed Forces (CAF)		14.5%	15.0%	Not available (n/a)	7.2%	3.4%	2.8%	n/a	0.9%	6.0%	7.2%	n/a	2.0%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA)		44.4%	47.5%	45.5%	37.1%	4.1%	3.3%	5.9%	2.4%	11.9%	14.7%	8.5%	8.4%	4.4%	3.4%	2.3%	2.7%
Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS)		47.3%	48.5%	47.3%	40.0%	2.6%	2.3%	2.6%	2.0%	18.5%	16.5%	18.5%	7.0%	4.6%	4.2%	4.6%	3.0%
Communications Security Establishment (CSE)		36.7%	37.3%	27.6%	30.4%	1.8%	2.0%	2.5%	4.3%	21.5%	11.4%	8.6%	4.3%	4.2%	3.7%	5.9%	0.0%
Department of National Defence (DND)		39.5%	40.0%	43.5%	42.4%	2.6%	3.1%	3.5%	<5	8.7%	7.8%	11.2%	4.1%	4.6%	5.4%	2.4%	5.9%
Global Affairs Canada (GAC)		57.6%	55.3%	51.4%	42.5%	3.1%	4.6%	5.0%	4.0%	13.9%	20.3%	9.5%	11.9%	3.9%	3.6%	2.3%	3.0%
Integrated Terrorism Assessment Centre (ITAC)		47.3%	68.0%	47.3%	67.0%	2.6%	5.0%	2.6%	0.0%	18.5%	13.0%	18.5%	0.0%	4.6%	5.0%	4.6%	0.0%
Privy Council Office (PCO)		52.2%	57.3%	47.1%	52.27%	1.8%	2.9%	n/a	0.0%	12.7%	13.0%	9.2%	4.5%	4.0%	3.4%	2.3%	4.5%
Public Safety Canada		55.3%	61.1%	46.3%	54.9%	3.1%	4.2%	6.6%	8.5%	15.1%	11.0%	7.5%	7.0%	3.9%	5.9%	2.3%	2.8%
Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)	Total	48.0%	39.5%	n/a	n/a	4.0%	6.8%	n/a	n/a	18.0%	12.0%	n/a	n/a	5.0%	2.4%	n/a	n/a
	Regular Member	49.3%	21.6%	52.1%	21.8%	3.1%	7.8%	2.8%	8.4%	15.1%	11.1%	12.7%	5.8%	n/a	1.7%	n/a	0.7%
	Civilian Member	48.0%	51.7%	52.1%	56.4%	4.0%	3.9%	2.8%	1.7%	18.0%	13.6%	12.7%	7.7%	5.0%	2.7%	2.8%	0.9%
	Public service employee	48.0%	77.6%			4.0%	5.7%			18.0%	13.7%			5.0%	4.1%		

Table 1: Representation of Designated Groups in Organizations in the Security and Intelligence Community, 2017–2018

Figure 1.1, Retrieved from, National Security Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, Annual Report 2019, 13.

It is also important to note that in the 2020 and 2021 reports there was no follow-up to the state of diversity in Canadian intelligence. In order to make substantive changes, there needs to be greater transparency regarding goals, and accountability for achieving them.
Creating an organisational culture more open and friendly to women and minorities, requires more than just sheer numbers. Because many of these cultural values that favour masculine, heteronormative, whiteness are so embedded into the structures of the institutions, many people who enter these organizations adapt themselves to better to fit in, rather bring themselves and their diverse perspectives as they are (anonymous interviews 2020). For example, many women in security and intelligence masculinize themselves, in order to reduce the friction of existing in a largely masculine space (anonymous interviews 2020). This hinders the benefits diversity can bring because a culture of inclusivity and openness to divergent people and perspectives has not been achieved. This friction can also lead to attrition amongst diverse candidates. Instead of adapting or dealing with a hostile work environment many choose to leave. This is why focusing one just recruitment and adding more diverse people to the pipeline, is not enough on its own (DCAF, OSCE/ODIHER, and UN Women 2019, 12). Although Canada has come a long way, from basically a minimal number of women and minorities in intelligence roles. To combat the legacies of history more substantive and cultural change is required.

Overall Recommendations

While recent years have brought many steps in the right direction, for example, CSE's 2020 document "Supporting transgender and gender diverse persons at the Communications Security Establishment" (Communications Security Establishment 2022), there are still many issues that need to be addressed. The following two sections are comprised of several policy suggestions and recommendations to help take further steps forward.

1. A working understanding of the history of Canadian Intelligence with analysis of the historical discriminatory practices and their lasting impacts, for practitioners, policy makers, and overseers.
   a. Including an understanding of how the historical targeting of diverse communities by the intelligence apparatus has lasting impacts today.
2. Specific and disaggregated data regarding diversity and intelligence in Canada so that more targeted and specific recommendations can be made.
   a. This includes following up on previously reported numbers, targets, and goals. The National Security Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, Annual Report in 2019 was a good start but there needs to be follow-up, transparency, and accountability.
   b. As suggested by the "Intelligence and Gender" report, data within the organisation should also be disaggregated for internal use and analysis, including all data collected by the intelligence agencies (DCAF, OSCE/ODIHER, and UN Women 2019, 27).
3. Working towards an overall meaningful cultural shift within the Canadian intelligence community.
   a. Requires a commitment to both top-down and bottom-up approaches
   b. Incorporating a critical gendered perspective into what intelligence is, how intelligence is done and who intelligence is for.
   c. This also means rethinking and dissecting the assumptions within the running definitions of intelligence used within the Canadian intelligence community.

Policy Avenues and Points of Intervention

Outside the intelligence organisation
Greater transparency and outreach
- There is currently mistrust of the Canadian intelligence community by many diverse groups and individuals (National Security Transparency Advisory Group 2022). In order to combat this trust gap clear goals must be set regarding transparency and engagement with these groups should be a priority.

- o As argued by the National Security Transparency Advisory Group, collection and outreach must remain distinct and separate in order to facilitate trust (National Security Transparency Advisory Group 2022). Transparency about collection processes must also be a part of this engagement.
- Meaningful engagement and brainstorming with the public, academics, professionals, civil society, etc. regarding how intelligence currently functions, but also more importantly how it could function. This could include adapting the working definitions of intelligence (DCAF, OSCE/ODIHER, and UN Women 2019, 30-31). In Canada it is crucial that this involves Indigenous groups.

More oversight that actively incorporate gender perspectives into their mandates. (UN 33)
- Canada already has established oversight bodies that could be used to a greater extent. Greater oversight could also seek to add transparency and trust.
- Most importantly there must be a clear and accessible complaint process for those who feel their rights have been violated by the intelligence community, both from within and outside the organisation. (National Security Transparency Advisory Group 2022, 15)
- These oversight bodies should also make diversity and inclusion, as well as gendered perspectives, part of their oversight mandates and processes. (DCAF, OSCE/ODIHER, and UN Women 2019, 33).

Inside the intelligence community
Hiring, promotion and attrition
- Finding ways to attract more diverse candidate and having specific goals in regard to hiring
    - o More people in the pipeline can lead to a change within the organisational culture but only if other additional measures are also taken.
    - o Reviewing job postings and hiring processes with the goal of uncovering unconscious bias, specific gendered and exclusionary language, and if necessary, add additional transparency to the hiring process.
    - o Make sure there are gender and diversity experts included in the hiring process.
- Promoting diverse candidates
    - o One of the most effective ways to create more inclusive work environments in to make sure diversity and inclusion measures reach senior management
        - ▪ "Surface-level diversity (national culture, gender, age, etc.) in top management teams has been proven by field literature to have a positive effect on strategic change frequency. Change frequency, in its turn, has been positively correlated with long-term organizational performance." (Chiru Et Al P.609-10)
    - o Have a plan and set concrete goals to have more diverse candidates in management. This includes:

- reviewing the promotion process and criteria. Promotion can seem gender-neutral and non-discriminatory until one dissects the assumptions within the language itself. For example, a criteria for promotion might be 'assertiveness' and 'leadership', adjectives which as typically associated with masculinity.
  - o Having more diverse management is an important step, but it should also be accompanied by management who are actively committed to diversity and inclusion to help shift the overall organizational culture ((DCAF, OSCE/ODIHER, and UN Women 2019).
- Have open and accessible complaint mechanisms to reduce attrition (DCAF, OSCE/ODIHER, and UN Women 2019, 27, 39).
  - o Training should include how to file a complaint if one is exposed to discrimination, violence, a hostile work environment or a violation of their human rights on the job.
  - o Mechanisms for addressing these complaints must be made transparent, in order to improve trust with employees and encourage reporting when necessary.

Training and Education

- Increased education and training for both management and employees of intelligence services
  - o Incorporate inclusivity and unconscious bias training throughout the career process. This does risk being seen as 'box to check' and then forget, so it must be incorporated with other interventions
  - o The incorporation of the history of the Canadian intelligence community into training, with analysis of the historical discriminatory practices and their lasting impacts. Stressing the importance of understanding history to learn lessons in the present.
- Having mentorship or leadership programs for members of diverse communities can help with both promotion and retention long-term.
- One possible avenue for education could be an expansion of GBA+ training programs with particular attention to hiring and promotion. This would be in line with Canadian training and priorities in other areas of public policy and service (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada 2020).

Putting diversity and gender at the centre

- Rather than having diversity as just a 'box to tick', incorporate diversity and inclusion into every aspect of the intelligence process
  - o DCAF, OSCE/ODIHER, and UN Women report recommends integrating a gender perspective into ever aspect of intelligence from collection to dissemination

(DCAF, OSCE/ODIHER, and UN Women 2019). This will require massive political will by the organisation as well as training, but might be one of the most effective strategies in creating organisational change.

- The hiring of specialized experts to become an integral part of the everyday workplace of the Canadian intelligence community both to train, as well as to monitor progress.

Conclusions

As part of their *Gender and Security Toolkit,* DCAF (Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance), OSCE/ODIHR (Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights), and UN Women, released a report on intelligence and gender. In this report they argue that, within "the context of the intelligent sector, gender equality means that women and men should have equal opportunities to participate in intelligence services, to have their rights equally protected and promoted, and to have their needs equally addressed." (DCAF, OSCE/ODIHER, and UN Women 2019, 9) This can only happen when intelligence communities not only increase diversity numerically but actively incorporate diversity and inclusion into their overall structure and processes. Canada as both a diverse and democratic nation should be no exception. While many steps have been taken in recent years to improve the situation for diverse individuals within intelligence, the 2017 discrimination lawsuit against CSIS shows there is still more that needs to be done. This brief has provided some potential avenues and points of intervention for doing so based on the historical actions of the Canadian intelligence community.
While the ethical implications of intelligence being more representative of society and accessible to all should be enough, there are also practice reasons to prioritize diversity. Diverse perspectives could help intelligence personnel work more effectively within their ever-changing environment, identify different threats, and create more well-rounded solutions to intelligence priorities (Intelligence and Security Council and Blears, 2015). Identifying the historical structural barriers to diversity in Canadian intelligence, and its lasting affects today, can help craft better policy, to both encourage more diversity and attract more diverse candidates to intelligence work in the first place. Diversity is arguably even more important for intelligence services because such biases may end up negatively affecting decisions about - indeed the very security of - the wider world.

References

Anderson, Scott. "The Evolution of the Canadian Intelligence Establishment, 1945–1950." *Intelligence and National Security* 9, no. 3 (July 1994): 448–71. https://doi.org/10.1080/02684529408432261.

Burke, Ashley, and Kristen Everson. "A Muslim Former Intelligence Officer Says Systemic Racism at CSIS Is a Threat to National Security | CBC News." *CBC*, June 29, 2021. https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/racism-descrimination-claims-canadian-security-intelligence-service-1.6083353.

Campbell, Isabel. "How Emerging Trends in Historiography Expose the Canadian Army's Past Discriminatory Practices and Provide Hope for Future Change." *International Journal: Canada's*

Journal of Global Policy Analysis 76, no. 3 (September 2021): 465–76. https://doi.org/10.1177/00207020211050330.

Chiru, Irena, Cristina Ivan, and Ruben Arcos. "Diversity in Intelligence: Organizations, Processes, and People." *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 35, no. 4 (October 2, 2022): 607–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/08850607.2022.2047533.

Communications Security Establishment. "Communications Security Establishment," February 18, 2021. https://www.cse-cst.gc.ca/en/culture-and-community/history/our-story.

Communications Security Establishment. "Supporting Transgender and Gender Diverse Persons at the Communications Security Establishment," June 30, 2022. https://www.cse-cst.gc.ca/en/supporting-transgender-and-gender-diverse-persons-communications-security-establishment.

DCAF, OSCE/ODIHER, and UN Women. "Intelligence and Gender." Gender and Security Toolkit. Geneva: DCAF, OSCE/ODIHR, UN Women, 2019.

Henderson, Mark. "Effecting Change - Susan Beharriell." *Queen's Alumni Review*, November 11, 2015. https://www.queensu.ca/alumnireview/articles/2015-11-14/effecting-change-susan-beharriell.

Hewitt, Steve. "Reforming the Canadian Security State: The Royal Canadian Mounted Police Security Service and the 'Key Sectors' Program." *Intelligence and National Security* 17, no. 4 (December 2002): 165–84. https://doi.org/10.1080/02684520412331306680.

IC Equal Employment Opportunity Office. "Diversity and Inclusion: Examining Workforce Concerns within the Intelligence Community," January 2017. https://fas.org/irp/dni/diversity.pdf.

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. "Gender-Based Analysis plus (GBA+)," March 10, 2020. https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/departmental-plan-2020-2021/gender-based-analysis-plus.html.

Intelligence and Security Council, and Hazel Blears. "Women in the UK Intelligence Community." London: HM Government, 2015. http://isc.independent.gov.uk/news-archive/5march2015.

National Security Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians. "Annual Report 2019," August 30, 2019. https://www.nsicop-cpsnr.ca/reports/rp-2020-03-12-ar/annual_report_2019_public_en.pdf.

National Security Transparency Advisory Group. "How National Security and Intelligence Institutions Engage with Racialized Communities," 2022.

Press, Jordan. "CSIS Faces $35-Million Harassment, Discrimination Lawsuit - The Globe and Mail." *Globe and Mail*. July 14, 2017. https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/canadas-spy-agency-faces-35-million-harassment-discrimination-lawsuit/article35690263/.

Robinson, Bill. "The Communications Security Establishment (CSE)." In *Top Secret Canada: Understanding the Canadian Intelligence and National Security Community*, edited by Stephanie Carvin, Thomas Juneau, and Craig Forcese, 72–89. The Institute of Public Administration of Canada Series in Public Management and Governance. Toronto ; Buffalo ; London: University of Toronto Press, 2020.

Rudner, Martin. "Canada's Communications Security Establishment from Cold War to Globalization." *Intelligence and National Security* 16, no. 1 (March 2001): 97–128. https://doi.org/10.1080/714002836.

Sethna, Christabelle, and Steve Hewitt. *Just Watch Us: RCMP Surveillance of the Women's Liberation Movement in Cold War Canada*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2018.