

Provincial Child Care: Gender Regimes and Social Citizenship in Canada¹

Paper presented at the 2013 Annual Meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association,
University of Victoria, June 4, 2013

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In 2011, an article by Ontario's Early Learning Advisor, Charles Pascal appeared in the *Toronto Star* with the headline, "Provinces fill void on early education." After the cancellation of the Bilateral Agreements on Early Learning and Child Care by the federal government in 2007, several provinces appear to be 'going it alone.' Quebec has long had its own national child care system. Manitoba leads the provinces outside of Quebec in child care policy. Ontario, British Columbia and PEI are expanding their systems of early learning and child care (ELCC) for four and five year olds. Nova Scotia has just completed a province-wide consultation on the Early Years. Has there been a "resurgence of substate building" in child care policy in Canada? And if so, what are the implications, particularly for marginalized groups?

I argue that we should be careful not to exaggerate the 'building' of child care in the provinces. It is more accurately described as a slight renovation. In this process, diverse provincial welfare state regimes, 'policy logics' (Mahon 2009), or *gender regimes* are being consolidated. I conclude that the existence of divergent regimes, which are heavily influenced by liberal and neoconservative values, raises important questions about the role of the federal government in social policy and the rights of social citizenship in Canada.

Provincial Child Care: Building or Renovating?

Province building refers to the assertion of provincial policy autonomy, particularly in the area of economic development through activities such as creating public corporations, managing natural resources, creating infrastructure, and regulating industry (Stevenson 1980). Because of its impact on economic growth and the labour market, social policy has also historically been part of the process of province building (Stevenson 1980), but there has been little analysis of child care as an endeavour of substate building. Such research is particularly timely, as welfare state scholars are being urged to adopt a political economy of scale approach and avoid 'methodological nationalism' (Mahon et al. 2007).

In the early 2000s, there was short-lived interest by the federal government in social policy renewal, expressed through a combination of initiatives organized under the National Children's Agenda (Mahon 2009a). While much of this has been abandoned federally, there appears to be more action and interest in early years policy within many of the provinces, where some planning and/or expansion of services is happening, and improvements have been made in the wages and training of the child care workforce (Friendly and Beach 2013). McGrane (2010) goes as far as suggesting that provincial "childcare in Canada could constitute an example of a 'race to the top' after years of welfare state retrenchment" (1).

What do we make of this apparent policy activism? Despite the rhetoric coming from many provincial governments about the importance of the early years, there is little building

¹ I would like to acknowledge support from the Mount Saint Vincent University New Scholars Grant.

happening. A review of some of the recent provincial activity related to early learning and child care indicates that there is, at best, some renovating, alongside many lost opportunities.

In 2012, the Nova Scotia government appointed an Early Years Advisory Council “to advise the Minister of Education and the Better Health Care Ministers on strategic issues related to the early-years work” (Nova Scotia 2012a 23). This was followed up with a province-wide consultation process in June and July, which included regional meetings with early learning organizations, focus groups with parents and families, and written and on-line surveys. A summary report was released called *What We Heard: Giving Children the Best Start — The Early Years* (Nova Scotia 2012b). The province has since announced in March 2013 that it would be creating a Department of Education and Early Childhood Development bringing together early childhood development staff from the departments of Community Services, Health and Wellness, and Education and services such as child care and early intervention (Nova Scotia 2013a; 2013b).² In April, there was additional news that the

province is also establishing three early years centres across the province that will provide support for young children and their families at accessible locations in the community. These centres build on the highly successful SchoolsPlus model being used in schools like Rockingstone Heights, and will help bring seamless access to regulated child care, early learning programs, early intervention and parent education (Nova Scotia 2013a).

Regardless of these steps, little in the way of concrete details have been provided. The public has been told only that an early years plan is “forthcoming” (Nova Scotia 2013b), and the Minister of Community Services, Denise Peterson-Rafuse made it clear that no new funding on child care was on the horizon because the NDP government was committed to balancing the budget (Fairclough 2013). It is unclear *what* the early years centres will look like, or *how* they will improve access to child care, and the SchoolsPlus model provides little guidance on the governance of ECD.

Nova Scotia is also a prime example of missed opportunities. While Collier (2006) has shown that in other Canadian jurisdictions, parties matter to outcomes in child care policy, the Nova Scotia NDP does not seem to fit this pattern. They have resisted even very minimal changes to existing child care policy. For instance, under the Progressive Conservatives from 2000-2008, changes to the funding formula were made that allowed for-profit providers to access public funding for subsidies, operating grants, and capital funding. This has had a dramatic impact on the growth of the for-profit child care sector in Nova Scotia (CCPA-NS 2013), and is entirely incompatible with the NDP’s values that prioritize public services. As such, it was widely considered to be “low hanging fruit” by party supporters and the child care community. Since it would not cost anything (and may actually save costs), the removal of for-profit funding was seen as a relatively easy way to signal a real commitment to building a child care system. But the government has stubbornly resisted making this change.

Furthermore, the advisory council and province-wide consultation had enormous, but unmet, potential. Instead of embracing the opportunity to develop a community driven plan for an integrated, public system of early learning and child care, the province conducted hastily organized consultations over a very short time frame. The advisory council was weighted heavily toward health and education, and was criticized by those in the child care advocacy community that their voices were not well represented by the appointed members. Child care advocates constantly lament the “ABC – Anything But Child Care” orientation in ECD policy (Findlay 2013b). With only one out of the nine members of the advisory council coming from an

² One of OECD (2006) recommendations is that early learning and child care services be consolidated under one Ministry.

early childhood education background, the balance of representation seems to reflect this child care residualism. With an election likely in the fall, a prime opportunity for building child care in Nova Scotia has been lost.

Several provinces are expanding early learning and child care services through the school system. In 2010, full-day (or full 'school day') kindergarten was introduced for all five-year olds in BC, public kindergarten opened on PEI and Ontario began phasing in full-day junior and senior kindergarten for four and five-year olds. For some in the child care community, this is a welcomed trend. McCain et al. (2011) maintain that "the provinces have been experimenting with public education to expand early learning opportunities. Education enjoys widespread public confidence, and using our largely underutilized schools is smarter and less costly than creating an entirely new program from the ground up" (15).

But how significant are these measures? Although BC planned to spend \$365 million over three years on the implementation of full-day kindergarten, many believe this funding is inadequate (Shookoohi 2011; Steffenhagen 2011). Moreover, full-day kindergarten should not be viewed as extraordinary progress. It already exists in many other provinces (PEI, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Ontario and Quebec) (Friendly and Beach 2013). Even in Ontario and PEI, where the most ambitious policy developments have occurred (outside of Quebec) there are still major gaps in services (such as before and after school care). Only in the context of Canada's liberal regime are these notable developments in family policy. Given the international trends, what is striking is not that so much is happening, but so little.

Valuable political opportunities for provinces to build coherent child care services have been eschewed in favour of solutions that further entrench many systemic problems. The education system can house quality, integrated child care services. But this requires taking seriously concerns about 'schoolification' – 'the school imposing its demands and practices on other services, making them school-like' (Moss and Bennett 2006 2). There is fear about a downward extension of the education paradigm and the loss of early childhood education (ECE) values and practices, such as a pedagogical commitment to play-based learning and partnership between caregivers and parents (Chudnovsky 2010). An ECE model would require much lower child-staff ratios, more assistants in classrooms, and greater support for special needs than exists in the BC system, for example (Steffenhagen 2011).

There is certainly evidence that 'learning' has overshadowed 'care' in these provinces. In BC, the Early Childhood Educators of BC (ECEBC) found that "[s]ome child care programs have received eviction notices as their space is required for other school district use" (2010). Community-based providers in Ontario are worried about their place in the new early learning system, and staff retention in the nonprofit sector is threatened by greater opportunities in the public system (Findlay 2013a).

Much of the commentary on the benefits of full-day junior and/or senior kindergarten focuses on school readiness and lifelong learning (BC n.d.; Steffenhagen 2011), not play-based learning, support for families, or women's equality. George Abbott, then-Minister of Education in BC stressed that full day kindergarten "assures that kids get a great start in terms of reading, writing and numerics" (Shookoohi 2011). This is why Stevenson includes education within the realm of economic development-oriented province-building "because its primary purpose from a government perspective is the training of a provincial workforce" (Stevenson 1980 266).

Interestingly, the need for provincial governments to support the labour market only goes so far, and is gender biased. In BC and Ontario, the programs have been structured in a way that does not account for the needs of working parents, particularly mothers. They run only for the school day or year meaning working parents still needed to arrange – and pay for – before and after school and summer care for their children (Pascal, 2009; Findlay 2013a; ECEBC 2010).

Even though Charles Pascal's (2009) plan for Ontario promoted service integration, the implemented model reinforces the division of learning and care by: (1) separating the school

day from the extended day and summer days; (2) continuing to treat 'childcare' as income-tested and 'learning' as universal; and (3) splitting the delivery of services between the school board (school day) and contracting out before and after school care to 'local or regional governments, school boards, postsecondary institutions, or non-profit agencies' (Pascal 2009 14; Findlay 2013a). Similarly, in BC, the provincial throne speech in February 2010 signaled that "[n]ew partnerships with the private sector and parents will enable the establishment of neighbourhood preschools for four-year-olds and three-year-olds within communities over the next five years" (ECEBC 2010 1). In BC's Full Day Kindergarten Program Guide, a clear line is drawn between the school day and before/after, where "[b]oards of education and independent school authorities can offer before and after school programs with user fees or work collaboratively with a provider" (BC 3 n.d.). School-day kindergarten is the main event, and is publicly provided. Child care is the afterthought, and is a private responsibility.

Tellingly, one of the challenges identified in a study conducted for the B.C. Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association was "how to help them [parents] see FDK [full-day kindergarten] as something other than daycare" (Steffenhagen 2011). Likewise, in PEI's early childhood education and care consultation:

Across PEI, the question was asked in focus groups and of all key informants: Should the framework be concentrating on early years education, or on support for parental employment? In every instance – after considerable thought – respondents advised that they wanted to see the framework support early years education for all as a primary goal (Flanagan 2010 34).

The gendered notions underpinning this learning/care dichotomy will be explored later on.

Notwithstanding the comment above, PEI has been pursuing a relatively more integrated approach. Full-day learning was followed by a substantial restructuring of child care services in the province:

Child care is in the process of becoming a more publicly managed program with the introduction of Early Years Centres, which are governed by new provincial policies. These policies include regulated parent fees, required spaces for infants and children with special needs, mandatory parent advisory committees, established staff wages and benefits, new early learning (curriculum) framework, revised certification and training requirements and a formula-based, unit funding approach. At the introduction of the new initiative, existing centres were given the option to apply for designation as Early Years Centres, or remain regulated private centres. Government determines the number of centres based on demonstrated community need. Private centres include those that do not wish to or were not selected to become Early Years Centres (Canada 2010 43).

Public funding for private centres will be phased out over five years, and existing for-profits will be grandparented into Early Years Centres (Flanagan 2010). PEI stands out in other ways. It has emphasized universality and parental governance (Flanagan 2010). The provincial budget for early childhood education and care increased by 63%, and parent fees are now regulated (Canada 2010).³

For these reasons, PEI was one of only three provinces (along with Quebec and Manitoba) in Canada to receive a passing grade on the 2011 Early Childhood Education Index.

³However, at a range of \$25-32 per day (Canada 2010), parent fees are still too high to be affordable for many families. Advocates recommend a target of \$10 per day (Kershaw 2011 a & b).

The index, developed by the late Dr. Fraser Mustard, is based on factors of governance, funding, quality, accountability and access to child-care for 2 to 5 year-olds in each province (McCain et al. 2011). That most provinces received a failing grade is a good indication that much more building is needed.

McCain et al (2011) summarize the state of provincial child care:

On the ground service delivery remains split between child care and education. Parents still struggle to find affordable, reliable services, and service providers continue to answer to multiple funding and regulatory masters ... virtually every jurisdiction has increased spending ... But public funding for early childhood services still remains low (83-84).

Friendly and Beach (2013) also found that “[w]hile there continues to be a modest increase in the number of regulated spaces Canada-wide, the *rate* of increase has been steadily decreasing since 2004” (2). Fees in all provinces except Quebec, and possibly Manitoba are very high, sometimes higher than university tuition (Friendly and Beach 2013). In many provinces, child care is targeted to ‘vulnerable children’ and is delivered from multiple ministries (Canada 2010; McCain et al. 2011). Programs for Aboriginal children are uncoordinated (Friendly and Beach 2013). The only province where public early learning and care is available to four-year olds is Ontario (Friendly and Beach 2013), whereas internationally, regulated services for three and four-year olds are commonplace (OECD 2006), and “from a comparative perspective, Canada’s ECEC [early childhood education and care] has fallen farther and farther behind” (Friendly and Prabhu 2010 15). According to the OECD, early years policy in Canada does not adequately support employment, gender equality, or child development (Friendly and Prabhu 2010). Thus, regardless of some limited provincial efforts, “no region of Canada provides a system of well-designed, integrated and adequately funded early childhood education and care services to meet the needs of a majority of families and children (Friendly and Prabhu 2010 15) and “when it comes to child care, parents get what they can, rather than what they want” (McCain et al. 2011 10).

Of the minor construction that is occurring,⁴ provinces are building the wrong things. Mustard et al. (2011) point out that “how much governments allocate to child care makes a difference, but how the funding is directed is also a factor. Funding into operating grants appears to have a positive impact on wages and program stability, whereas funding through fee subsidies or tax transfers has little or no effect” (84). In addition, in Canada, funding “on the child care side, is primarily directed to priming the market, encouraging operators to establish or expand services” (McCain et al. 2011 84). Expansion in for-profit spaces surpasses non-profits in most provinces, and there is currently public funding available to for-profit providers in every province except Saskatchewan (Friendly and Beach 2013).

Not only is this unproductive in meeting vital policy goals (such as affordability, accessibility, quality and accountability), this privatization makes system-building in the future much more difficult, as will be elaborated later. It is alarming that “a publicly traded corporation, the Edleun Group, with ties to the now defunct Australian giant ABC child care, boasts it will become the largest child care chain in Canada” (McCain et al. 2011 85). Such provincial

⁴ It is also worth noting that while impossible to confirm given gaps in public reporting (Findlay and Anderson 2010), most of these provincial initiatives are likely funded with federal transfers. Mahon and Collier (2010) provide that in Ontario “[t]o date, all the childcare increases associated with Best Start have been funded through federal/provincial agreement dollars” (Mahon and Collier 2010 63).

policies that foster the growth of commercial chains, are more likely to demolish good child care, than to build it.

Provincial Child Care Regimes

Much of the growing literature on child care regimes in Canada focuses on how to characterize variations across jurisdictions. Through the lens of child care, Mahon has stressed the importance of variations inside national welfare regimes. Within Canada's liberal welfare regime, a social democratic child care model was taking shape at the municipal scale in Toronto, and in social democratic Sweden, neoliberal child care was emerging in Stockholm (Mahon 2003). Alternative child care arrangements have been forged in Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal, and Calgary (Mahon 2009b).

Mahon has also highlighted variation over time by identifying varieties of liberalism: classic liberalism; social liberalism; neoliberalism; and inclusive liberalism (Mahon 2009a). Classic liberalism relies on limited government intervention, targets social policy only to the poor, and is supported by a patriarchal family structure. The social liberalism of the Keynesian Welfare State used the state to foster equal opportunity and moderate the effects of capitalism whilst relying on gendered citizenship. Neoliberalism seeks to reverse the welfare state gains made under social liberalism to restore individualism and unfettered markets, through a seemingly gender-neutral process. Inclusive liberalism shares many of the tenets of neoliberalism: preference for low inflation, balanced budgets, economic liberalization, flexible labour and labour market participation, and gender erasure but it adds a heightened focus on investment for the future (Mahon 2009a).

In child care, this could include public investments in parental leave and demand-side subsidies such as tax deductions or transfers to parents, providing information, and regulations. The dominant discourse is about parental choice, and commercial providers play a key role (Mahon 2009a). In the early 2000s, many new federal initiatives fit this pattern, such as the National Child Benefit (NCB) and the National Children's Agenda (NCA) (including the Early Childhood Development Agreement (ECDA), the Multilateral Agreement on ELCC, and the Bilateral Agreements on ELCC) (Mahon 2009a). In contrast, when the Harper government came into power, the inclusive liberal form of child care policy was replaced by neoliberal and neoconservative instruments – the Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB) and the Child Care Spaces Initiative (CCSI) (Mahon 2009a).

McGrane (2010) builds on Mahon's insights, seeking to identify variations inside Canada's liberal welfare regime in provincial child care policy. He explores the " 'ten small worlds' position that each Canadian province has a unique political economy, political culture, and set of societal cleavages that leads to significant policy divergence" (McGrane 16 2010). Based on data from Friendly and Beach, McGrane (2010) finds a great deal of provincial diversity in terms of spending, availability (number of spaces), affordability and quality. He concludes that all but Manitoba and Quebec should be categorized as neoliberal regimes, yet some provinces (Ontario, Newfoundland and PEI) are taking steps toward inclusive liberalism.

Young and Pasoli also take a detailed look at provincial child care policies, and agree that wide variation exists among them. Nonetheless, they challenge the notion that neat typologies can be detected:

these arrangements comprise a rather complex and occasionally incoherent set of policies that defy straightforward description and categorization ... Our analysis failed to produce evidence of clearly defined types of child care policy in the Canadian provinces; efforts to label different child care policy arrangements according to a pre-existing schema erase many important nuances that are essential to understanding policy arrangements (Young and Pasoli 2012 1).

They determine that “there is no guarantee that child care policy arrangements will ‘make sense’ and indeed, the empirical evidence in this paper suggests that they often do not” (Young and Pasolli 2012 2). What does this provincial policy landscape mean for gender relations?

Gender Regimes and Social Citizenship

Feminists have shown that different welfare state regimes rely on and (re)produce different gender relations (Sainsbury 1999; Mahon 2009a). Gender regime theory highlights the “ways in which institutions reflect, reinforce, and structure unequal gendered power relations in wider society” (Krook and Mackay 2011 6). Therefore, it is not enough to simply identify and describe distinct regimes; the *consequences* for women must be understood and contested.

State interest in child care policy has grown as neoliberalism has undermined the traditional male breadwinner model. The expectation that both women and men will be active in the labour market has produced a crisis in social reproduction (Mahon 2009a). States have responded to this crisis, but action has taken a variety of forms. The organization of child care in gender regimes is of central importance to women’s equality. It determines if: women will be supported in balancing paid work and family; the predominantly female child care workforce will be well compensated; and all women and children will have equal access to services. It is not only the lack of construction of child care that has gender consequences. The pattern and type of construction matter as well.

In this final section, I will highlight three particular problems with provincial child care policy in Canada. Through both action and inaction, these gender regimes are intensifying the policy patchwork, consolidating liberal residualism, and preserving neoconservative social values.

Policy ‘Diversity’: The Child Care Patchwork

It is commonplace to hear Canada’s child care system described as a patchwork. The patchwork refers to the lack of coherence and consistency in child care services across the country. Access to regulated, centre-based child care varies from 10.5% in Saskatchewan to 41.6% in PEI (Friendly and Beach 2013). Friendly and Prabhu (2010) stress that there

is no national ECEC program or policy framework; each of Canada’s ten provinces and three territories has developed its own approach to providing multiple ECEC programs – full-day child care, nursery schools and kindergarten. In each province/territory, an assortment of ECEC programs is provided through multiple departments and authorities. These include child care centres and regulated family child care homes intended to provide ‘care’ while parents are working or studying and kindergartens and nursery schools whose main purpose is early childhood education. Although ECEC is primarily a provincial responsibility, none of the provinces or territories provides universal access to high quality programs (16).

McCain et al. (2011) refer to this policy mix as “the alphabet soup of services parents must navigate” (21).

The federal government views this state of affairs from the perspective of ‘open federalism,’ where the constitutional division of powers is strictly followed (Bickerton 2010):

The Government of Canada’s approach respects provincial and territorial responsibility for social services while at the same time supporting parents to choose what is right for their children. Programs under the aegis of the federal government include fiscal

transfers to P/Ts to be spent at their discretion on programs and services; transfers to individuals to support their choices; and programs for populations for whom the federal government has particular responsibilities, including contributions to ECEC in Aboriginal communities (Canada 2010 7).

Curiously, this approach to federalism is happening at a time when elsewhere there is heightened interest in intergovernmental cooperation, collaboration and partnerships through multilevel governance. In the child care advocacy community and the women's movement, calls for multilevel governance aren't especially novel. They have long argued that 'diversity' (or inequality) in social policy across the country is problematic for citizenship rights, and that governments need to work together to ensure equity through national standards and funding.

Child care is fundamental for social justice, so its variability is not just an issue of federalism, it is one of human rights. A national presence in social programs has always been justified in terms of equity -- for mitigating regional disparities. Other equity concerns have received less attention. Women need access to quality, affordable child care regardless of where they live in Canada. Uniformity of services⁵ is of special concern for women, who have less control over their mobility due to their patterns of paid work and family responsibilities (Vickers 1994). If well-designed and governed, child care can advance women's equality and multiculturalism. If not, it can undermine these goals. Mahon (2003) points out that

while decentralisation is said to facilitate diversity, 'downloading' child care to inadequately finance sub-national scales can force many women to turn to part time, 'off-hours' work or to turn to unlicensed care. It can also fuel racial inequality as hard-pressed middle class families turn to (legal or illegal) immigrant nannies. Downloading can also exacerbate the gap between the child care options available in families in well-heeled suburbs and those in working class areas. This kind of social and spatial polarisation is happening in many European countries (5).

Friendly and Prabhu (2010) add that

universally accessible ECEC programs that incorporate social inclusion can play a key role in building a foundation of respect for diversity by capitalizing on children's receptivity to these ideas about diversity in the early years. But ECEC programs are poorly developed in Canada, with only a minority of preschool-age children accessing services before age five when part-time kindergarten becomes widely available ... Canada's diffuse ECEC policy goals and fragmented policy and service delivery limit the possibilities (4-5).

Even if province building were to happen in any significant way in child care, subnational governments cannot do it alone because they lack the fiscal capacity. We can't fixate on one scale of governance (Mahon 2003). As McCain et al. point out, "[o]nly senior levels of government have the authority to merge public and private services with multiple and overlapping purposes, regulatory requirements and funding" (McCain et al. 2011 21). The history of health care and social welfare shows that without inducement by federal funding arrangements, provincial spending in these areas would be limited (Stevenson 1980 266). More

⁵ For some, there is a benefit to such policy diversity to "suit the unique situation of each province" (McGrane 2010 16). While beyond the purview of this paper, I would warn against exaggerating the uniqueness of provincial child care needs.

recent evidence indicates that dedicated federal transfers were needed to stimulate provincial investment in child care (Findlay and Anderson 2010; Findlay 2013b). Provinces and the federal government also need to cooperate because both benefit from these investments:

To receive maximum financial efficiencies and social benefits, provinces and territories are advised to organize and fund programs to meet these goals. The federal government also holds responsibility; it currently makes a very modest contribution to early childhood programming. Ongoing funds from residual federal programs now rolled into the Canada Social Transfer total \$1.1 billion annually, compared to over \$7.5 billion invested by the provinces and territories. The economic analyses confirm the windfall the federal government derives from the investments provinces, territories and regional governments make in child care. Ottawa does 'nothing,' to quote Fortin, but takes in a substantial portion of the increased tax revenue from working parents and benefits from the lower social payments it makes to families. The figures provide a sound rationale for increased federal investments in early childhood ... (McCain et al. 2011 73).

It is important to note that this policy patchwork is not merely a product of federalism, and the challenges posed for social citizenship rights are not incidental. The patchwork is integral to Canada's liberal gender regime.

The Enduring Liberal Welfare State

Given the discussion above, it is difficult to disagree that "child care policies and procedures vary widely from province to province" (Young and Pasolli 2012) and that "provincial governments are taking *divergent paths* when it comes to childcare" (McGrane 2010 1). But how wide is the variation? How divergent are the paths?

Because of the implications for social citizenship, provincial diversity in child care policy is a significant concern, and it is important to add some nuance to the generalizing thrust of regime theory. But the diversity should not be over-stated. The overwhelming tendency of both federal and provincial child care policy⁶ is liberal (Mahon 2009b 213), and any variation must be understood within these boundaries. Consider McGrane's (2010) study, aimed at classifying provincial child care regimes. The methodology he employs is designed to compare similarities and dissimilarities between cases. It isn't surprising then, that variation is found, but it is variation within a like and limited set of (liberal) cases.

Some of the provincial differences found in his study are that Ontario and BC stand out for having "high availability," but also high fees (McGrane 2010 10). In addition, "Saskatchewan has relatively affordable childcare fees and high quality childcare but the availability of regulated care is abysmal. On the other hand, Prince Edward Island has a relatively high number of regulated spaces but its fees are expensive and its quality is low" (McGrane 2010 12). In these examples, best cases exist only by lowering the bar. It is questionable whether there are any provinces outside Quebec that have 'high availability,'⁷ and only *relatively* speaking, are these noteworthy policy achievements. When Mahon (2009a) refers to varieties of liberalism, the variety is prefaced by the constraints of liberalism.

The fixation on variation can mask the durable commonalities of high fees, low wages, few spaces, limited public financing and growth of for-profit services (Friendly and Prabhu 2010; Friendly and Beach 2013; McCain et al. 2011): the markers of liberal child care policy. Dallaire and Anderson (2009) observe that despite provincial claims of uniqueness, most governments continue to apply remarkably similar, market-based policy and funding approaches to child care

⁶ With the possible exception of Quebec.

⁷ And again, this is debatable for Quebec as well.

services - with consistently weak results” (31). Notwithstanding some attempts to place Quebec or Manitoba within the social democratic regime, none of Canada’s provinces transcend liberalism. None can accurately be described as social democratic (Young and Pasolli 2012). In the case of Manitoba, where there is no publicly-delivered child care, a social democratic classification is a stretch (Canada 2010 127). And progressive efforts at the municipal scale in Toronto and Vancouver faced the limitations of liberalism (Mahon 2009b). Despite the variations within liberalism, the lack of options outside of it, are troublesome.

The options within liberalism also seem quite limited. McGrane (2010) is optimistic that there has been movement toward inclusive liberalism in provincial child care policy (McGrane 2010). In his definition, an “inclusive liberal ECEC regime would make investments in society’s youngest members through moderately high provincial government spending that creates more regulated spaces and improves affordability as well as enforcing high standards of quality through provincial legislation” (McGrane 2010 6). Young and Pasolli found some evidence of these indicators in Manitoba, Ontario, and BC, but with the high fees in Ontario and BC, only Manitoba seemed to fit comfortably in this category (Young and Pasolli 2012 15). But beyond whether, or to what extent, this trend is actually occurring, is it desirable? Is this a positive development?

It would be a mistake to assume that inclusive liberal child care represents linear progress toward social democracy. Inclusive liberalism is not a transition stage between neoliberalism and social democracy. It has much more in common with the former than the latter, and is more likely to become entrenched than to usher in a more egalitarian gender regime. In fact, institutionalized inclusive liberalism makes it more difficult to move toward social democratic child care. It normalizes neoliberal macroeconomic policy (low taxes, deficit reduction), which is detrimental to progress on child care. It also embraces private, for-profit, commercial child care, posing a powerful threat to the limited public and non-profit services that currently exist, and to their prospective growth. These changes act to “reproduce a neoliberal future” (Hackworth 2008 22) and put advocates in the awkward position of fearing new spending as it might do more harm than good.⁸

It is further complicated by the fine lines that are drawn between different welfare state varieties. Regimes and their subdivisions are not always clearly distinguishable in practice. As mentioned earlier, Young and Pasolli (2012) question whether provincial child care in Canada lends itself to classification. They explain that

the data presented in this paper suggest that the affordability of child care, and staff education and wages, are not closely correlated. While Ontario and British Columbia both score high on staff education and wages, they score low on fee affordability. Logically, these findings make sense, suggesting that higher parent fees subsidize high staff education and wages, but existing typologies and concepts fail to recognize that it is possible for these measurements to correspond in a negative direction (Young and Pasolli 2012 15).

They suggest that the provincial policy varies in “idiosyncratic or counterintuitive ways” (Young and Pasolli 2012 1). Although they acknowledge that outliers can exist within ideal types (Young and Pasolli 2012), they do not consider that such contradictions are inherent, and

⁸ There are parallels between child care and other areas of social policy. Hackworth examines housing policy under the McGuinty Liberals. In Ontario, a kinder, gentler form of neoliberalism “has become an institutionalized way of life” (Hackworth 2008 16). This institutionalization of neoliberalism is reinforced because it is more difficult to resist -- advocates are reluctant to criticize the government while the floating promise of future action is in the air (Hackworth 2008).

to be expected, in liberal gender regimes. In regimes with substantial public funding, low fees and high wages are compatible, but the individualism and market-orientation of child care policy in Canada make put these indicators at odds with each other. These incongruencies are not accidental; they are characteristic of a regime that is organized in a way that makes social citizenship rights more elusive. When Friendly and Prabhu indicate that “there are as many as seven different federal ECEC programs for Aboriginal children under three federal departments” (Friendly and Prabhu 2010 16), this institutional configuration reflects the liberalism and colonialism underpinning social policy in Canada.

Having said this, their point is well-taken that provincial child care does not always fit neatly into welfare state categories. The lines are especially blurred between the variants of liberalism. To illustrate, Mahon (2009a) characterizes Mulroney’s proposed child care policy as neoliberal, supplemented with social conservatism. Mulroney’s Child Care Act “planned to impose a ceiling on federal contributions to childcare. The Act would also have made funds available to commercial as well as non-profit operations” (56). Yet these neoliberal elements are nearly indistinguishable from the inclusive liberal measures introduced through Martin’s Bilateral Agreements on ELCC. Actually, the main difference between these two approaches is not one within liberalism, but between liberal and conservative/neofamilial regimes. The other element of the Mulroney plan was “a refundable child tax credit, which was designed ‘with the express intent of permitting ... families to choose among different types of childcare options, including the choice of one parent remaining in the home’” (Mahon 2009a 56). Interestingly, it appears that there is policy activity beyond the realm of liberalism in Canada, drawn from conservative/neoconservative influences.

Neoconservatism/Neofamilialism

The strength of conservative/neoconservative social policy ideas has been underestimated in Canada. Conservative/corporatist welfare regimes, or neofamilial/caregiver parity gender regimes, rely heavily on social insurance programs (including parental leave), family provision of services and support from charities and the voluntary sector. It is organized around an ideal male breadwinner and female caregiver model (at least until children are school-age) (Mahon 2009a; Fraser 1997). Many of these elements are significant in Canadian child care policy.

As Mahon (2009a) explains, parental leave figures in both the neofamilial and the social democratic regime. Neofamilial parental leave encourages maternal caregiving, whereas social democratic policy promotes shared parental responsibilities for social reproduction. She also identifies publicly financed parental leave as one of the tools of inclusive liberalism. There have been significant changes to federal parental leave in Canada that have extended combined maternity and parental leave coverage to a maximum of 52 weeks. So in which category does it belong?

It is certainly not social democratic. Outside of Quebec, parental leave does not create an incentive for shared parenting, access is limited, and benefit levels are poor (MacDonald 2009). MacDonald places it in the social investment (or inclusive liberal) family, as it is compatible the NCA’s emphasis on investing in children. But it also has distinct conservative characteristics -- it is funded through a contributory program, and clearly reinforces gendered patterns of parenting.

To return to the provincial scale, there are other signs of neoconservatism in child care policy, such as the heavy reliance on extended family care arrangements, and the voluntary sector. The steadfast adherence to the learning and care dichotomy (or “ABC”) that is evident in provincial policy is another strong indication. As seen earlier, several provincial initiatives have been explicitly framed as early learning, in contrast with child care. The policies designed around this frame produce certain outcomes: “Neither kindergarten nor parenting programs address the need for non-parental care” (McCain et al. 2011 80). This learning/care divide

reflects a gendered value system. It is a market-based value system associated with (inclusive) liberal concerns about school-readiness and future competitiveness (Friendly and Prabhu 2010). Still, there is a strong socially conservative factor that views school-based early learning as the least disruptive of traditional gender and family relations, stressing parental (i.e. maternal) care for younger children. Many 'progressives' also rely on this gendered distinction, seeing kindergarten, strategically, as more publicly palatable than child care. In practice, this gender ideology trumps other stated values, including claims made increasingly by both Liberal and NDP governments about evidence-based policy making.

Other policy instruments associated with inclusive liberalism and neoliberalism also have a solid neoconservative basis. Mahon (2009a) provides that "new disciplinary techniques associated with the 'roll-out' of neo-liberalism often enlist the family, which becomes the target of therapeutic 'parenting' discourses" (52), and that these techniques incorporate social conservatism. These 'disciplinary techniques,' such as home visiting and parent drop-in centres⁹ are on the rise, without supports to meet the material needs of parents (Rippeyoung 2013). Rippeyoung (2013) analyzes new discourses around "intensive parenting" and "attachment parenting," and argues that parenting experts reinforce neoliberalism by promoting individualized responsibility and limited public supports. They also promote neoconservatism. In this highly gendered discourse, women are the "primary bearers of the associated costs of motherhood" (Rippeyoung 1 2013) and are the primary targets of parenting expectations. Here, the learning is directed at mothers, with little attention to their caring needs. Neoconservatism is a steady companion in the provinces' liberal regimes.

Conclusion

The limited provincial activity on early learning and child care indicates that if we are witnessing a new era of sub-state building, social policy has not been the primary tool of construction. Overall, provincial child care policy has not been particularly ambitious. In some cases, policy changes toward privatization are putting constraints on future progressive efforts, and the action that is occurring is reinforcing a patchwork of liberal and neoconservative policy approaches. This gender regime fails to address the growing crisis in social reproduction and undermines women's social citizenship rights.

Early learning and child care cannot be a DIY project for the provinces. If significant progress in child care is to occur, it requires cooperation across multilevels of governance. It requires building plans and blueprints (Anderson 2005; CCCABC and ECEBC 2011; CCAAC 2004). And it requires dismantling the gender ideologies that support the current policy structure.

⁹ Including Strong Start centres in BC, and Early Years centres in Ontario (and perhaps the proposed Early Years centres in Nova Scotia).

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