

Childcare as a public and common good: A Canadian perspective

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Excerpted from abstract

Motherhood sits at the forefront of the struggle for gender parity. In Canada, where the gendered pay gap and the feminisation of poverty continue to act as challenges to gender equality, motherhood remains negatively correlated to wages and socio-economic status for women. Additionally, the lack of affordable, widely accessible, quality childcare and early childhood education is implicated in the perpetuation of other forms of social inequality, including the persisting disparities in working and living conditions revealed through a study of variation across ethnic groups. Departing from a set of debates surrounding universal childcare in Canada, this chapter examines the correlation between privatised childcare and widening social disparities along gendered, racialised and class-based lines. Demographic trends in Canada, such as a high number of working mothers, persisting and widening class disparities, stark inequalities in conditions of living for indigenous communities, and a sizeable level of ethnic and cultural diversity, accentuate the debates surrounding childcare and early childhood education as a commodity versus a public good. I apply a feminist political economy framework to argue the position of childcare as a public good, advancing this as a crucial and overdue departure from the established assumption of parenting as 'women's work'. I assert the prospect of such an approach as key to not only bridging gendered inequalities, but also disrupting patterns of social inequality that are evident in the racialisation of class-based disparities. Renowned motherhood scholar, Andrea O'Reilly (2016), refers to motherhood as the 'unfinished business of feminism'. In this sense, this chapter positions childcare centrally in an intersectional analysis of persisting social inequality in Canada.

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