Canadian women are more likely than men to experience precarious work, and the prevalence of this is increasing. Analytical models provide insights into the sources of these trends but say little about why Canadians do not resist the growing precarity of work in general, and for women, in particular. Canada’s being a liberal welfare state contributes to this situation, but cultural values and attitudes concerning the role of the State in distributing resources and women’s roles may also shape and maintain these conditions. Drawing upon theoretical insights from Esping-Andersen on the nature of the liberal welfare state and from Pfau-Effinger on the importance of cultural values and attitudes, various research questions whose answers can promote both understanding and improving the precarious work situation of women are identified.

The incidence of precarious work is increasing in Canada and the situation is especially disadvantageous for women (Statistics Canada, 2017). Precarious work is not only about non-permanent employment but also about the nature of the work: its wages, benefits, and workplace protection. Precarious work can be best defined in relation to standard work: “Standard work is a situation where a worker is employed by one employer on a full-time, permanent basis, receiving decent wages and benefits, and has access to and effective protection from regulatory agencies” in contrast to: “Precarious work (also referred to as non-standard employment) is described as any deviation from standard employment and is characterized as being temporary or casual in nature, lacking benefits, lacking in certain legal protections, and usually associated with low income” (Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, 2018). Kalleberg identifies three key aspects of precarious work: a) it is insecure and uncertain; b) provides limited economic and social benefits; and c) has limited statutory entitlements (Kalleberg, 2018).

It is advantageous for material, psychological and social reasons to be in standard rather than precarious work (Tompa, Polanyi, & Foley, 2016). And not surprisingly, type of work is related to health as precarious work is associated with a wide range of adverse physical, mental, and social health outcomes (Lewchuk, Clarke, & de Wolff, 2008; Lewchuk et al., 2013). Those occupying particular social locations are more likely to experience precarious work: women, recent immigrants, those with less education, persons of colour, those of Indigenous ancestry and those in service occupations (Law Commission of Ontario, 2012). For women who occupy multiple vulnerable social locations such as being a recent immigrant of colour, this situation is especially problematic (Vosko, MacDonald, & Campbell, 2009).
In this article, I draw upon theoretical insights from social theory to identify research questions that to date have not been asked about how this situation has come about in Canada and how it is being maintained. More specifically, insights from Esping-Andersen’s concept of the welfare state and Pfau-Effinger’s analysis of the importance of cultural values shape this proposed research agenda into women’s precarious work situations.

**Scope of the Problem**

Numerous writers have commented on the lack of good data for determining the extent of precarious work in Canada (Fong, 2018). A good approximation comes from a report of data from the 2016 Canadian Census (Statistics Canada, 2017). These data indicate that there were declines in full-time year-round employment among core-aged workers (25-64 years of age) with women having lower rates than men.

- The period from 2005 to 2015 saw an overall shift from full-time, full-year employment to part-time or part-year work.
- In 2015, 56.2% of men aged 25 to 54 worked full-time all year, down from 63.3% a decade earlier, and the lowest proportion since 1980—the first reference year for which comparable statistics were collected.
- The proportion of core-aged women who worked full time all year also declined, but less markedly. In 2015, 43.7% of women in this age group worked full-year and full-time, down from 46.4% in 2005 (Statistics Canada, 2017).

This situation is also a problem for those identified as highly skilled professionals (Hennessy & Tranjan, 2018). A national study of 1,000 professionals found that 22% gave a positive answer to at least one of the following questions: My job is from contract-to-contract; I work part-time; and I work freelance. Sixty percent of these were without pension plans and sick days; more than half had fluctuating incomes; and almost 30% had unpredictable work schedules.

The situation for other groups of Canadians is far worse. The Law Commission of Ontario concluded that not only are youth and women overrepresented among precarious workers, but so too are racialized persons, immigrants, Aboriginal persons, persons with disabilities and older adults (Law Commission of Ontario, 2012). Recent reviews summarizing the precarious work situation in Canada are available (Betti, 2018; Hira-Friesen, 2018; Jackson & Thomas, 2017; Tremblay, 2016).

**Existing Analyses of the Causes and Means of Responding to Precarious Work**

Compelling analyses of the causes of precarious work in developed nations such as Canada are available (Procyk, Lewchuk, & Shields, 2017; Vosko, 2010). A particularly useful overview of the situation is provided by Kalleberg (Kalleberg, 2018). He suggests that changes in the global economy, including the growing mobility of capital, increased international competition, and the reduction of governmental regulations — usually termed as economic globalization -- provided the impetus for growing prevalence of precarious work.

However, Kalleberg also notes that there are national differences in the extent of precarious work and he identifies macro-, meso-, and micro-level factors that both contribute and reflect these national differences (Kalleberg, 2018). At the macro-level, differences in the power of organized labour combines with labour force demography and unique cultural and historical traditions of the society to lead to differences in social welfare protection policies and labour market institutions.
At the meso-level, national differences result in varying levels of non-standard work arrangements and the extent of job insecurity. Not surprisingly, these differences manifest at the micro-level with individuals experiencing differences in well-being linked to the extent of economic insecurity they experience and the resources that are available to both them and their families.

This model certainly describes the factors contributing to precarious work in Canada. On each of the features provided in Kalleberg’s model, Canada presents a picture unfavorable to standard work. Canada does little to counterbalance the problematic aspects of economic globalization and its politics has retreated from redistributive approaches (Banting & Myles, 2013). These features have been traced to Canada being a liberal welfare state where the corporate and business sector has undue influence upon the key institution of the society: The Market (Raphael, 2015a). Under such influence, the labour market moves towards precarity as a means of maximizing profits with rather little attention paid to the adverse health effects upon those precariously employed (Scambler, 2009). In the following sections, the links between Canada being a liberal welfare state and its prevalence of precarious work in general and for women in particular are made explicit.

This analysis helps explain the current situation but says little about why Canadians do not resist this agenda even though it has adverse effects upon health and well-being. Previous work raised questions about why Canadians do not resist growing inequities in the distribution of the social determinants of health and the resulting health inequities (Raphael, 2015b). Similar questions appear relevant to understanding Canadians acquiescing to growing precarious work, especially for women. What these questions might be and how they can be researched constitute the following sections.

**Questions Suggested by Social Theory for Understanding the Precarious Work Scene in Canada**

Many advocates concerned with precarious work and its adverse consequences for women assume that documenting and transmitting information about these effects will spur policymakers to address the problem. This is clearly not the case as decades of accumulated evidence concerning precarious work and its effects has done little to reduce its prevalence. Indeed, the opposite seems to be occurring: precarious work is increasing and becoming more concentrated among women occupying vulnerable social locations. Two threads of social theory suggest why this is the case. These threads also suggest questions that to date have not been asked in this literature.

*Materialist political economy* analysis identifies the important role played in public policymaking by powerful and influential societal sectors and places these issues in the context of various forms of the welfare state (Coburn, 2010). Welfare state theory sees Canada’s public policymaking within the structures and processes of the liberal welfare state where the Market dominates public policymaking such that the State does little to manage the economic marketplace (Peters, 2012). In this view, precarious work is a natural outgrowth of the corporate and business sector’s influence shaping public policy in the service of maximizing profits (Langille, 2016). It goes a long way to explaining the Canadian precarious work scene (Tremblay, 2016).

*Cultural values* analysis identifies the role played by values and attitudes in shaping the making of public policy as well as the public’s willingness to accept such public policy (Pfau-Effinger, 2012). The importance of values and attitudes is especially important when considering the role of women in society and the willingness of policymakers, as well as the public, to view the precarious work situation of women as being problematic. In this analysis, women’s precarious work may not be seen as problematic as policymakers and the public may attribute less importance to women’s situation in the workplace than might be the case for men (Pfau-Effinger, 2017).
The following sections examine the contributions that both political economy and cultural values theory play in understanding the precarious work situation of women occupying vulnerable social locations. It also identifies areas of further inquiry and suggests means of building opposition to the present situation and remediating it through public policy action.

**A Framework for Making Sense of Women’s Precarious Work**

As noted, two primary theoretical approaches contribute to understanding the prevalence of precarious work in general and among women in particular. Figure 1 outlines a framework for understanding these situations. Each component is considered in turn from the top of Figure 1 to the bottom. Some of these components have already been the subject of detailed inquiry in Canada.

![Figure 1: Framework by which Welfare State and Cultural Values Theory Suggests Means of Understanding the Prevalence and Health Effects of Precarious Work in Canada](image-url)
Welfare State Theory

Welfare state theory is best understood within the context of a critical materialist political economy framework (Coburn, 2010). This framework is critical in that it is concerned with uncovering societal structures and processes that shape public policy and public understandings of important issues such as the prevalence of precarious work. It is materialist in that it is concerned with the production and distribution of concrete resources and how they shape daily living and working conditions as well as the understandings that are held by the population concerning these processes. Finally, it is concerned with the politics and economics of the society and how these structures and processes are influenced by sectors that differ in power and influence. These concepts, uncovering as they do the structures and processes that shape the distribution of resources, are especially relevant when considering issues of precarious work.

The Canadian Liberal Welfare State

In Figure 1, the corporate and business sector is given prominence as shaping and maintaining Canada’s form of the welfare state. Welfare state theory considers that societies exhibit differing forms of political and economic organization that distribute economic and social resources as well as power and influence in particular ways (Esping-Andersen, 1990, 1999). These differing logics contribute to the organization of the workplace and the nature of work. One form of this logic -- or form of the welfare state -- cedes control of these processes to the economic powers that be (Raphael, 2015a). This is the liberal welfare state. Another has the State intervening to manage these processes in the service of the population. This is the social democratic welfare state. A third logic is one where all societal sectors, including the business and corporate sector, share responsibility for meeting the needs of its members. This is the conservative welfare state.

The liberal welfare states (for example, Canada, Ireland, UK, and USA) do little to manage the workplace (Olsen, 2010). Their political and social history is one of dominance by business interests resulting in the population relying on the employment marketplace rather than the State as the source of economic and social security. Their main organizing principle is that of Liberty (Saint-Arnaud & Bernard, 2003). These welfare states make it difficult to organize the workplace and not surprisingly, show the lowest levels of union membership and workplace collective agreements (Raphael, 2011). They have higher levels of precarious work and provide less social protection related to under- and unemployment (Kalleberg, 2018). In addition to these problematic workplace situations, they spend the least on social programs and supports such that these liberal welfare states are the least developed in terms of the provision of citizen economic and social security. Generally, this appears to be the case in Canada, as organized labour and civil society influence pales beside that of the business and corporate sector (Raphael & Bryant, 2015). The result is a public policy agenda that does little to redress the situation of precarious work.

The social democratic welfare states (for example, Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Norway) emphasize universal welfare rights and provide generous benefits and entitlements (Saint-Arnaud & Bernard, 2003). Their political and social history is one of political dominance by social democratic parties of the left, a result of political organization initiated by industrial workers and farmers that later came to include the middle class (Esping-Andersen, 1985). Their main organizing principle is that of Equality (Saint-Arnaud & Bernard, 2003). Their workplaces have the highest union membership and high collective agreements. In addition, through universal provision of a range of benefits, these states have historically secured the loyalties of a significant proportion of the population (Esping-Andersen, 1990, 1999). The strong influence of organized labour contributes to the stability of the social democratic welfare state by moderating the influence
of the corporate and business sector on public policymaking. Workplace legislation is progressive, curbing the prevalence of precarious work. They also have greater social expenditures – possible through generally higher taxation rates – that provide universal benefits across the life course (Raphael, 2011).

The conservative welfare states (for example, Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland) also offer generous benefits but do so through social insurance plans based on employment status (Esping-Andersen, 1990, 1999). Their political and social history is one of political dominance by Christian Democratic parties where traditional Church concerns with maintaining the family merges with conservative upholding of status differences among citizens. As a result of their key organizing principle of Solidarity (Saint-Arnaud & Bernard, 2003), collective agreement rates are very high, abetted by employer associations, although union membership levels are lower than the social democratic welfare states (Raphael, 2011). The prevalence of precarious work is also more limited than in the liberal welfare state (Kalleberg, 2018). These tendencies sometimes manifest in corporatist approaches (for example, Germany) where business interests are major influences or Statist approaches (for example, France) where the State plays a key role in provision of citizen security (Pontusson, 2005).

Precarious work therefore is one of the most obvious results of the situation where profit-driven business and corporate interests dominate public policymaking. The liberal welfare state does this directly by limiting the regulation of the workplace, thereby allowing employers to impose precarious work on its employees. These jurisdictions also promote precarious work by providing a very weak social safety net which literally forces workers to settle for precarious work. Finally, the liberal welfare state imposes precarious work on women by reducing the availability of social programs that would improve their control over their family lives. The most obvious manifestation of this is the lack of universal affordable childcare systems which, when combined with cultural values and attitudes towards women in the family, requires women to take primary responsibility for child rearing (Torres, 2017). This helps explain the situation but does not make explicit why the Canadian public – including Canada’s women -- acquiesces to it.

**Cultural Values Theory**

Pfau-Effinger (2015) argues that welfare state analysis fails to consider the cultural values and attitudes held by societal members that shape support for public policies that may be specifically related to gender-related roles. Pfau-Effinger’s work considers how cultural ideals shape how people view welfare incentives with specific focus on childcare and homecare. These ideals can also affect family and work life. These ideals can shape acceptance or rejection of precarious work situations in general and for women in particular, allowing particular work configurations to emerge. These values and attitudes can differ between nations, genders, and social groups (Pfau-Effinger, 2017).

The second key aspect of Figure 1 is therefore, the recognition of the importance of these values and attitudes for shaping public policies on the workplace and women’s roles including work. The two boxes at the left and right of Figure 1 recognize this, making explicit the value of Pfau-Effinger’s concept of culture as explaining the prevalence and acceptance of women’s precarious work situation. These are the areas we know little about.

The proposed research agenda into women’s precarious work therefore revolves about asking specific questions concerning Canadians’ cultural values and attitudes towards work and women’s work. Box 1 provides some of these questions. These could be answered through surveys, focus groups, and in-depth interviews with selected groups representing various, classes, genders,
and specific social locations such as immigrants, and Indigenous groups, among others. It would also involve inquiry amongst policymakers as well as representatives from all political parties.

**Box 1. Questions to be asked of Canadians, Policymakers, and Representatives of Differing Political Parties to Illuminate the Presence and Persistence of Women’s Precarious Work**

**Precarious Work**
- To what extent does the Canadian public accept the necessity of precarious work?
- How do they interpret its increasing prevalence?
- How do Canadians understand the forces that are driving the increase in precarious work?
- What is the role of government concerning the management of precarious work?
- How prepared are Canadians to challenge the current orthodoxy?

**Women’s Precarious Work**
- What are Canadians’ cultural values and attitudes towards women’s roles in Canadian society?
- What are the values and attitudes towards women’s roles in the workplace?
- How do Canadians perceive the precarious work situation of women?
- How do Canadians think about the role of women in raising families?
- How is precarious work seen against the backdrop of women’s responsibility for managing the family and raising children?

Results of these inquiries would help answer these questions:
- Do these values and attitudes maintain the precarious work situation that Canadian women face, and do they act as barriers to public policy change?
- To what extent have Canadian women themselves internalized these values and attitudes, thereby making responses to their precarious work situations more difficult?

There is little direct evidence concerning these questions and how they may shape the prevalence of women’s precarious work in Canada. Answers to these would help explain why Canadians appear to accept the status quo regarding women’s precarious work. It would also explain why policymakers and representatives of Canadian political parties are not raising these issues. It could expose entry points for both educating and mobilizing the Canadian public to have these issues addressed, literally forcing policymakers and party representatives to take up these issues. The following sections fill out the remaining parts of the model provided in Figure 1. Inquiry into Canadians’ understandings concerning these specific issues could also inform efforts to effect change at each of these levels.

**Public Policies Shaping the Nature of Work**

Welfare state theory and cultural values theory contribute to understanding the origins and maintenance of public policies that shape the nature of work in Canada. Welfare states differ profoundly in their public policy approaches to work. Both social democratic and conservative welfare states have processes by which labour negotiates with employers within and across
employment sectors to provide consistent collective agreements outlining wages and benefits (Swank, 2005).

This is not the case in liberal welfare state Canada where each workplace sets its own policies, usually determined by the employer. Welfare states also differ in the extent to which they make possible the organizing of the workplace by labour as well as the presence of collective employment agreements. It should not be surprising that public values and attitudes towards labour regulation mirror these structural arrangements. It may be that members of liberal welfare states are more likely to hold anti-union attitudes, thereby maintaining the public policies that make organizing the workplace difficult, but I did not locate any recent studies addressing this issue.

Workplace Regulations and Rules

Welfare states differ in union membership rates and the percentage of the workforce covered by collective agreements. Liberal welfare states, including Canada have the lowest rates of collective bargaining as well as union membership (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2018a, 2018c). Only 30% of Canadians are covered by a collective employment agreement and only 29% belong to a union. Such numbers skew the amount of power firmly towards employers rather than workers, thereby allowing the high prevalence of precarious work.

In Canada, working under a collective agreement and being a union member are associated with more secure employment, higher wages, and better benefits (Jackson & Thomas, 2017). These differences in collective agreements and union membership rates also help explain differences among the workplace between different forms of the welfare state. Not surprisingly, Canada’s rates of precarious work and low-paid employment are above the average of OECD nations (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2018b).

To what extent do Canadian values and attitudes towards these issue parallel structural arrangements typical of the liberal welfare state? To what extent do Canadians see these situations as problematic? There is very little information available on these issues.

Specific Social Locations

As noted earlier, women are more likely than men to be found in precarious employment. In addition, recent immigrants of colour as well as lower income women are especially likely to be in that situation (Law Commission of Ontario, 2012). This should not be surprising as specific social locations are likely to have less power and influence. This is especially the case in the Canadian liberal welfare state. With union membership and collective agreement employment so low in Canada -- and especially low for those in vulnerable social locations, -- the high levels of precarious work are to be expected.

Welfare state theory clearly explains the situation in terms of the dominance of business and corporate influence upon the workplace. Precarious work allows employers to avoid living wages, employment benefits, and providing job security. Their ability to do so is especially strong when it comes to the situation of those in vulnerable social locations. The relative weakness of the organized labour sector contributes to the situation.

What is less obvious is the extent to which cultural values and attitudes are contributing to the situation. Do Canadians have values and attitudes that make the provision of standard employment less likely and more likely to countenance the situation? Also important is the extent to which women themselves may have internalized these attitudes such that they are less willing to question their participation in precarious work than might be the case of women in other societies with different cultural values and attitudes towards women’s work. It has been suggested
that Canadian women’s progress in employment has stalled, yet we do not know why (Saunders, 2017).

This is not to blame women for their precarious work situation but rather to raise the question of whether the economic and social organization of society and their accompanying ideologies that justify precarious work are internalized by their victims; a situation identified as false consciousness. Also contributing to such values and attitudes would be the unwillingness of Canadian governing authorities to provide universal affordable childcare thereby raising the attractiveness of precarious work for women with childrearing responsibilities.

Presence of Precarious Work
As noted earlier, precarious work is usually low-paying, without benefits, part-time, and insecure. Figures that are available for precarious work support the theoretical assumptions provided above. Canada’s liberal welfare state does little to avoid precarious work and, in many ways, promotes it. Business and corporate interests provide ideological justifications for this phenomenon. It is not surprising that Canadian cultural values and attitudes comes to mirror these justifications. Once these ideas become accepted, they come to have an independent influence upon the maintenance of the economic and social structures, and processes that both cause precarious work and the ideologies that justify it.

Health Outcomes
An extensive literature now exists that describes the adverse mental and social outcomes associated with precarious work (Lewchuk et al., 2008). Two threads are mentioned here. Perceived job insecurity is related to numerous adverse physical health outcomes of increased symptom load; worse self-reported health; increased use of health services; increased cardiovascular risk (less physical activity, hypercholesterolemia, hypertension); increased non-fatal myocardial infarctions and coronary deaths. Mental health outcomes include increased prevalence of depressive symptoms, minor psychiatric morbidity, and generalized anxiety disorder (Benach et al., 2014).

Precarity itself is related to adverse physical health outcomes of worse self-reported health and mental health outcomes of increased prevalence of poor mental health and depressive symptoms. There is also greater risk of occupational injuries and greater exposure to environmental risks (Benach et al., 2014). However, despite the greater likelihood of women experiencing these situations, we know little about whether these health effects are stronger for women or men (Benach, Vives, Tarafa, Delclos, & Muntaner, 2016; Menéndez, Benach, Muntaner, Amable, & O’Campo, 2007).

An Integration and Further Questions
Form of the welfare state shapes the organization of the workplace and women’s role in society. At the same time, it also shapes the attitudes and values that are held by members of the society towards these issues. These attitudes and values can come to have a life of their own such that they then act to maintain how the workplace is organized. This is important as even if governing authorities strove to make changes in the workplace, these could be resisted if they are not consistent with prevailing values and attitudes. If Canadians do not afford the issue of precarious work in general and of women in particular as problematic, then public policy reforms are unlikely to be implemented.
The situation of women’s precarious work, and the vulnerable social locations in which women may be found reflects the organization of the welfare state and policymakers and the public’s values and attitudes towards women’s workplace roles. Whether we like it or not, the current situation is that public policy is allowing precarious work to occur as well as allowing women to predominate in it.

**Moving Forward**

The framework in Figure 1 suggests numerous entry points for rectifying the precarious work situation and its health effects in Canada in general, and for women in particular. The question is which interventions are most likely to be successful? What would such interventions look like? I present these possibilities working from bottom to top in Figure 1. I preface this section by suggesting that attention be focused on the upper elements of the framework.

**Health Outcomes**

Since the health outcomes of those employed in precarious work are likely to be more problematic than those in secure work, it is important to assure that accessible and responsive healthcare and social services are available. Limiting oneself to such interventions do little however to change the circumstances that produced the conditions that lead to adverse health outcomes.

**Presence of Precarious Work**

Interventions at this level will be focused on helping those employed in precarious work cope with their situations. This approach represents the resilience approach that suggests that even though problematic environmental circumstances cannot be changed, intervening through psychosocial and social counselling services can help ameliorate the harm associated with precarious work. The efficacy of these interventions remains unproven and, as is the case for responding to health outcomes, these interventions do little to address the circumstances that create precarious work and its adverse health outcomes.

**Specific Social Locations**

Interventions focused on the vulnerabilities of specific social locations usually take the form of anti-discrimination efforts, building social support for vulnerable groups, and promoting psychosocial interventions to promote well-being. Like the preceding interventions, these may provide help to some vulnerable individuals, but do little to change the problematic situations in which they find themselves.

**Workplace Regulations and Rules**

Intervening at this level is the primary work of the organized labour sector. Increasing union membership to achieve the goal of collective bargaining agreements is an important way to reduce the prevalence of precarious work and increase the prevalence of standard work. However, even when workplaces unionize, this is no guarantee that standard work will increase and precarious work decrease.

However, the evidence is clear that organized workplaces are more likely to increase standard employment, increase wages promote security and provide better benefits than non-unionized workplaces (Jackson & Thomas, 2017). Nonetheless, there are potent barriers to organizing workplaces which have their origin in legislation and regulations that shape the nature
of work. As one example of recent – and apparently, temporary -- gains in this area, the province of Ontario implemented new regulations under the Liberal government of Premier Kathleen Wynne to improve the quality of work (Government of Ontario, 2018). The next section examines these changes.

Public Policies Shaping the Nature of Work

At this level we are clearly intervening at the political realm, engaging municipal, provincial, and federal authorities to enact laws and regulation to improve the quality of employment by reducing precarious work. To date, there is little indication that the mainstream Liberal and Conservative political parties have any interest in doing so. While it would be expected that the New Democratic Party would be in favour of such shifts, they have not, to date, made such recommendations main planks of their platforms.

Recent developments in Ontario indicate what such shifts might look like. Prior to their losing office in the June of 2018, the Liberal governments enacted changes in labour regulations that served to provide the following:

- equal pay for equal work on the basis of employment status and assignment employee status;
- one week’s notice or pay in lieu of notice for employees of temporary help agencies if longer-term assignments end early;
- fairer scheduling rules;
- a minimum of three weeks’ vacation after five years with the same employer;
- up to 10 individual days of leave and up to 15 weeks of leave, without the fear of losing their job when an employee or their child has experienced or is threatened with domestic or sexual violence;
- expanded personal emergency leave to workplaces regardless of number of employees; and
- unpaid leave to take care of a critically ill family member.

However, with their electoral defeat the legislation has been repealed (Mojtehedzadeh, 2018).

Form of the Welfare State

Shifting the form of Canada’s welfare state would seem to be an almost insurmountable problem. It has been suggested that one of the aspects that has maintained Canada’s liberal welfare state is its first-past-the-post electoral process which allows corporate and business-friendly political parties to gain majority control with far less than a majority of votes (Raphael, Komakech, Bryant, & Torrence, 2018). Proportional representation has been identified as a key element that contributed to the development of the social democratic welfare state in Scandinavia and generally more progressive welfare states in Continental Europe than is the case in the liberal welfare state nations (Alesina & Glaeser, 2004).

The acceptance of proportional representation would end the era of majority governments usually involving the election of pro-business parties such as the Liberals and Progressive Conservatives. The result of proportional representation would be an ongoing process of minority government in which the New Democratic Party would be assured of input into the policymaking process. Such a shift could lead to a Scandinavian-type welfare state in Canada (Finn, 2006).

Consideration of proportional representation has been on the agenda of numerous provincial governments. Indeed, a majority of voters in British Columbia opted for such a system.
but it was rejected due to an established yardstick of a 60% acceptance rate. An upcoming referendum is planned that will not require that high bar for acceptance. Even the conservative Globe and Mail suggested in an editorial dated June 28, 2018 that serious consideration be given to reconfiguring the Canadian electoral process (Globe and Mail, 2018).

It has been suggested optimistically that if Canada accepted proportional representation, it could achieve a welfare state similar to what is seen in Scandinavia (Finn, 2006). Of course, such a profound shift in governance by Canadian authorities would have to be accepted by the Canadian public. This would require Canadians holding cultural values and attitudes supportive of an increasing State role in distributing resources and managing the workplace.

Public Values and Attitudes towards Work and the Workplace

We really know very little about Canadians values and attitudes towards secure versus precarious work. It may be that growing precarious work is a concern among many Canadians, but much remains to be explored.

Public Values and Attitudes towards Women and Women’s Roles

Similar questions arise as to Canadians’ values and attitudes towards women’s roles in the workplace. Do Canadians perceive precarious work as being less of a problem for women than for men? Do women receive precarious work as being a problem or do their family responsibilities that have been foisted upon them by an arguably patriarchate society make them accepting of their precarious work situations?

CONCLUSION

I have suggested that precarious work in general and its concentration among women in Canada reflects both the operation of Canada’s liberal welfare state as well as Canadians’ values and attitudes. These values and attitudes are shaped by existing structures and processes but have the capacity to maintain these structures and processes even if these were poised to change. I have outlined how welfare state theory and cultural values theory suggests how precarious work has come to increase and be accepted by Canadians. In many cases, evidence concerning these hypotheses may be lacking such that a research agenda inquiry into these issues seems necessary.

This research agenda would involve examination of how various societal sectors are shaping the making of public policy regarding precarious work as well as the ideological justifications provided to these developments. Perhaps most importantly, the research agenda would require inquiry into Canadians’ values and attitudes towards the world of work and precarious work with particular reference to women’s employment and family roles and how these interact with the structures and processes maintaining precarious work.

Finally, I provided means of intervening at various levels to promote standard and reduce precarious employment. In some cases, this will involve supporting organized labour’s efforts to unionize workplaces in the service of promoting collective agreements to mitigate the worst aspects of precarious work. It will also require analysis and reaction to the role played by various powerful economic and political forces that have led to increasing precarity in the workplace. Finally, it was suggested that moving towards proportional representation in the electoral process would shift the form of Canada’s liberal welfare state as a means to improve the nature of work in Canada.
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