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Master of Arts in Public Administration

Who cares about childcare policy: An analytical literature review

Major Research Paper
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Abstract

The need for affordable childcare is a social issue that affects all Canadian families, yet there is little consensus on what is the most appropriate policy response from the federal government and other levels of government. While Quebec introduced a centralized childcare policy in 1997, the rest of Canada has maintained status quo with a market-based 'patch-work' system that is becoming unsustainable due to growing demands. This research paper aims to provide an outline of the main issues and debates that surround childcare policy in modern democratic states and welfare regimes by conducting an analytical review of existing literature published in academic journals. From the literature, three themes emerged: first, state ideology and the structure of governance have a direct influence on the design and selection of childcare policy tools and desired outcomes; second, institutionalized gender bias create barriers to achieving gender equality; finally, Canadian scholarship remain skeptical on the effects of poverty and non-parental childcare on children's social and cognitive development.

Key words: *childcare policy, policy instruments, gender equality, sociological institutionalism, critical policy studies, and welfare regimes*

Section I

Introduction

Scholarly contributions in social policy seek to integrate lessons learned from the often-regretful past, critically examine the present state of affairs and propose recommendations to improve future outcomes. Childcare policy is firmly entrenched within the field of social policy as it has far-reaching influence that extends beyond the wellbeing of children to include mothers, fathers, caretakers and society as a whole. Unfortunately, unlike the better-known examples of Canadian social policy such as the pension system and universal health care, the push for a cohesive childcare policy in Canada has remained unsuccessful.

As an interdisciplinary field, social policy grows and adapts to reflect emergent values in areas such as public ethics, gender and race equality, which are now exacerbated by the penetrating reaches of globalization and information technology. Given that development in the area of childcare has been limited in Canada (with exception to Quebec), we need to explore the international fora to determine how childcare policy is contextualized and characterized among welfare regimes that have active childcare policies in place.

The aim of this research paper is to build a narrative of the main themes in childcare policy, locate commonly used theories and conceptual frameworks, and identify knowledge gaps to support future policy development in Canada; this will be accomplished by conducting an analytical review of academic literature on childcare policy.

Background and Historical Review

Public policy is a set of responses or actions undertaken by governments designed to address a problem or to achieve a desired outcome in order to fulfill its obligations and responsibilities to the general public. Social policy is a sub-set of public policy that focuses on improving the wellbeing of individuals through government services funded by some form of wealth redistribution (Graham, Swift and Delaney 2012: 14). In Canada, it is possible to trace the evolution of the welfare state and social policies created to deal with what Rittel and Webber coined as “wicked problems”. Wicked problems are complex, varied and deeply rooted. Canada’s wicked problems originate from regional and cultural cleavages, geographic divisions, unequal distribution of wealth and resources between “have” and “have-not” groups, provinces and territories. Many Canadian historians have written extensively on the lingering legacy of the “compact theory” between early English and French colonists, which saw the exclusion of input and influence from the indigenous peoples and later settlers and immigrants from the dominant governing structures (Jackson and Jackson 2001; Lachapelle and Paquin 2006; Nevitte and Kanji 2004).

Each levels of government have different responsibilities to develop and maintain Canada’s social infrastructure. The Canadian federal system of provinces and territories adds to the complexity in the relationship that exists between each person and federal, provincial, and regional jurisdictions. To achieve their objectives, tools used by governments can be: legislation, regulation, enforcement, incentives such as tax credits and grants, penalties such as fees and fines, and information. Each tool or instrument are

designed and intentionally selected to address or prevent social problems, which may or may not be explicitly communicated (Howlett 2000; Lascoumes and Le Galés 2007).

A few scholars have attempted to create a chronology of the major junctures and themes that have shaped the path of Canada's social welfare system (Finkel 2006; Graham, Swift and Delaney 2012). This history reveals that the values which contemporary Canadians hold in high esteem such as equality, fairness and compassion, were not always embraced by all sectors of society, in fact, it is revealed that the state and elite members cared very little for the general population beyond economic utility. Contrary to the romanticized notions of the capable and roughened early pioneers, the mortality rate for the rural and urban poor were astonishingly high as they were often unemployed in winter due to a lack of work and could not afford warm clothing, shelter or fuel to endure the harsh northern climate, yet there was little in the way of state support to help them survive (Finkel, 2006).

Over the years, the driving ideology behind some public policy also revealed xenophobia and homophobia in program such as the Chinese head tax to restrict family reunification of railroad workers, its neglect of Africville, internment of Japanese Canadians during World War II, and use of the "fruit machine" in the 1950s to screen and eliminate homosexuals from the public service and military. A more recent example can be seen in the passage of Bill C-51, *Anti-terrorism Act, 2015*. While these policies have more to do with measures to control immigration and social norms, nonetheless they demonstrate the ability of the government to implement legislation based on the prevailing values in society. Social policies are neither inherently good nor necessary

designed to improve the welfare of citizens, they are an expression of the ideological views of the government in power.

Beginning of the Canadian welfare state

Finkel (2006) traced back to the 1800s to illustrate how the limited involvement of the state in providing care to the poor in New France led to the rise of the Roman Catholic Church as a provider of not just spiritual leadership, but also health care and shelter for the most vulnerable population, such as orphans, single mothers and the frail elderly. Similarly, the *Poor Law* from England applied to the Anglophone community in Upper Canada (and subsequently the Francophone community after the conquest of New France), which saw the internment of the poor and destitute in hundreds of “Houses of Industry” for the sole purpose of labour exploitation. Meanwhile across the country, indigenous populations languished on reserves after signing land treaties that had deceived them into surrendering their traditional territories and way of life for the promise of security, protection and resources from the federal government that never adequately materialized.

In the absence of state intervention, the church became a center of resource and expertise in providing social services. It is also in these conditions that women’s social-welfare activism was born. As women were excluded from the paid workforce, they sought to contribute to society by expressing their sympathies, advocating for the destitute and raising funds to provide meals and clothing through forming groups and committees, such as the Female Benevolent Society (Finkel 2006). Remarkably, by many academics, the field of social work stems from this tradition of caring led almost

exclusively by women. The role of women will be explored further when the discussion returns to the topic of childcare. As the country began to industrialize and a more powerful middle class emerged, groups united by common interest and shared values such as workers unions and various sectors of the business community would join forces and play an influential role in the shaping of Canada's social welfare landscape.

After World War II, the western nations experienced a fundamental shift as a reaction to the atrocities of war and the magnitude of human sacrifice. In the history of Canada, it was in the period from 1945-1975 that defined the nation as a welfare state, as citizens began to change their expectations and demanded more from their government beyond peace, order and good governance. There are two key pieces of social policy struck during this time that continues to define Canadian citizenship: the pension system, and universal health care.

In the 1950s, provinces had already begun to build their own provincial pension systems, most of which were means-tested and contributions-based. Although the Registered Retirement Savings Plan (RRSP) was introduced in 1957 to help individuals prepare for retirement, it benefited only the wealth elites who had money to save. It was not until 1964 that the government devised a universal pension system that would provide a measure of social protection against poverty, however meager that support was at the time. The significance of this first attempt at a universal system could not be understated because nothing like it had existed before in Canada and it would pave the way for universal health care to come.

Whereas the federal government had already provided family allowance to poor Canadians with children, there were conditions that have to be met; the recipient must be

of a certain age, must be able to demonstrate financial need, and they must be of a particular racial or ethnic background (i.e. Caucasian). This new pension system on the other hand, was universal and an “absolute right” entitled to all citizens (Finkel 2006:156). The lobbying efforts by the Canadian Congress of Labour and Canadian Association of Social Workers were able to draw political support from the newly created New Democrat Party led by Tommy Douglas. Influenced by Quebec’s unique set-up, the pension system was later modified to a contributions-based plan to satisfy the business community, with Guaranteed Income Supplement for those in most dire need.

The push for better health care policy was initiated by farmers groups who were frustrated by high infant mortality and maternal deaths that were preventable, especially in rural community where access to medicine and knowledge of sanitation was limited. The government ordered the Hall Commission in 1961, which produced four criteria for a pan-Canadian health care system: comprehensive coverage, universality, publicly administered, and portability across provinces. The health care policy was met with strong opposition from businesses such as health insurance providers, and the Canadian Medical Association, who feared that government regulation would stifle their autonomy and revenue potential. Under strong federal leadership the *Medical Service Act* was passed in 1968, despite initial hesitance from some provinces.

The pension system and universal health care were driven by the changing ideas on the quality of life and who deserve care and made possible by the persistent and successful lobbying efforts of the labour workers unions and organizations. The universality of the plans meant that citizens all belong to a collective social network and

that the state held an important role to improve the welfare of the old, the sick and the poor.

Childcare in Canada

The care and governance of children were exclusively within the domain of the family until 1870, when it became mandatory for children under the age of 12 to attend school (except for Quebec). From that point, the government's approach to the wellbeing of children would appear morally inconsistent and outright bizarre. The socially elitist perspective objective of "child saving" that persist until the middle of the 20th century led to abusive state interventions that resulted in egregious and long-lasting harm in some cases, such as the creation of residential schools that plucked Indigenous children from their communities and subjected them to religious indoctrination, abuse and isolation.

The debate over childcare originated around the issue of labour and the imperative for women with children to work due to financial need, such as single mothers who were widowed, deserted or unsupported by their husbands. A mother's allowance was introduced to address this need, but it was meager and attached with social stigma. Recipients of the allowance were monitored by social workers or even noisy neighbours to ensure their behaviors complied with a strict and conservative moral code. Despite growing demands for female labourers and changing realities in the workplace during especially during World War II, childcare remained a private issue that was a domestic responsibility. After World War II, a family allowance was introduced to encourage mothers to return from the workplace and stay home. Fearing abuse of this allowance as a

“baby bonus”, the government quickly removed this financial support but offered nothing in its place. Once again, mothers were left to fend for themselves.

Even as the Canadian welfare state began to embrace values such as equality and fairness, as seen with the create of pension and health care policy, there was strong resistance and rejection from various sectors in the level of support and service the state should provide towards childcare. This ambivalence towards gender equality in the workplace reveal the dominant view of the time that a women’s primary vocation was motherhood at the exclusion of her career or personal choice. Social norm dictated that the nuclear family was a sacred institution created for the creation of children, with a father and a mother who conformed to gendered roles. Unlike pension and health care reform, childcare policy did not receive support from the powerful labour movement, which was male-dominant. In fact, even female-run organizations such as the National Council of Women of Canada did not support the creation of childcare facilities due to their belief that the family home is where children would receive the greatest level of care.

Due to these irreconcilable perspectives and values, and even as the rest of Canada watched Quebec strikes out on its own in 1997, a national childcare policy has remained a Gordian knot that has persisted well into the 21st century.

Methodology

The objectives of this research paper are to synthesize the current state of knowledge on childcare policy into coherent themes, identify gaps in the literature, and create linkages that would inform evidence-based policy making for a Canadian context.

To ensure relevance, the body of literature reviewed was drawn from academic journals that focused on social policy, public policy, and public administration. These publications were selected as they provide insights into childcare administration from democratic states that would allow for more effective comparisons of the similarities and differences in the policy development process. To limit size of the literature for review, only articles published between 2000-2015 from the pre-determined journals were considered. A manual search through the electronic archives for 13 academic journals¹ was conducted, which yielded a total of 39 articles selected from eight journals for analysis.

The resulting selection of articles provided a robust range in the breadth of discussions on childcare policy from various international perspectives. Owing to the interdisciplinary heritage of the social sciences, a blended use of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies and sources was found in most of the literature. In addition to a wide range in the breadth of discussion, the literature reviewed also contained diversity in the depth of analysis offered. Some articles presented a comparative analysis of childcare policy from different states and welfare regimes, while others examined the impact of changes in childcare policy on parents within a specific jurisdiction.

For future research, notable gaps in academic research, especially that of Canadian academia, could be addressed by expanding the literature analysis to include

¹ Please see Appendix A for a list of the academic journals used for the literature review.

alternative sources such as books, mainstream media, and grey literature, such as government policy documents, position papers released by stakeholders, think-tanks, and advocacy groups.

Section II

Literary Analysis - State of Childcare Policy

Theme 1 Ideology and Political Structure

As a site of scholarly research, social policy have developed over time to integrate traditional disciplines such as psychology, economics, and political science, with philosophical underpinnings that swing the spectrum between four groups: neo-conservative, liberal, social-democratic, to Marxist (O'Connor and Netting 2011: 6). These four world-views provide sets of assumptions and interpretations on human nature, society and the role of the state, and they are used frequently by academics to unlock the connection between changes in political leadership with changes in policy objectives and outcomes. Richard Timmuss, who was an early thinker on social policy created three models as a way to illustrate how policy choices are influenced by prevailing views on what the ideal society should be: residual welfare model, industrial achievement-performance model, and institutional redistributive model. The influence of Timmuss' work can be seen in the three models proposed later by another welfare-state scholar, Gøsta Esping-Anderson's social democratic welfare state, conservative/corporatist welfare state, and liberal/ residual welfare state.

Welfare regimes

In the body of literature examined, Esping-Anderson's welfare regimes are referenced most often, especially in describing the political ideology of the state, traditional gender roles within a particular cultural group, and the influence of that regime

type on the implementation of childcare policy. The welfare regimes were created in 1989 in a seminal book call *The Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* and while the world has undergone much change since then, reforms to welfare policy within the regimes can be described as incremental at best. It would appear that these models have become institutionalized such that changes are largely path dependent, even as the international and domestic context may shift. Within social welfare academia, the use of comparative analysis between the regime models, policy tools and outcomes of childcare policy between European countries is one of the most commonly devised methods for conducting research (Béland, Blomqvist, et al. 2014; Ellingæter 2014; Fleckenstein 2010; Kaltenhaler and Ceccoli 2008; Rauch 2005).

The Liberal welfare state, such as the US, Canada and the UK, provides means-based assistance that aim to support the market by encouraging employment and reduce welfare expenditure for the state. The use of non-authoritarian tools such as tax credits or monetary incentives is preferred for this model. Conservative welfare states, such as Germany, Italy, Poland and France, provide contributions based-social assistance and state policies goals aim to maintain social cohesion and stability by protecting family values. This model is considered a hybrid among the three. Finally, social-democratic welfare states, which mainly comprise of the Nordic countries, offer extensive universal services and programs to its citizens and are generally held as the most progress in the delivery of childcare policies to promote gender equality and child development for families.

Though a review of comparative studies within the literature, it is clear that there is a growing interest across countries towards a gradual hybridization of traditional tools

used in each regime for the delivery of childcare policy. While there is consensus on the superior gender equality offered by the social-democratic Nordic “earner-carer” approach, there are also on-going concerns about the sustainability and affordability for the state in light of mounting national debts, among other issues such as domestic violence and racism, which indicate there is no universally correct or perfect solution for childcare (Hearn and Pringles 2006).

Given the inflexibility of the monolithic welfare regimes, Rigby (2007) propose a theory connecting the “degree of visibility or coerciveness” in the use of policy tools with the economic and political context of the regimes (653). Childcare policy tools typically include: government subsidies to care providers, monetary incentives for parents, tax credits and industry regulations (Rigby 2007: 654). As demonstrated by the variety of tools and the different ways in which they are deployed used across different countries, it is clear that policy tools are also political tools “central to the political battles that shape public programs” and policy tool shopping has proven to be effective strategy for gaining support (655). The deliberate and strategic use of incentivizing tools to encourage female labour force participation will be further discussed in a later section with specific examples from the UK and Germany (Fleckenstein 2010:801).

Economic self-interest

Across childcare policy literature, there is a spectrum of approach used to understand the drivers of policy development and change. Academic discussions over welfare programs tend to focus on macro-structures such as government institutions, formal arrangements or networks of influence from industry and stakeholders. However,

some scholars contend that it is also important to follow the focus to a lower level that accounts of the lived experiences and individual encounters that make up the main theoretical assumptions that guide childcare policy. “To put it simply: what the public thinks about the welfare state matters” (Kaltenthaler and Ceccoli 2008: 1042).

Kaltenthaler and Ceccoli (2008) adopt a micro-level analysis by investigating personal attitudes towards childcare policy, arguing that individual interests and ideas play a significant role by providing or withholding political support. The implication of acknowledging the collective power of the voting block build on individual support cannot be understated, yet this is often neglected by authors who adopt a top down and institutional approach to examining childcare policy. By using a simple survey with a robust group of respondents from seven European countries, Keltenthaler and Ceccoli sought to test three different reasons that can be used to explain individual preferences in the tools and policies used in addressing childcare needs: economic-utilitarian, political, and psychological. Their findings identify economic self-interest as the primary driver, with personal psychological predisposition as a close second. Their results were echoed by other analysis done in Unified Germany (Goerres and Tepe 2012), and the United States (Rigby 2007).

Economic-utilitarianism, also known as functionalism, originates from political economy and is premised on the idea that people are rational beings who seek to maximize the utility of available resources in self-interest (Fleckenstein 2010; Kaltenthaler and Ceccoli 2008). As the name would suggest, the factors considered under this category tend to be quantifiable and conducive to economic or monetary exchange, such as income, education level, employment status or earning potential.

Although Kaltenthaler and Ceccocoli regard risk acceptance or risk aversion as a psychological explanation for individual support or rejection of state invention, this is nonetheless rooted in concerns over economic self-interest for a social safety net or greater economic opportunities (2008: 1051). As welfare policy is a redistribution of wealth and resources within society from the rich to the poor, it stands to reason that those who stand to gain from childcare policy, such as the poor, would be in support of it. Likewise, those who stand to lose, such as the wealthy, would be more likely to promote individual responsibility. This simplistic arrangement can be expanded to include an individual's "self-perceived social class" and the resulting stratification of economic classes (Kaltenthaler and Ceccocoli 2008: 1048) that produce predictable voting patterns and useful information for political parties.

Following the logic of economic utilitarianism, the term "material self-interest" used by Goerres and Tepe (2012) points to how parents, and especially mothers, with small children are most likely to support public childcare. Indeed, some of the most vitriol criticism of childcare policy, mostly from a gendered perspective, is in reaction to the subjugation of working mothers and mistreatment childcare workers as mere economic components. This will be explored in another portion of the analysis dedicated to institutionalized gender bias.

Partnership and institutional fragmentation

The degree of leadership, control and influence held by the state in its relationship with other levels of government and its citizens are highly dependent on its welfare regime type. Rauch (2005), Penn and Randall (2005), and Cottes (2011) adopted a similar

approach to examining childcare policy by identifying partnership strategies and influence of stakeholders on the policy development and feedback process. While there are some variations within each regime type, Liberal welfare states generally prefer public-private governance structures that utilize principles of new public management to achieve desired outcomes (Cottes 2011; Penn and Randall 2005). Conservative welfare states have the highest degree of centralization and institutional authority by the government to implement top-down policy decisions (Fleckenstein 2010). Social democratic states have political systems that provide more veto opportunities for municipalities and NGOs, which result in more fragmented decision-making and democratic style of governance (Rauch 2011).

While the Nordic countries are generally recognized as socially democratic regimes and place a high value on equalitarianism and gender equality, there are still differences among each country's childcare system that can be attributed to institutional variations that emerged in the last three decades (Ellingsæter 2014; Rauch 2005). Rauch compared the level of institutional fragmentation between Denmark, Sweden and Norway for veto opportunities by oppositional interest groups that would impede the introduction of welfare program reforms. He found that in contrast with Denmark and Sweden, Norway had weak regulations and non-binding declarations that allowed municipalities to exercise their veto power and resist guaranteed childcare service delivery. Similarly, non-profit public childcare organizations in Norway were powerful and maintained their autonomy over business operations, hours, fee structure and service delivery; as such, this group was not incentivized to support fulltime, regulated childcare proposed by the state (Rauch 2005: 379).

Within Canada, the delivery of childcare services varies depending on provincial jurisdiction; Cottes (2011) found that the innovative use of a coalition model of governance has created benefits and surprising challenges for the Province of Manitoba². Cottes traced the political transformation within Canada from the 1980s that saw the rise of neoliberalism and the changing attitude towards childcare from a shared public-private responsibility to solely that of the family (2011: 381). In 1999, the New Democratic Party rose to power in Manitoba and began the deliberate expansion of the government's role in child rearing with a program call "Healthy Child Manitoba". By intentionally adopting a more deliberate and open policy development process with clear objectives, the province was able to gain greater support for buy-in. Although the process for coordinating stakeholders and reaching consensus took longer, the quality of the result and the level of engagement was a positive outcome. Incidentally, this program made the province a front-runner towards fulfilling the national 1999 Social Union Framework Agreement (SUFA).

The UK New Labour Party's New Deal for lone parents and "Third Way" manifesto have provided rich fodder for welfare scholars; indeed, a significant portion of published literature on childcare policy were written in response to the Labour government's welfare objectives and their impact on women, families and children (Featherstone 2006; Himmelweit and Siagala 2004; Gray 2001; Mckie, et al. 2001; Rake 2001; Wiggan 2010). In contrast to the success in Manitoba brought on by political

² Cottes used a participatory action approach for his research methodology as he was privileged with access to his subjects when he worked for a parent-child coalition in Winnipeg's inner city. While the level of detail and display of comprehension for local politics that came as the result of this methodology was uniquely insightful and precise when compared to the body of childcare policy literature reviewed, it does leave the objectivity of his findings to question.

change, Penn and Randall (2005) attribute shortcomings in UK's childcare policy as the result of a legacy of institutional fragmentation between local and central governments and weak proclivity for seeing childcare as a state responsibility (81). As noted by Cottes, the issue of stakeholder engagement and public management is an important factor in childcare policy that is often overlooked by consideration of childhood development and employment levels (2011: 386). Following the intense privatization of public services by Conservative government in the 1980s, the New Labour Party sought to reformulate public perception by "presenting them [public-private partnerships] as part of its commitment to widen participation, engage with civil society, and involve 'stakeholders' (Penn and Randall 2005: 86)". Unfortunately, many of these partnerships, such as the Early Year and Development Partnerships, were found to be ineffective mechanisms for decision-making and unable to produce viable solutions and results.

Despite a shared focus on institutional design and stakeholder input, the examination on the Nordic countries, Canada, and the UK produced inconclusive evidence of the influence of institutional fragmentation on childcare policy. It appears that stakeholders can act on their own private agendas and self-interests, which can be unpredictable and difficult to anticipate or control. Collective wisdom from scholars to address this issue of institutional fragmentation recommends greater transparency, accountability and inclusivity at every level of the policy development cycle (Anderson and Findlay 2010; Penn and Randall 2005; Kershaw 2006).

Governance and Accountability

Anderson and Findlay offer a sober assessment for the lack of engaged and genuine debate on childcare in Canada, “Too often, federalism and jurisdictional arguments act as a guise for blocking substantive policy progress and undermine democracy (433).” This observation was affirmed by Kewshaw who points to how the complexity of intergovernmental relations jeopardize the ability of general public to raise the issue of childcare policy in the public sphere and suffocate fair representation and democratic participation (2006: 216). Unlike the European models, the Canadian federal government manages the redistribution of wealth through tax revenue and pass on the authority and responsibility for most services and program delivery to provincial and territorial governments, including childcare. Using the shifting analogy of a weather vane, Paul Kershaw (2006) describes how the lack of direction from federal leadership on childcare policy stems from pre-existing the power relation between the federal government and the provincial and territorial levels (199).

This issue of accountability is explored by Anderson and Findlay (2010) through an examination of the conditions and terms attached to transfer payments in Canada, specifically the SUFA, the 2003 Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Childcare and associated performance measurements (419). Anderson and Findlay found that provincial and territorial governments were not fulfilling the reporting requirements set out by the Public Sector Accounting Board due to poor communication practices in the release of their annual reports. The reports provide a measure of leverage for the federal government to engage and obtain compliance from provinces and territories, but there were numerous issues such as irregular updates, excessive length of information,

online accessibility, broken links, etc. (425). Also concerned with accountability, Kershaw noted that there were no attempts to correct the provinces' misuse of federal transfers for purposes other than the delivery of early childcare services. Due to a lack of data, performance measure and adequate tracking, it is not possible to create a baseline to assess whether governments are effectively using transfer payments to address childcare needs. Indeed, the rollover of unused funds for next year was even encouraged through the use of informal correspondence so that this communication could not be obtained by access to information requests (Kershaw 2006). Thus, despite assumption about the assertion of control and oversight through the agreements in place, the lack of accountability points to the contradiction where in reality, "The purpose of performance management is for all governments to be accountable to their publics, not to each other (Kershaw 2006: 203)."

Under the SUFA, Canadian intergovernmental relations adopted the practice of "collaborative federalism" to enhance planning and consultation between governments (Kershaw 2006: 197). Yet the unexpected consequence of this arrangement created a peculiar channel of accountability that extended "only to their citizens, not to one another (200)." Without proper annual reporting as noted by Anderson and Findlay, the impact of this set-up is an erosion of transparency and public trust, especially for stakeholders and researchers as they draft policy recommendations or conduct program planning. Furthermore, the burden on communities and citizens to actively monitor public reporting and hold policy authorities to account is unrealistic and disingenuous as a form of public engagement (Kershaw 2006, Anderson and Findlay 2010).

Transformation and convergence

As an extension of welfare policy, accessibility and inclusivity of childcare service are key concerns. In a comparative analysis of welfare programs between two liberal welfare regimes, Canada and the UK, and two social democratic regimes, Denmark and Sweden, Béland et al. found that there was no overall sign of a “universal decline of universality”; however, there are incremental changes that reflect political interests and fiscal concerns across both types of welfare regimes (2014: 740). The analysis by Béland et al. across welfare programs provides an interesting opportunity to observe the effects of regime path dependency when it is confronted by the changing economic self-interest of voters, and in turn, the self-interest political leaders and their parties.

Universality is determined by the criteria of universal accessibility, entitlement and centralized administration. Béland et al. examined three areas that are considered the mainstays of welfare policy: pensions, healthcare, and childcare. Across all four countries, healthcare was still the most universally covered program (even as the UK’s National Health Service saw the introduction of a two-tiered model under the Thatcher-era) and enjoys the greatest level of stability and support from across all groups within the general public. Pensions programs have undergone some changes between universality to means-tested (claw backs for Old Age Security in Canada), as well as a gradual push back on the age of eligibility in some counties; but largely, the real effects of change on pensions have been incremental and low impact. This demonstrates the power of the baby-boomer generation to exercise their vote to assert political influence.

Childcare has experienced some minor degree of privatization in terms of service delivery in Sweden and Denmark, but it has remained a universal program that has only expanded to include more children over time. This phenomenon was attributed to the entrenched of the state's attitude towards child development (Béland et al. 2014; Ellingsæter 2014). Under the New Labour party, childcare in the UK was drastically changed as the social agenda on welfare shifted towards improving female labour participation. In 2013, the UK's Coalition government ended universal Child Benefit and nothing was introduced to replace it (Béland et al. 2014: 743-750). On the other hand, universal childcare allowance in Canada was reintroduced by the Harper government in 2006 after it was replaced by the means-based Canada Child Tax Benefit in 1993; but the delivery of care is remained market-based and varies from one –province to another. As highlighted by the author, “the Harper government recently returned to a modest form of universality but it did so for purely political reasons, as a way of helping stay-at-home parents but avoiding investing in a federal childcare framework similar to one put forward by the preceding Liberal government (Béland et al. 2014: 751).”

Given the complimentary approaches, institutional change analysis is well suited to Rigby's (2007) theory on policy tool shopping (as linked by the degree of visibility or coerciveness based on regime type) to provide further insight into the complex relationship between politics and policy. Rigby's theory on policy tool shopping was reaffirmed by Ellingsæter (2014) in her study, which focused on factors that contribute to stability and instability for the Nordic earner-carer models undergoing institutional change. Ellingsæter moved beyond the level of analysis done by Béland et al. for Denmark and Sweden by relating the types of policy change such as layering, with

political stability and displacement with instability. Goerres and Tepe (2012) looked at the determinants of attitudes towards childcare policy in unified Germany and found evidence of regime socialization between the populations that lived in East Germany under a corporatist welfare regime from those who lived in West Germany. Analysis of survey results over time reveal that these attitudes based on political ideology and the resulting preference for level of state program versus market enterprise are enduring despite a major paradigm change, implying that “people’s expectations towards social policy are sticky (Goerres and Tepe 2012: 366).” This finding of “stickiness” was also found in a survey with Polish citizens well after the fall of the Iron-curtain” (Plomein 2006: 140).

Despite their shared past under communist ideology, the childcare policy outcome in unified Germany (Goerres and Tepe 2012), Poland (Plomein 2009), and Bulgaria (Sotiropoulou and Sotiropoulus 2007) provide a stark contrast. The lingering effects of Communism were recognized in former East Germany, Poland and Bulgaria, and all three states are firmly within the conservative welfare regime typology where state control, family values and traditions are strong. Unfortunately, the economic and political conditions in Bulgaria were in a state of disrepair. Through interviews with key informants and experts and reports from major international non-governmental organizations such as the United Nation and the World Bank, Sotiropoulou and Sotiropoulus cited major problems with an ineffective public administration, weak legislation, rampant corruption and crime which indicate that the state is concerned with more challenging issues than childcare. Despite efforts to modernize legislation such as the *1991 Public Education Act*, *1998 Social Assistance Act* and *2000 Child Protection*

Act, there was no mechanism for implementation; this was attributed to the absence of a state regulatory structure following the fall of Soviet control (Sotiropoulou and Sotiropoulos 2007: 153). In summary, to implement change there must be genuine political leadership and available resources to overcome the stickiness of institutionalized values and ingrained regime traits.

Theme 2 Institutionalized gender bias

Within the body of literature examined, childcare policy is situated within a constellation of social and welfare policies designed to enhance the labour force participation of mothers with low income and to improve the cognitive and social development of children. There is a strong level of resistance and discontent from the academic community that questions and challenges the ways in which institutional design and childcare policy tools have contributed to creating or even diminishing gender equality, particularly that of the UK's "Third Way" (Featherstone 2006; Gray 2001; Himmelweit and Sigala 2004; Lewis 2006; McKie et al. 2001; Rake 2001; Wiggan 2010) and the Nordic earner-carer model (Eydal and Rostgaard 2011; Hearn and Pringle 2006). The attention on childcare policy has predominantly been focused on the demand for childcare and balance of care responsibilities within the home, but there is also a growing concern over the labour supply of childcare providers, who are predominately women, and their working conditions (Cameron et al. 2002; Latif 2006; Penn 2000; Rostgaard 2002; Stalker and Ornstein 2013).

Reconciliation of work and family

Childcare policy has been described as a process of reconciliation between the unpaid responsibilities in a domestic setting with paid work in the market place (Lewis 2006; McKie et al. 2001; Plomien 2009). The process formally began after World War II with the signing of the 1957 Treaty of Rome in Europe which recognized that the value and contributions women bring to the workplace is equal to that of her male counterpart, a concept commonly known as "equal work for equal pay". Despite sweeping changes in

the past few decades that have transformed the modern global economy and normative understanding of equality and gender roles, not all social policy reforms have been successful in overcoming institutionalized gender expectations as they are deeply embedded and often hidden within the social fabric.

Through the lens of sociological institutionalism, McKie et al. (2001) question why genuine change to address the challenges faced by working mothers has been so slow and difficult to achieve by exploring the socialized notions of gender, care, paid and unpaid work (233). McKie et al. begin by unearthing the “ideological connection” that forms a gendered division of labour in the roles and responsibilities assumed by women and men within the family, also known as “gender templates” (2001:234). Traditional roles of the breadwinner and housekeeper, commonly seen in corporatist welfare regimes, demarcate masculine and feminine attributes and confines women to perform care and related activities in the home that are not monetized, and therefore undervalued (236).

The reconciliation of unpaid work and paid work for women is problematic because it is an ideal that fails to first address the urgent need for reconciliation of domestic responsibilities between women and men as equal partners (McKie et al. 2001; Featherstone 2006; Lewis 2006; Wiggan 2010). McKie et al. further argue that this neglect is “actually stifling the debates on the gendered nature of care, caring work and equal citizenship (2001: 235).” The notion of citizenship is an important component of the normative narrative between work and care; it will be explored more extensively in a later section on the UK’s “Third Way”.

Lewis makes a valuable contribution to the literature by highlighting the role of the European Union as a regulator of normative behaviors; she points to the transition

from 'hard' directives to 'soft' pressure upon members through the "open method of coordination (OMC)" for a more collaborative approach that provides greater flexibility and engagement (2006: 421). An unintended outcome through the use of OMC has been the policy drift or diffusion of commitments to social justice issues, such as childcare policy and gender equality, for economic development. This is evident by a number of publications such as the Commission's White Paper on competitiveness and growth in 1993 and the White Paper on European Social Policy in 1994. Both documents stress the need for social solidarity but promote increasing economic productivity to ensure the Euro-zone maintains its advantage in the face of growing international competition (Lewis 2006:424). Much like McKie et al., Lewis contends that policy frame created by bundling pay equity and gender equality was an attempt to mainstream gender equality across the thorny issues of work and family reconciliation, equal opportunities and social policy without addressing the underlying systemic challenges that created gender inequality in the first place (2006: 421-422).

As a new member to the European Union, the social transformation that took place in Poland within the past decade provides a clear example of the growing tensions that linger and fester as policies geared towards gender equality in the workplace are not matched by the alleviation of care responsibilities at home (Plomien 2009: 146). Facing external pressures from globalization, technical developments and an aging demographic, Poland has demonstrated signs of eagerness to pursue defamililization in the footsteps of the Nordic countries and commodify the labour of women, but the results have not been impressive. While Poland has a stronger economy and a more robust government than Bulgaria as described by Sotiropoulou and Sotiropoulos (2007), culturally entrenched

family values and gendered responsibilities are hard to shake. Polls revealed that while a majority of Poles believe the state should be responsible for the provision of childcare services, they are also evenly divided between supporting a traditional breadwinner and homemaker model and an equal carer-earner partnership between the father and mother, which indicates ambivalence and cognitive dissonance (Plomien 2009: 140).

In reconciling paid work and non-paid work for women and men, Plomien determined that the state has failed in three areas: 1) insufficient resources to improve the delivery of childcare services, either by opening regulated space, tax credits or lower the mandatory age for public school; 2) no commitment to improving uptake of paternal leave; 3) minimal or inconsequential changes to facilitate parent-friendly organization of work (Plomien 2009: 141-143). The specific example offered by Poland enforces the idea despite commitments to promoting gender equality and fairness on the international stage, the driving force behind social and welfare policy continue to be cultural values, economic incentives and marketplace ideology.

The "Third Way"

In 1997, the New Labour Party ascended to power in the UK and began an ambitious social policy agenda to reduce welfare expenditure and galvanize the population towards greater economic productivity and prosperity through employment. "Welfare-to-work is emblematic of the 'Third Way' approach, because on one hand, it promises to save public money by getting people off benefits, and, on the other hand, it aims to combat the harmful effects of social exclusion through the moral, but also the social, benefits of hard work (Penn and Randell 2005: 83)." Gray (2001) similarly

outlined the three welfare objectives for tackling the issue of lone parents on welfare: 1) reduce welfare dependency for lone parents, 2) maximize employment rate by increasing female labour force participation, 3) improve the economic status and developmental conditions for children (189).

With the “Third Way”, the government sought to redefine the normative behaviors of good citizenship by challenging its people to view work as the most meaningful pursuit to move beyond poverty and other social issues (Gray 2001). Under the slogan of “making work pay”, the UK government increased the financial incentive for single parents to seek employment instead of staying at home while receiving welfare to provide care for their offspring (Wiggan 2010). To facilitate buy-in, the government attempted to set a new normative standard that work, not care, is the best thing mothers can do to provide the best future for their children. While single parents still have the option to stay home and continue receiving an allowance before their children can enter public school, this choice is clouded by social judgment. By equating employment as the morally responsible thing to do while professional caretakers mind the children, the government intensified the challenges and stress faced by single parents, as many mothers struggle with over coming their guilt for working and desire to provide care for their children (Rake 2001; Wiggan 2010).

In a demonstration of political communication that is similar to Featherstone’s “language of power”, the New Labour government repackaged a series of welfare services called “New Deals” tailored for various segments of the welfare population. In the provision of childcare, there are New Deals for lone parents and New Deals for low-income families. Through the strategic use of the New Deals and policy tools such as the

Working Family Tax Credit (WFTC), the government changed conditions for eligibility for childcare allowance for different welfare recipients that has resulted questionable outcomes, some of which might not have been wholly intentional (Himmelweit and Siagla 2004; Rake 2001).

While the WFTC promoted employment by presenting a lone parent with the choice to work or continue to stay home for a limited amount of time, the WFTC for a two-parent family unit actually reduced the choice available to mothers. For low income families to receive WFTC, the introduction of tighter restrictions on income level per household meant that the parent with lower paying jobs, which tends to be the mother, would be more likely to leave the workforce and engage in full-time care taking. In the UK, Himmelweit and Sigala (2004) found that the cost of childcare is seen as a cost of the mother's employment but not the fathers. The duo also determined that consideration of which parent will stay home to provide fulltime care is contingent on a host of factors which are dynamic, such as financial need, flexibility of time, personal identities which are rooted by cultural or familial traditions and external circumstances. Faced with these factors, the option that best serves the family unit would be chosen; in this scenario, there is no reconciliation of work and care for the mother and the dichotomy of the carer-earner is further entrenched along gendered lines (Himmelweit and Sigala 2004; Wiggan 2010).

Wiggan (2010) was able to capture the lived experiences of mothers under the "Third Way" in the UK through conducting direct interviews. She found that the push for a lone parent or mother to enter the workforce when she is not ready or to quit work to bring net economic benefits for the family can lead to long-term consequences. A rushed entry to the workforce without career counseling and proper training can create a poverty

trap where low-wage positions are all that is available or within reach. Similarly, an extended interruption to a woman's work history can have long-term negative impact on her career advancement and reduce her ability for upward mobility when she is able to return to the workforce. The notion of time was highlighted as a resource is quickly depleted for all mothers, and that multi-temporal layers of responsibilities make it especially difficult for mothers to engage with paid work while they are busy with other care-related tasks (Wiggan 2010; Latif 2006). Wiggan noted that there was "a lack of empathy for notions of time and space" from the establishment, suggesting that greater sensitivity and consideration is needed to fully comprehend the realities faced by mothers and parents. In conjunction with the analysis on absence of true reconciliation between work and care, these scenarios that capture the gender bias that put women at a disadvantage under the New Deals (Rake 2001; Wiggan 2010).

Neutralizing gender debates

The discussion on childcare policy openly acknowledges the inequality and disadvantages faced by women, yet the role and responsibility of men as perpetrators or allies are often obscured in policy development, the political arena and the public forum. Featherstone's use of discourse analysis is a powerful approach that is well suited to unveiling the layers of explicit and implicit communication that contribute to the institutionalization of gender bias in childcare (2006). In the same way that gender templates from McKie et al. are connected to deep-seated cultural traditions and welfare regime types, Featherstone also emphasizes the influence of ideology in shaping and perpetuating gender roles through looking at New Labour party's use of political

communication (2006). Hearn and Pringle (2006) take issues with the way in which European men's relationship with children and childcare are underdeveloped and over simplified in research and policy development. In a reversal of genders, Hearn and Pringle seek to remind us of the subjectivity that is also placed upon men as earners and as source of economic productivity by reintroduce men as providers of care as well as earners (2006: 366).

The "power of language" and the "language of power" are two key themes that explain how the New Labour Party used semiotics to promote government reform (Featherstone 2006: 297). The power of language is used to construct a new reality by shaping the conversation and use of terminology to subtly assert control over dialogue and perception. The language of power is the strategic use or avoidance of specific constructs that would evoke attention towards power dynamics, gender relations or structural inequalities. The two themes work in tandem in the discourse used by the government to promote their childcare policy reform. For Featherstone (2006) and Rake (2001), the use of "parent" instead of defining mothers and fathers is meant to portray a seamless blend of the division of labour between earner and carer as a completed reconciliation as described by McKie et al. and Lewis. The resulting perception of gender neutrality falsely conveys a sense of inclusivity, reconciliation, and the achievement of a harmonious resolution of gender inequality. As seen by the volume of criticisms and backlash from childcare scholarship, it is safe to say that this exercise to mainstream gender issues over workplace and domestic inequality did not adequately cover the jarring disparity between reality and fiction.

Hearn and Pringle (2006) further problematize gender neutrality and the absence of fathers in childcare discourse by adopting a cross-European perspective to highlight the ubiquity of the situation. Just as women's relationships are rich and complex, the relationships men have with their partners, children and community are dynamic and subject to the same set of changing social mores. Stereotypes of men as creators of welfare problems due to violence, recipients of welfare due to poor work ethics, and avoiders of care responsibilities are juxtaposed with the image of men as political leaders who will solve these problems (Hearn and Pringle 2006: 368). In fact, these stereotypes can overlap and create unique predicaments not normally accounted for in childcare policy's objective to reconcile work and care for mothers. Despite prevailing stereotypes, Hearn and Pringle's research reminds that men and women are all guided by circumstance, social norms and economic incentives, and that there is an opportunity for achieving more successful policy outcome for childcare by calling out on the false pretense of gender neutrality.

Childcare workers

Within the literature, the bulk of the attention has been directed on the demand for childcare to promote female employment and its impact on gender relations, while the supply side of childcare services has remain fairly unscrutinized (Cameron et al. 2002; Penn 2000; Rostgaard 2002). Cameron et al. (2002) turns the attention to the group of individuals who provide child care as a means of employment and identified three key issues which must be addressed: working conditions, changing nature of the work, and future of the workforce. While most of the analysis focused on findings from sources that

are specific to the UK, Cameron et al. provide a brief comparative analysis that provides a good flavor of the childcare sector across Europe. In a similar way, Rostgaard (2002) also presents a triage of dualities of care that are effective touchstones for capturing the essence of this area: care as paid or unpaid work, care for the young and the old, and support for care from the state in the form of cash or service. Finally, Penn (2000) explored the policy and practices in childcare and nursery education to distinguish how different types of services were created to suit childcare needs based on different sociological and pedagogical considerations. While all three authors tackle a different aspect of childcare work, they all emphasize the need for greater attention on the long-term planning for to meet the growing and changing needs for childcare as a cohesive occupation field.

Through her three dualities of care, Rostgaard (2002) reiterates the consequences of gender bias that subject women as *de facto* caregivers. The majority³ of childcare is provided by women and at home, this responsibility or burden is often characterized as a 'labour of love'. At work, childcare services are not adequately monetized and valued within a neoliberal capitalist society (Rostgaard 2002). There is a variety of care services available: private childminders, registered nurseries with trained early childcare educators, and licensed or unlicensed daycares; unfortunately, low wages and unstable working were prevalent among all types. Despite the rapid expansion and growing demand due to the policies under the Third Way and News Deals for parents, there is still a patch-work of services and availability that makes it difficult for parents to navigate and childcare professionals to develop a fruitful career (Cameron et al. 2002; Penn 2000).

³ Majority is 98-99 percent according to data from the UK Labour Force Survey reviewed by Cameron et al. 2002.

Cameron et al. found that the care work is paid well below the national average of earnings; indeed, poor pay and poor associated value are the most common reasons for those who eventually decide to leave (2002: 578). Many workers also do not have sick days, holidays, or even contracts that offers job security or protection from unjust dismissal. From interviews with childcare workers, it was found that despite low pay, many childcare workers experience high satisfaction from the work they do because they love to work with children (Scott et al. 2002).

Although there is a perception that this line of work is an accessible job for those with little work experience or formal education, the reality is that this occupation is unable to retain and recruit the talents necessary to maintain a robust workforce that can match growing demand; the current trajectory for the industry is unsustainable (Cameron et al. 2002; Scott et al. 2002). On a positive note, Cameron et al. also found that as women become better educated, they are less likely to explore childcare as a source of work. In addition, there is strong competition from other service industries that require minimal level of experience and education, such as retail or hospitality. In raising concerns over the lack of public reporting in childcare service delivery from provincial governments, Anderson and Findlay (2010) also highlighted the lack of information on the number of regulated spaces. This information is critical for the overall planning of investments and training required to meet future demands (429).

Theme 3 Childcare in Quebec and the ROC

Canadian literature on childcare policy is divided into three areas of focus: female labour market participation (Latif 2006; Myles et al. 2007; Stalker and Ornstein 2013; White 2001), Canadian federalism and governance (Anderson and Findlay 2010; Cottes 2011; Kershaw 2006), and child development as affected by income level and parental or non-parental care (Beaujot, et al. 2013; Lefebvre and Merrigan 2002; McEwan and Stewart 2014; Kottelenberg and Lehrer 2013; Kornberger et al, 2001; Waldfogel 2007). While the first two areas were integrated into the rest of the literature in sections under the themes of ideology and political structure, and institutionalized gender bias, the specific concern over impact of institutionalized or non-parental childcare on child development is exclusive to Canada. But first, it is clear across the literature that any discussion about childcare in Canada must begin by situating Quebec's socio-democratic regime against the rest of Canada's liberal welfare regime.

Quebec

In 1997, Quebec became the only province within Canada to have a provincial childcare system with universal accessibility and a subsidized, means-based fee structure (Stalker and Ornstein 2013). It is for this reason that Quebec is often used as a departure point or a point of comparison when discussing childcare policy issues within Canada. Owing to its unique cultural and language heritage, Quebec has always been protective about the preservation of its characteristics as a 'distinct society', even when it comes to the provision of welfare and social services for its citizens. But these differences are giving way to growing similarities due to economic modernization and secularization that

began in 1960s. Over the past three decades, the province has also witnessed a reduction in its sphere of influence as western provinces such as Alberta and British Columbia grow in population and GDP, which has led to more protective social objectives such as greater female employment and fertility as countermeasures to preserve its 'distinct society' (Dyck and Cochrane, 2014).

Beaujot et al. (2013) remarked that the childcare system in Quebec more closely resembles the Nordic earner-carer model within a social-democratic welfare regime. Using data from the 1996, 2001 and 2006 Long-Form Census, Stalker and Ornstein conducted a comparative analysis of Quebec and the ROC on the household strategies used by couples with young children to address their daycare needs (2013). Their findings show that not accounting for the cultural difference in preference for marriage in the ROC and common-law for Quebec, the strategies used by families of the same age and education level are remarkably similar.

Overall, Stalker and Ornstein (2013) found that childcare policy in Quebec has been effective in increasing female labour participation for mothers from middle-class families; as Quebec's subsidized childcare enabled these families to have two full-time working parents while being able to afford the cost for childcare. The effect of the subsidies on families with low income was positive, but not as significant as prior to the implementation of the childcare policy in 1997, this group already received subsidies from the government. In addition, Stalker and Ornstein considered the barriers to employment that may have been in place for those with minimal education or without job specialization who could only find work in the low income category. Across Canada, the education level and hours of employment worked by mothers are strongly and positively

correlated, and a high education level (college and above) for both mother and father is a good predictor of full-time maternal employment. The age disparity between the father and mother are negatively correlated with hours of maternal employment. This suggests that education and age are factors that are related to the power dynamic and division of carer-earner responsibilities between parents and supports Beaujot et al.'s findings on the convergence in education and age between Quebec and the ROC (Stalker and Ornstein 2013; Beaujot et al. 2013).

Concerns about child development

From the volume of articles written on the issue of child development and childcare provision, it is clear this is an area of concern among Canadian scholarship. However, there is a lack of consensus on the direction and strength of relationship between parental employment, familial income level, and children's development.

MceWen and Stewart (2014) compiled a synthesis of research to determine the effects of household income on children's development and well-being. Overall, their findings conclude that high income will only slightly improve a child's wellbeing. In their research on the relationship between the use of childcare arrangements and developmental outcomes of children, Lefebvre and Merrigan (2002) conclude that non-parental arrangements have "insignificant or negligible impacts on developmental outcomes (159)." On the other hand, Kornberger et al. (2001) looking at the effects of income for children from poor families that may already be receiving welfare support and conclude that a family's level of income has a clear and direct influence on the

development of children. The discrepancies and holes between the findings indicate there is a major knowledge gap in this area.

As indicated by Waldfogel (2007), there exists a strong contingency of contextual and moderating factors which has not been considered, such as the different influence of care provided by mothers versus fathers, on child development (261). For MeeWen and Stewart (2014), since income has a smaller effect than anticipated, the policy implication of their finding opens up an opportunity to reexamine childcare policy tools aim to subsidize costs of childcare, such as allowance, or increase net income, such as tax credits. Future research can focus on factors that might have a higher impact, such as how to improve the overall socio-economic status of the family unit. Lefebvre and Merrigan acknowledge the growing demand for non-parental childcare services as more mothers make the decision to work instead of provide care at home. In the same vein as Anderson and Findlay, and Cameron et al., they recommend that more research is necessary to examine the quality of care offered by various type of care institutions, especially ones that are unregulated or unlicensed (Lefebvre and Merrigan 2002: 175).

Clearly, more research and data is needed to develop a more conclusive foundation of knowledge to support childcare policy development in Canada. As the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) was cited as source of data for all Canadian academics, perhaps this could be one of the first tools to be relaunched to provide valuable longitudinal information for future benchmarking and assessment.

Section III

Observations

Dominant theory and conceptual framework

While feminism is a popular theory used in the study of gender discrimination, the literature analysis revealed that the main areas of debate and concerns over childcare policy extend beyond gender issues; instead, I would like to propose sociological institutionalism as the unifying dominant theory. Hall and Taylor's sociological institutionalism defines institution in broad terms that overlap between culture and institution, which includes rules and procedures but also symbol systems, moral templates, and other frameworks of meaning for guiding human behavior and action (948). The application of this theory on childcare policy is multi-faceted; individuals and political institutions act to maximize benefits and self-interest through the strategic use of voting power, partnerships, policy tools, and rhetoric within a labyrinth of existing governance frameworks, the institution of marriage, existing gender norms and windows of opportunity.

The welfare regime types provide insight into the political ideology and cultural values that have been institutionalized within a state over time. The dynamic process to resist and adapt to external and internal conditions is revealed through policy reforms that most often take shape when an election is near. In the example of the UK's "Third Way", childcare policy reforms were ushered by a New Labour Party that was anxious to implement its new agenda that balances social values such as community and opportunity, with market-based values such as individual responsibility and accountability. The application of sociological institution theory is complete with the

“making work pay” strategy that connected the policy outcome to improve the economic status of women and condition for children, with the implicit suggestion that citizens have moral obligations to work and serve as economically viable role models for their children (Penn and Randall 2005; Rake 2001). Similarly, the failure or difficulties experienced in implementation of childcare policy in some of the state formerly under Communist control, such as Poland and Bulgaria, suggests that government institutions are heavily influenced by ideological, which can be so deeply entrenched that it defies conventional attempts at policy reforms.

As stated by Lascoumes and Le Galès, policy instruments are devices that are both technical and social, and that organize specific social relations between those who are governing and those who are governed (2007: 4). This understanding allows us to take a deconstructive approach to consider the political intentionality and ideology embedded within policy instrument choices, exposing the lack of neutrality of these tools for achieving policy objectives and managing state-societal interactions that are supportive of the state’s regime (Lascoumes and Le Galès 2007, Howlett 2000; Hood 2007). And indeed, across the literature on childcare policy, the use of policy tools and instruments, such as tax credits, childcare allowances, governance structures, and accountability controls, were assessed for their effectiveness in both achieving social, as well as political objectives.

The use of critical policy studies as a conceptual framework was central to many of the pieces of literature that highlighted the effects of systemic discrimination on those who are from a low socio-economic status, women, and single mothers. Critical policy studies is concerned with representation, accessibility and equality in all stages of the

policy cycle, with emphasis on agenda setting and policy formation (Hankivsky and Cormier 2011). Its academic origins is derived from critical theory and rooted in the fields of sociology and anthropology, and is thus well suited to the issue of childcare policy. Critical policy studies ask questions about certain groups or issues that have traditionally been neglected or downplayed by those interested in maintaining status quo within the political and policy development arena. For example, some of the literature raises question about the creation and treatment of childcare workers as marginalized occupational group that has emerged from the growing demand for non-parent childcare services. Likewise, the tactic of mainstreaming gender equality as a way to bypass real policy reform was also critically examined within the articles. It is clear that application of critical policy studies has enabled researchers to identify women as the key stakeholder group that is directly affected by a state's childcare policy within both the public and private spheres, in their overlapping roles as productive workers, mothers, care providers, and policy makers.

Who cares?

In conducting this literature assessment on childcare policy, an inescapable observation emerged – the majority of scholars who wrote on this subject were women. This pattern could be further refined to predict the gender of the authors by the theoretical lens or dominant conceptual framework used: male academics tend to use economic-self-interest from the area of political economy to approach their investigations, while female academics tend to adopt a critical studies and gender-based approach with their research. The only exception to this trend was the work produced by Hearn and Pringle, as these two male authors wrote about the acute absence of men within childcare discourse.

This research paper did not set out to perform an exhaustive review of all available articles written on childcare policy, and as such, this observation could only be considered a curious coincident. Nonetheless, it sparks interest for future research into the motivations that guide academics on how they select the areas of investigation, topic and analytical tools for their research. For now, it might be sufficient to draw a parallel between the recommendations and findings noted within the literature on the roles and influence played by ‘femocrates’ or political leaders and policy makers who are concerned with the interests of their female constituents in shaping the outcome of childcare policy.

It has been noted in Fleckenstein’s (2010) comparative analysis that it is possible for the rigid structures of welfare regimes to change in response to paradigm shifts. “In the English case, we find a Labour Party in the late 1980s and early 1990s that pledge to increase public childcare provision to capitalize from the on-going value change among

the female electorate (802).” As identified by Myles et al. (2007), in the period from 1980s to 1990s saw a steady increase in employment and earnings among lone mothers in Canada. This trend was attributed to the coming of age from a generation that was better educated and better equipped with the skills necessary for higher paying and more technical management positions (Myles et al. 2007). At the same time, political scientists observed the changing political preferences of women becoming more left-wing and socially progressive. Kaltenthaler and Ceccoli (2008), Gorerres and Tepe (2012) and Ellingæter (2014) deploy the ‘class voting’ or ‘social constituencies’ argument to explain how working mothers support childcare policies as it is in their economic self-interest. The desire to capture this group’s support provided the incentive for many political parties and governments to modernize their social policy agendas towards achieving reconciliation between work and non-paid work for women, and thus commit to policies supporting gender equality that at first glance seem to defy welfare regime models (Fleckenstein 2010: 802).

Finally, Rigby’s analysis elevates the discussion on women’s power to influence on another level. In her examination of the use of policy tools by different welfare regimes, Rigby found “increased descriptive representation by female legislators was most clearly linked to increased stringency of childcare regulation in states that were poorer and more conservative”; this is evidence that a more balanced gender representation within the formal political decision-making apparatus also have positive influence on childcare policy outcome (2007: 665).

Gaps in literature reviewed

The need for more accurate data and a deeper appreciation of gender equality in childcare policy development are commonly cited as gaps across the literature; however, Hearn and Pringles raised this concern further by challenging their academic peers and questioning why “most research focuses on white heterosexual partners.” They argue “there is a need for more research on the intersections of men, home and the labour market in their diverse configurations, including minority ethnic families and gay partnerships (2006: 376).” It is fitting how this recommendation aligns with the spirit of critical policy studies and is highly relevant to the evolving idea of the family as a cohesive social unit.

Just as the use of gender templates contribute to the subjugation of women as the primary childcare giver, gender templates also restrict men’s participation in childrearing and parenting. As identified by Hearn and Pringles, the portrayal of men in relation to childcare is overly simplified and undeveloped, but there is opportunity for change. While discussions on gender equality and female-specific challenges have lend a critical voice to advancing issues faced by women in the post-modern era, there is a need for understanding the struggles and challenges faced by men in response to common pressures that affect both parties, such as financial security, economic volatility, and erosion of traditional gender roles. The gap in existing literature can be addressed by recognizing the variety of domestic partnerships and arrangements for childcare that exist within each welfare regime model, and the effects of cultural traditions and changing notions of masculinity, femininity and gender fluidity. By integrating the roles and

responsibilities within a domestic partnership along a spectrum, gendered divisions of labour can be more effectively deconstructed and challenged.

In light of the comparatively diverse and rich selection of international literature on childcare policy, the works produced by Canadian scholars appears stifled by a lack of real policy development. All of the articles provided a perfunctory comparative analysis between Quebec's provincial childcare policy and the rest of Canada, but there is no centralized national childcare policy to scrutinize. Of the thirteen Canadian articles: six focused on the effects of child poverty, income level and quality of non-parental care on child development; four focused on the impact of childcare services on female labour market participation; and three focused on the influence of federalism and governance on achieving or preventing policy outcome.

Besides the three articles written on federalism and governance, what is missing are debates that address Canada's "wicked problems" over wealth distribution, regionalism, indigenous people and new immigrants. For example, within Canada's vast geography, the cost of living and availability of opportunities can change dramatically depending on where one is located. This is especially true for families with low income that live in major urban centers who have to compete against with high demands for childcare, and also for private childcare providers in rural towns too small to sustain a healthy business (Abrassart and Bonoli 2015). Likewise, as a nation that is home to a diverse indigenous population as well as immigrants from around the world, there is much that remains unknown about the cultural and language barriers that prevent their access to existing social support and childcare services. Research into this area can inform policy making by identifying solutions that will address their particular needs.

The limited discussion on childcare policy within Canadian literature could be attributed to many factors. It is possible that the preferred sites for discourse on childcare policy are not located within the academic realm, but over mainstream media and more open and accessible policy forums. To provide a more fulsome understanding of how childcare policy is characterized in Canada, it is imperative for future research to include a wider selection of sources for review and analysis, such as books, mainstream media, and grey literature, such as government policy documents, position papers released by stakeholders, think-tanks, and advocacy groups.

Section IV

Conclusion

This research paper set out to develop a characterization of childcare policy across various welfare regimes by identifying key areas of debates and synthesizing the current state of knowledge. To achieve this objective, an analytical literature review of select academic journal articles with an exclusive focus on childcare policy was conducted.

As seen in the literature, each country struggles to find a balance that would enable them to meet political objectives while satisfying social and welfare policy goals by weighting economic self-interest against public interest. Although the levels of sophistication for policy instruments and government commitment differ from country to country, there are three main geographic areas that were observed: the Nordic countries, which are social-democratic welfare regimes considered to have most advanced policies; central Europe countries with its hybrid models which are conservative welfare states, such as Germany and Poland, and market-based liberal welfare states such as the UK and Canada. The analysis also revealed distinct perspectives within the literature that can be grouped into three themes: ideology and political structures, institutionalized gender bias, and Canada's lingering concerns with child development and non-parental care.

Sociological institutionalism and critical policy analysis were deployed as a unifying force that connected the shared assumptions and methods of investigation from scholars across the literature.

Finally, given the inherent connection between policy and politics, and enduring ability of culture and social norms to find expression in institutions, it is crucial for academic research to challenge childcare policy reform and ask: "to what extent do these

changes represent real social progress or sometimes re-creations of patriarchal dominance in relatively novel forms (Hearn and Pringles 2006: 376)?" A successful example of this was seen in how the UK's "Third Way" created such a tremendous backlash among scholars, as it was roundly criticized for its negative impact on gender relations and enforcement of a poverty trap for mothers and families with low income (Gray 2001; Himmelweit and Sigala 2004; Rake 2001). As noted in the gaps of knowledge within the literature, this skepticism should be extended to the childcare policy scholarship to give pause for reflection and consideration on how existing knowledge, lived experiences and normative values held by researchers can also shape or enforce gender bias in academic research and policy development.

Appendix A

List of academic journals

Within a restricted time frame from January 2000 to January 2016, 39 articles were selected for the literature review from these journals:

- Canadian Public Administration
- Canadian Public Policy
- Critical Social Policy
- Journal of European Public Policy
- Journal of Social Policy
- Policy Studies
- Policy Studies Journal
- Social Policy and Administration

These journals were reviewed, but no articles were selected:

- Canadian Journal of Political Science
- Journal of Public Policy
- Public Policy and Administration
- Critical Policy Studies
- International Review of Administrative Sciences

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