R. Mahon and C. Collier, “Navigating the Shoals of Canadian Federalism: Childcare Advocacy,” in M. Haussman, M. Sawyer, and J. Vickers, eds., *Federalism, Feminism, and Multilevel Governance* (Surrey Ashgate, 2010)

**Overview**

Chapter argues that – for the most part – Cdn childcare advocates have been able to navigate the shifting shoals of Cdn federalism with the aim of establishing a pan-Cdn publicly-funded childcare system. The complex interests, opportunities, frames and institutions that make up the Cdn federation necessarily compound progress towards that ultimate goal. Even if a more favourable federal govt is elected, the closest thing to a pan-Cdn system would be a revitalization of the bilateral agreements under the Liberals in 2005.

**Background**

* Childcare an important issue for Cdn feminists since the Royal Commission on the Status of Women placed it on the pan-Cdn agenda in 1970
* Has influenced the “national” question as well – for Quebec feminists ‘nation’ refers to Quebec, and thus they have focused on the provincial scale.
  + For the rest of the country – the question of ‘nation’ has impacted success
* Push for child-care came out of second wave of feminism in 1960s. Though headway was made through the 1970s, the political opportunity structure shifted in the 1980s under the Mulroney govt: (1) Meech Lake Accord included opt-out provision for any province not wanting to take part in new shared-cost initiative; (2) election of Conservative govt brought party with neoliberal ideas into office; and (3) an anti-feminist ‘pro-family-values’ social conservatism gained a voice within the federal Conservative Party’s Family Caucus
* 1990s saw the political framing of the childcare debate shift from one of women’s equality to one of “combating child poverty” and later to “early childhood development”
* Switch back to Liberal govt came with a promise of pan-Cdn childcare program, but this was largely overshadowed by deficit reductions
* Opening in the late 1990s came from widespread dissemination of research showing impotance of early years on brain development, thaw in IGR, and return to party surpluses
* 1999 SUFA agreement made room for childcare – and in 2000 the Early Childhood Development agreement committed the federal govt to transfer $2.2 billion over 5 years to the provinces – with funds to be invested in 4 areas (included childcare)
* Childcare under Harper closed a lot of doors
* Hwr, as federal govt has continued to spin its wheels on national childcare, advocacy has continued, especially within the provinces – Quebec achieving a lot, Ontario only moderate amounts, BC hardly at all.

**Conclusions**

Main question: is federalism an obstacle to ‘women-friendly’ policies, or does it provide opportunities? Authors agree that there are benefits to a multilayered opportunity structure (continually shifting provincial and federal governments can mean if one door closes, another may open).