

WORKING PAPER

**PRECARIOUS LIVES IN THE NEW ECONOMY: COMPARATIVE
INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS**

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In a previous paper we argued the so-called new economy is characterized by four processes: postindustrialism, the knowledge society, new technologies and precarious employment (Clement *et al.* 2009). Here we approach precarious employment from comparative and intersectional perspectives and suggest enriching the concept of *precarious employment* with *precarious lives*. This raises some questions: What does it mean to live precarious lives? Who is at risk of experiencing precariousness and where? What are buffers against precariousness? How can we document and compare precarious lives? We believe that the notion of intersectionality provides a framework to understand precarious lives. Comparing precarious lives has much to do with harmonized cross-national data. The final section of this chapter illustrates prospects and frustrations for comparative analysis.

PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT AND PRECARIOUS LIVES

Scholars have examined whether the new economy entails a shift from standard employment, where the worker maintains a stable, full-time, year-round, 9-to-5 weekday job offering statutory benefits (Krahn 1991). Non-standard jobs, defined by the absence of

these features, are likely to be held by women, youth, immigrants, and poorly educated individuals. It was unclear, however, whether it is the jobs, work arrangements, labour markets, sectors, or particular people (with regard to class, gender, ethnicity) that are precarious. The novel contribution of the concept of precarious employment captures the diversity within non-standard employment and the deteriorating quality of standard jobs along with the classed, gendered and racialized nature of these processes (Cranford *et al.* 2003).

Barbier notes that the 'French debate about employment precariousness is closely intertwined with an assessment of a much wider precariousness ... Life in general is precarious, as well as social life' (Barbier 2002: 27). The term *précarité* was used to describe a particular social condition of families or households. In the 1970s, Pitrou was among the first using *précarité* (cited in Barbier 2002), focusing on *familles précaires*: when families are unstable and when their networks are damaged, they become *précaires* and vulnerable. The employment dimension was only one characteristic among others that constituted *précarité*.

Drawing on precarious employment scholarship and the French *précarité* debate, we argue that precarious lives include precarious employment and the social conditions in which it is embedded. These social conditions include household structures, kinship networks, and access to welfare services independent of labour market status. We define 'precarious' as being in a situation that is not autonomously sustainable, where the situation includes the labour market, the social support system and conditions affecting both entries into and exit

out of the labour market. Social vulnerability potentially includes such things as divorce (a change in household circumstances), responsibility for children or dependent adults, or issues concerning shelter or health. All these vulnerabilities interact with precarious employment — that is, non-sustainable jobs or forms of contingent employment.

Following feminist political economy, we believe that labour markets and households are best comprehended in relation to each other, and the welfare state affects the character of the family–market nexus with consequences for class, gender and ethnic inequalities. Two reasons justify the concept of precarious lives.

First, considering precarious lives helps to further emphasize that employment and household are intertwined for many people. For instance, when individuals work on irregular schedules or are on call, family life is disturbed. Family meals may become the exception rather than the norm, quality time during the weekend may be non-existent if parents are busy working, and partners may find it challenging to maintain a stable relationship. Similarly, when incomes are insufficient or irregular, young adults continue to live with their parents, postpone cohabitation/marriage and have fewer children than desired.

Second, the way care is connected through the labour market, social security and the household is at the core of the intersections perspective on precarious lives. The ‘life-course scheme’ in the Netherlands, work–life balances issues in the UK, and family/work policies of Australia discussed in this volume illustrate the value of this embedded way of seeing

precariousness (also see Fuller, this volume). As contributions to this volume show, when women are responsible for caregiving, and parents cannot count on daycare services or extended family, mothers' employment options are constrained. One option is to work part-time. In many countries, however, part-time is associated with fractured career advancement and low wages and benefits. Even women without children with stable full-time jobs earn less than men. O'Dorchani finds it was not motherhood per se but the patriarchal labour markets (treating all women as potential mothers) that justified paying women low wages across the EU. Furthermore, 'motherhood status generally worsens women's wages whereas being a father tends to have a positive impact on men's wages' (O'Dorchani 2008: 1).

There is a rise in marital dissolution in nearly every industrialized country. Divorce, however, does not automatically lead to precariousness. The nature and the degree of after-divorce precariousness vary along gender lines and across countries by welfare regime and the reproductive bargain. In Australia, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain, over one-third of children in single-mother households live below the poverty line, while in Canada, the UK and the US, the rates skyrocket above 40 per cent (see Table 15.2).

Welfare states affect all sites of precariousness. In many countries, welfare retrenchment led to a shift from the state to both the market and the family in terms of how social care needs are met (McKeen and Porter 2003), causing precariousness in social security. Cuts to the health system forced families in Canada — or more accurately women — into doing care work that used to be delivered by the state. States, markets and families can be sources

of, as well as buffers against, precariousness. The challenge is to understand the reasons for and moments, locations, subjects and forms of precariousness.

We believe precariousness is related (not reducible) to *new social risks* (NSR). They are ‘the risks people face in the course of their lives as a result of the economic and social changes associated with the transition to a post-industrial society’ (Taylor-Gooby 2004: 3). These risks are *new* in the sense that they were marginal during the postwar era, and, unlike *old* risks, they affect larger groups of people. Old social risks had more to do with retirement insecurity and illness, and were likely to affect people later in life. NSR are broader since they are related to entering the labour market, job insecurity, care responsibilities, and the decline in labour union power and collective bargaining, all characteristic of what is broadly termed ‘the new economy’. Taylor-Gooby (2004) notes that NSR are likely to cause a welfare loss in one or more of three areas: first, in families, where parents are trying to reconcile earning and caring activities; second, in labour markets, where people lack the skills which are deemed necessary to have well-paid and secure jobs; and third, in social security, for individuals following an ‘atypical’ career pattern, as most pensions are adequate only for continuous full-time workers. The common thread across NSR is that people are not well protected against them by contemporary welfare states. Thus, people are forced to develop individual strategies to cope with precariousness. This might include asking grandparents to care for children, buying private pensions, or returning to school.

Therefore, we must ask: precarious for whom and under what conditions? Are all lives becoming more precarious or does precariousness hit certain people more than others? NSR bear particularly on those without relevant skills, younger workers and women. However, the skills rewarded in labour markets are a complex issue. Frequently, skills discourse is embedded with competitiveness ideology, and gendered/racialized (Gabriel 2004).

No single social characteristic universally determines precariousness. The intersection of individual factors, household dynamics, labour market structures, and welfare states shape precariousness. As many chapters in this collection illustrate, one source of precariousness comes from vulnerable immigrant status. This is evident in the US. The central place of undocumented workers in the US is in precarious employment. The US is not alone, however, as the chapter on Sweden illustrates. In Sweden there is a two-tier social security system whereby those not employed have basic coverage and those employed have a more generous coverage. Irregular immigrant workers are excluded from both kinds of social security. This leaves them particularly vulnerable not only to precarious employment but also to *precarious unemployment*. The chapter on the UK illustrates that migration status shapes people's precarious lives, as it does in Germany and Australia.

INTERSECTIONALITY: A THREE-PRONGED DEFINITION

We argue that precarious lives can best be captured in an intersectional framework. We suggest a three-pronged definition. First, we refer to intersectionality as typically understood in social sciences: the nexus of class, gender and ethnicity (Chow *et al.* 1996).

This definition of intersectionality involves decisions regarding the number of social stratifications to include in the analysis both at the conceptual and the operational levels. Although class, gender and ethnicity are the main social stratification lines, age (McDaniel 2001, 2004), citizenship (Stasiulis and Bakan 2003), heritage, and ability are also significant. Each layer of analysis added to an intersectional framework, however, increases the difficulty of operationalizing the concept. Even operationalizing class is challenging. Some studies use income or educational attainment as proxies for class (Cotter *et al.* 1999; McCall 2001). Such a strategy is necessary in many cases but sacrifices the richness of the concept of social class to the availability of the data. Cross-nationally comparable datasets simultaneously accounting for gender, class and ethnicity are rare. Accurate and harmonized data on citizenship status, ethnicity/heritage, and ability are yet to be collected.

While the first prong of intersectionality clarifies the social characteristics of the individuals at risk of precariousness, the second prong enables an understanding of individual lives through the work–family nexus, avoiding methodological individualism: people’s work and career patterns interact with household, kinship and generational relations. Individuals’ lives are made up of multiple trajectories intersecting with those of their parents, children and partners. Put differently, the life courses of individuals are profoundly affected by what happens in the life course of family members. Thus, individuals, as opposed to households, are not always the best unit of analysis to investigate precariousness. Households include the *long family* extending across generations from childhood to pensioners, including both the notions of living under the same roof and sharing obligations through common roots. Roots are about obligations to, and entitlements

from, other individuals, independent of whether they live under the same roof (Clement 2004). The unit of analysis and the time frame considered have critical implications for precariousness. University students who can lean on wealthy parents for financial support are not exposed to the same levels of precariousness in the short term as those who must rely only on part-time jobs, nor precariousness over the longer term. Married women working part-time as secondary earners are risking precariousness over the longer term (see Fuller, this volume, for the life course perspective).

Finally, the third prong of intersectionality helps to locate precariousness across households, labour markets and public policies. The intersections between states, markets and families occur at several levels: national, sub-national and local community. The extent to which a person in a given position is precarious varies across welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen 1990). Although it is not as precarious to be a child in Scandinavian countries, it is a different story in Anglo-Saxon countries, which have the highest child poverty rates among advanced capitalist societies. Buffers against, and causes of, precariousness differ across welfare regimes. In liberal regimes the labour market is the main pillar of welfare and primarily determines the degree of precariousness. In conservative welfare regimes, on the other hand, families play a bigger role in providing social welfare, creating different gender dynamics that determine precariousness.

Although a good deal of employment is being defined correctly as precarious nowadays, such contingencies have long characterized women's working lives. Fast and Da Pont (1997) found that almost two-thirds of Canadian women who had paid work had that work

interrupted for six or more months, compared to just over a quarter of men. What is crucial, however, is that whereas family reasons (caregiving) was the main reason for such interruptions in the 1950s (88 per cent), by the 1990s this fell to half (47 per cent), with economic reasons such as lay-offs accounting for nearly a quarter (22 per cent) (Fast and DaPont 1997: 3–5). Thus, precariousness stems both from family situations and employment conditions. The balance has shifted over time, as indeed has the meaning of the family variable (that is, the increase in single parenthood and disrupted partnerships).

To summarize, precarious employment and precarious lives are contingently, not deterministically, related to each other. Even when jobs are not precarious, lives of particular individuals holding these jobs can be precarious and vice versa. Thus, the three-pronged definition of intersectionality is relevant to explore precariousness from multiple entry points. While our discussion above has been conceptual, we now turn to the empirical side. Using statistics compiled by various institutions, we illustrate the challenges of cross-nationally exploring precariousness through the lens of intersectionality.

COMPARING PRECARIOUSNESS USING INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS, ACROSS TIME AND PLACE

One of the challenges of comparative intersectional analysis of precariousness is the availability of data. Can our theoretical ambitions be translated into statistical evidence? How do the problems with the available data impinge on our capacity to conduct

comparative research on precarious lives? To understand various manifestations of precariousness, we identify four necessary characteristics of statistical data:

- The data should document different manifestations of precariousness in labour markets and households. These include statistics on labour market participation, earnings distribution, marriage and divorce, intra-household distribution of income, child poverty, parental poverty, education and skill levels, wages/benefits, types of job contracts, and duration of jobs.
- The data should document state-led measures that buffer or generate precariousness, for example, social policy, employment regulations, benefit rates of governmental programs, inclusiveness/exclusiveness of social security programs, and states' contribution to pensions, public daycare, elderly care, and policy measures on class, gender and ethnic inequalities. The data should be available and comparable for several countries. Hence the further harmonization of national data collection methods and variables is needed.
- The data should be comparable across time.
- The data would inevitably be collected at the level of individuals or households, but it should reflect, directly or through proxies, the class, gender, ethnicity, age, education, and citizenship status of individuals.

We emphasize that drawing comparative conclusions by looking at national case studies on precariousness is one thing; making cross-national comparative intersectional analysis based on harmonized data is another. Even the most ambitious cross-national data sets

suffer from several weaknesses. Therefore, of the many social characteristics of individuals to take into account, we limit our focus in the tables below to class-related characteristics (such as income distribution and poverty) and gender because there is relatively more data available. Our objective is to illustrate some prospects for comparative intersectional analysis and review some strengths/weaknesses of the available comparative data on precariousness. Based on these data we do not claim an absolute rise or decline of precariousness everywhere. Nor do we claim to explain all changes occurring in the countries we compare.

We start by locating precariousness in the labour market. Table 15.1 illustrates both the value of doing comparative analysis of time and place and the frustration of poor intersectional data requiring proxies for class, such as earnings ratios and measures of low pay. The data in the first two columns on earning dispersion and the incidence of low pay illustrate the fact that earnings inequalities in developed countries rose between 1995 and 2005 (Spain and Ireland being the exceptions), with a higher proportion of people earning low pay (in Ireland and the US this proportion decreased slightly in the 10-year period). It also allows us to identify clusters of countries — the US and Korea having the highest earnings dispersion and the highest incidence of low pay, while Sweden has the lowest. Unfortunately, however, these data are silent on the social composition of the people in the lowest and the highest earnings percentiles, as well as those with low earnings. Who are the people at the bottom of the earnings ladder? Are the inequalities between the ninth and the first earnings percentiles the same for men and women? Put differently, are class inequalities lower among men or among women? We know that income distribution differs

among men and women (Arulampalam *et al.* 2007; Blau and Kahn 1992; Mandel and Shalev 2006), but earnings inequality measures do not allow us to see such gender differences clearly. Differences by age, ethnicity and citizenship status are also unknown.

Data in the last column on the gender earnings ratio for full-time employees unfortunately do not shed much light on the class–gender nexus. Although we observe that the gender earnings gap is decreasing in all countries except Australia, France and Germany, we do not know for *which* women. The observation that there is an overall decrease in the gender earnings gap is a common finding in recent studies (EC 2006). When we comparatively interpret the national studies, we share this opinion. Yet, in the present cross-national data, as gender is added, class proxies disappear. Why should we care? Because the nature of the gender earnings gap varies across welfare regimes. Countries with generous family policies, such as Sweden, enable more women to be economically active, which explains the low gender earnings gap at the bottom of the wage distribution. At the top of the wage distribution, however, the gender gap in Sweden is higher, suggesting that family-friendly policies are costly for mothers' occupational and economical attainment (Mandel and Semyonov 2005; Arulampalam *et al.* 2007). In the US, the wage structure, and specifically the higher level of class inequalities, explains much of the gender earnings gap, as women have been 'swimming upstream in a labour market increasingly unfavourable to low-wage workers' (Blau and Kahn 1992: 538).

Table 15.1 Earnings dispersion, incidence of low pay and gender earnings ratio, selected countries, 1995 and 2005

Country	9 th to 1 st Earnings Ratio		Low Pay (%)		Gender Earnings Ratio (%)	
	1995	2005	1995	2005	1995	2005
Australia	2.91	3.12	13.8	15.9	86	84
Canada	3.50	3.74	22.0	22.2	74	79
France	3.08	3.10	--	--	90	89
Germany	2.79	3.13	11.1	15.8	77	76
Ireland	4.01	3.57	20.4	17.6	76	82
Japan	3.01	3.12	15.4	16.1	63	69
Korea	3.64	4.51	22.9	25.4	57	61
Netherlands	2.77	2.91	13.8	--	77	80
Spain	4.22	3.53	15.2	16.2	71	83
Sweden	2.20	2.33	5.7	6.4	81	85
UK	3.48	3.51	20.0	20.7	73	79
US	4.59	4.86	25.2	24.0	75	81

Sour

ce: OECD 2007: 268.

Notes: Bold figures represent an increase in earnings inequality, low pay or the gender earnings gap over the period 1995 to 2005. Earnings measures are gross earnings of full-time wage and salary workers (Non-harmonized measures). Low pay refers to the share of workers earning less than two thirds of median earnings. Earnings dispersion is measured by the ratio of 9th to 1st deciles of earnings. Gender earnings ratio is the ratio of median earnings of full-time female workers relative to male workers.

Further analyzing Table 15.1, we observe, first, that Spain and Ireland are the only countries where earnings inequality fell over the decade. Spain also has the greatest improvement in the gender earnings ratio and Ireland is one of the two countries (along with the US) to have decreased the proportion of its employees with low pay. Second, Sweden stands out by having the second lowest gender earnings gap (after France), exceptionally low rates of low pay, and the smallest earnings dispersion, but even there earnings inequalities increased. Third, Korea is notable for having the highest gender earnings gap and the highest incidence of low pay as well as the largest increase in the gap between the ninth and first deciles of earnings between 1995 and 2005. It is not possible to

precisely cluster all these countries, but Korea, the US, the UK, Canada and Ireland tend to be high on inequality for the three indicators, while Australia, France and Sweden tend to be low. Are these clusters meaningful?

Table 15.2 Child poverty rates by family type, selected countries (%)

<i>Country</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Two-Parent Family</i>	<i>Single Mother</i>
Australia	1995	9.7	34.2
	2003	9.2	35.3
Canada	1994	10.0	46.4
	2000	10.9	40.7
France	1994	6.1	25.3
	2000	5.1	28.8
Germany	1994	5.6	41.0
	2000	3.8	30.5
Italy	1995	18.3	32.2
	2000	16.5	19.2*
Netherlands	1994	6.3	28.2
	1999	7.6	35.1
Spain	1995	16.6	34.0
	2000	14.7	32.8
Sweden	1995	1.5	6.6
	2000	2.3	12.9
UK	1995	13.3	43.5
	1999	10.4	39.2
US	1997	13.7	52.5
	2000	14.8	49.5

Source: Luxembourg Income Study 2000.

Notes: A child is considered poor if their household has a disposable income below the poverty line. Poverty line is defined as 50 per cent of median adjusted disposable income for all persons. Bold figures indicate at least a third of children living in poverty.

*Few cases.

Tables 15.2 and 15.3 are instructive on the precariousness of family life. Table 15.2 demonstrates that child poverty rates are usually lower in two-parent families than in single-mother households. The extent to which divorce or reproduction outside marriage leads to poverty among single mothers, however, varies across countries. For example, in

2000, the gap in poverty rates between children living in two-parent families and living in single-mother households was 10.6 percentage points in Sweden but 26.7 points in Germany and an astonishing 34.7 points in the US. Again, the table does not provide us with intersectional data; thus, we are unable to map the social characteristics of poor single mothers.

Although we do not have the precise answer, Table 15.3 sheds light on the influence of employment on poverty rates for single parents. As we noted, states and markets can be at the source of precariousness as much as they can cushion the impacts of disruptive changes in the family. In Sweden, the relatively low poverty rate for non-employed single parents demonstrates the capacity of the welfare state to overcome both labour market precariousness and precariousness in family life. Indeed, high divorce rates in Sweden are likely to be the result of the smaller penalty women face for marital breakup, rather than a sign of precariousness.

Accordingly, the gap in poverty rates between employed and non-employed single parents is much lower in Sweden than in the other four; although, like elsewhere, it is clearly advantageous for single parents to be working. In Germany, Canada and the US on the other hand, non-employed single parents are almost irremediably destined to poverty. Table 15.3 is helpful at revealing interesting variations hidden behind national averages. Observing that more than 93 per cent of children of non-employed single parents live below the poverty line represents a richer — and indeed more disturbing — analysis than observing that about 50 per cent of all children living with single mothers are poor. While

the issue is more complex, we can discern from this table some of the effects of welfare-state and labour market policies (while recognizing they both interact) on households of single parents (most of whom are women, a fact disguised by this table). There is variation evident, with half the single parents in Australia and Canada and a third in Germany not in employment, whereas in the US it is about a quarter and Sweden only 13 per cent. Single parents who are not employed stand an enormous chance of living in poverty, except in Sweden where the welfare state succeeds in keeping the rate below 25 per cent. Labour market regulation and the welfare regime also affect the poverty outcomes for employed single parents. In Sweden, for example, available child care, wage solidarity practices, near-universal unionization, and progressive child support policies all reduce the precariousness of employment.

Table 15.3 Non-employment among single parents and poverty rates, selected countries (%)

<i>Country</i>	<i>Single-parent non-employment, 2001</i>	<i>Poverty rates single parents, 1993–5</i>	
		<i>Non-employed</i>	<i>Employed</i>
Australia	57	57.1	9.3
Canada	49	72.5	26.5
Germany	34	61.8	32.5
Sweden	13	24.2	3.8
US	23	93.4	38.6

Source: OECD 2003: 138.

Note: Poverty rate is defined as percentage of persons living in households with incomes below 50 per cent of the median adjusted disposable income of all households.

Misra *et al.* (2007) suggest a typology of welfare states based upon patterns of household care responsibilities and employment. The four types are primary caregiver (with a primary caregiver supporting a secondary carer who is the primary wage earner — Germany, Netherlands); primary earner (with a primary earner and secondary carer — Canada, UK,

US); choice strategy (encourages women to be employed with state support for caring — France) and an earner–carer strategy (both women and men balance care work and employment — Sweden). They conclude that primary caregiver countries have the highest gender inequality, primary earner countries have high poverty rates for single mothers, and choice countries have low wage penalties and poverty, whereas earner–carer countries have the greatest equality for all groups, including single mothers. For our purposes, their research illustrates what innovative conceptualization and creative use of limited data sources can yield for comparative intersectional analysis. There are limits to the Luxembourg Income Study data, some of which were overcome with the development of the now-suspended Luxembourg Employment Study (LES) data. The number of countries covered and the timing of their surveys has been sporadic at best. Still, the data reveal intriguing connections between household formations, as measured by whether or not there are children under 18 in the household, and women's employment status, measured by full-time, part-time (30 or fewer hours worked per week) and not employed. There are national variations which merit further analysis and understanding (see the chapters on Germany and Japan, this volume).

Table 15.4 Women's employment status by children at home, selected countries (%)

Country	No children at home			One or more children at home		
	Full-time	Part-time	Not employed	Full-time	Part-time	Not employed
Canada	63	11	26	46	20	35
France	59	18	22	46	21	33
Germany	70	15	15	31	31	39
Netherlands	63	21	16	17	53	30
Sweden	48	36	17	38	46	17
UK	71	12	17	31	33	35
US	79	6	15	62	14	24

Sources: Luxembourg Income Study: Canada (2000), France (1994), Germany (2000), Netherlands (1999), Sweden (1995), the UK (1999) and US (2000). Based on Misra *et al.* 2007: 141, Table 1.

Notes: Part-time is defined as 30 or less hours per week. Working-age adults between 25 and 49, including female heads of households and wives/partners of male heads of household, since LIS links children in households to heads of households. Children are under 18 years of age.

THE GENDER EARNINGS GAP

The gender earnings gap provides an intriguing way to do intersectional analysis because the measure itself contains an inherent gender analysis which can then be used with other variables of inequality and precariousness. Accurately measuring the gender earnings gap is challenging. When cross-national comparability is at stake the challenge is multiplied. The gender earnings gap is extremely sensitive to the variables selected. It makes a big difference whether the calculation is based on the gross or net earnings and whether it is based on annual, monthly or hourly earnings. Diverse data sets provide varying — and often conflicting — results on the gender earnings gap. Several expert groups in the EU produced illuminating analyses of the gender earnings gap with critical observations on the limitations of data sets for comparative purposes (Rubery *et al.* 2002). Similarly, all studies demonstrating the comparative picture in the gender earnings gap contain caveats with

regard to available years, types of earnings used in the calculation, changes in the questionnaires, breaks in series, and possible sources of misinterpretation. For example, in Table 15.5, which is based on the European Community Household Panel, the Netherlands appears as a country with a very large gender earnings gap. However, most figures in this table are based on the monthly earnings of all men and women, which differ dramatically, given the high incidence of part-time work for women. On the basis of earnings of full-time workers, on the other hand (as presented in Table 15.1), the gender earnings ratio in the Netherlands is around 80 per cent.

Mindful of the need for caution in interpreting the data, Table 15.5 allows us to introduce key generational concepts such as age, to refine the nature of changes in the gender earnings gap. Again, it is not universally the case that younger, prime-age employees have a lower gender earnings gap.

Table 15.5 Gender earnings ratio for two age groups (employees), selected countries, 1994 and 2001 (%)

<i>Country</i>	<i>1994</i>		<i>2001</i>		<i>Change 1994–2001</i>	
	<i>24-54</i>	<i>55-64</i>	<i>24-54</i>	<i>55-64</i>	<i>24-54</i>	<i>55-64</i>
Canada	63	56	67	58	4	2
Denmark	77	60.6	78.2	75	1.2	14.4
Finland	77.8*	78.4*	82.1	72.5	4.3	-5.9
France	70.2	64.8	78.2	55.8	8	-9
Germany	65.2	57.5	66.5	58.1	1.3	0.6
Ireland	62.3	64.6	64.4	46.8	2.1	-17.8
Italy	81.2	79.2	86.8	110.7	5.6	31.5
Netherlands	50.7	39.7	52.3	53.6	1.6	13.9
Spain	74.6	69.3	73.9	58.1	-0.7	-11.2
UK	65.9	72.5	70	73.5	4.1	1
USA	69.1	57.2	67.7	65.8	-1.4	8.6

Sources: Data for European countries are calculated from the European Community Household Panel (Eurostat 2003); data for Canada are from the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (Statistics Canada various years); data for the US are calculated from the Current Population Survey (US Census Bureau various years).

Notes: Canadian figures are annual gross earnings; European and US figures are monthly gross earnings. The gender earnings ratio is calculated as the ratio of median earnings for female relative to male workers. A negative number in the change rows means an increase in the gender earnings gap between the two periods.

*1998 for Finland.

Also of interest is the introduction of employment status into the analysis of the gender earnings gap. There is no consistent pattern distinguishing permanent from temporary employees in terms of the gender earnings gap. There are too few permanent part-time jobs to provide sufficient evidence for any claims about temporary work; temporary part-timers are generally more gender equal in terms of pay than their full-time equivalents.

Finally, we can also use the gender earnings gap measure to compare self-employed workers to employed workers. The data in Table 15.6 allow for two categories of self-employment: those who work on their own and those who employ others. This is another proxy for class. Clearly the data are not consistently available for all the countries, most

notably Sweden, nor for all years. They do reveal, however, substantial class variation within the self-employed in terms of a gender earnings gap. These differences are not consistent across the countries for which we have data. Nor are the data readily understood, such as the exceptionally high rates in the UK for self-employed women with employees compared to their male counterparts. Our appetite is simply whetted for better data and better indicators of class divisions.

Table 15.6 Gender earnings ratio for self-employed, age 24–54, selected countries, 1994, 1998 and 2001 (%)

<i>Country</i>	<i>Self-Employed</i>					
	<i>Own Account</i>			<i>Employer</i>		
	<i>1994</i>	<i>1998</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>1994</i>	<i>1998</i>	<i>2001</i>
Canada	-	-	73	-	-	75
Denmark	114	75	-	23	-	45
Finland	-	67	61	-	80	87
Germany	51	85	54	59	73	72
Ireland	41	33	:	87	38	-
Italy	63	60	102	58	61	66
Netherlands	39	49	63	-	-	-
Spain	45	41	44	65	47	86
UK	50	59	43	97	116	235

Sources: Data for European countries are from the European Community Household Panel (Eurostat 2003); data for Canada are from the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (Statistics Canada various years).

Notes: Own account: self-employed without employees; employers: self-employed with employees. The gender earnings ratio is calculated as the ratio of median earnings for female relative to male workers. European figures are annual net earnings. Canadian figures are annual gross earnings.

‘-’ means no data available.

Gender earnings ratios tell us about the relative earnings of men and women but they do not reveal the sources of change. In Canada over the past 25 years, for example, the ratio of young women’s to young men’s earnings (25–29 year-olds with full-time earnings) rose from 0.75 to 0.85, an apparently progressive shift. Behind this change, however, is a different story. Despite the improvement in the gender ratio, young women’s median full-

time earnings fell by \$709 (constant 2005 dollars) over the 25-year period. Their relative improvement compared to young men came entirely from the even more dramatic fall in men's earnings by \$6,087, certainly not something to celebrate (Statistics Canada 2008: 19, Table 6). What is revealed most acutely is the vulnerable labour market position of the generation of workers just attempting to establish themselves. Similar to the Canadian case, studies demonstrate that in the UK and US during the 1990s a narrowing of the gender earnings gap occurred partly as a result of: 1) decreases in men's pay; 2) the disproportional impact of industrial restructuring on men; 3) the disproportional impact of a general increase in the incidence of low-pay on men; and 4) the increased presence of men in some traditionally female-dominated service sectors that are already low-paid (Grimshaw *et al.* 2001; Bernhardt *et al.* 1995)

The state of the art for calculating the gender earnings gap is promising. However, in order to translate this quantitative sophistication into meaningful analyses, scholars need appropriate data sets. In Europe, the main data source during the 1990s and early 2000s was the European Community Household Panel (ECHP). However, due to several problems of data collection, comparability and harmonization, it was stopped. Currently it is replaced by the European Union Survey On Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), and it seems that some of the problems have been fixed. As new waves of the survey become available, EU-SILC is likely to provide reliable cross-national and temporal data. Another source has been the Structure of Earnings Survey (SES), which provides harmonized earnings data. However, because it excludes public-sector employees and the self-employed, it can only provide a partial picture.

Despite the complexities and problems of the measurement, findings from the gender earnings gap literature are telling for our engagement with precariousness and intersectionality. For example, studies point out that the direction of the gender earnings gap is closely related to the direction of developments in wage-setting mechanisms, collective bargaining and trade unions' active engagement with gender equality (Rubery *et al.* 2002). In an environment where wage setting is increasingly decentralized and individualized (as is happening across all OECD countries), potentially positive developments provided by legislative changes aimed directly at gender earnings inequality may be offset by the uneven distribution of social power in labour markets.

WHERE TO?

Data provide both prospects and limitations for comparisons over time and space. Which countries are of interest for comparison? What institutions, policies and practices? Should the aim be for as many countries as possible on a few factors (thin comparisons), or as many as possible taking into account more factors (thick comparisons)? How should analyses be framed? This is a question asked recently by O'Reilly (2006) in a key review of four broad approaches to cross-national comparisons of 'work and welfare' from a gender perspective. She reminds us of the importance of including the neglected institutions associated with social reproduction. In response to her work we call for a multi-layered intersectional analysis that includes households/families/reproduction as an equal site alongside the labour market and welfare state.

Another insight comes from Acker (2006a: 441) and her concept of inequality regimes, by which she means ‘the interlocked practices and processes that result in continuing inequalities in all work organizations’. Acker (2006b) demonstrates the inadequacy of conventional notions of class for the challenge of intersectionality, most notably for explaining the issues of care, distribution, reproduction and unpaid labour as they relate to each other. Equally important is the dynamic relationship between class, gender and race (in her terms) as mutually constituting relationships. We prefer the notion of heritage to that of race, in the sense that it is broader and encompasses a variety of issues including language, cultural traditions and status not necessarily captured by race. In a comparative context, race is the element of intersectionality least likely to be sustained cross-nationally, yet heritage, by including such status designations as foreign-born and first generation, may be more portable. This may fall short of capturing African–American and Indigenous inequality in North America, and Roma inequality in Europe, but carefully designed research can tackle this challenge. Present cross-national data sets, however, are far from capturing complexities of heritage-based precariousness.

Acker also claims that instead of abstract class relations it may be valuable to focus on class practices, by which she means ‘all those activities that organize and control production and distribution’ (2006b: 50). Examples of class practices, for Acker, include ‘paying wages and maintaining supervisory oversight’ (2006a: 453). This includes low-pay and low-status jobs as well as ‘class controls, directed at maintaining the power of managers, ensuring that employees act to further the organization’s goals, and getting

workers to accept the system of inequality' (Acker 2006a: 454; also Clement and Myles 1994). Class controls involve sets of rules, rewards and punishments. Most intersectional studies, due to limited data sets, concentrate on gender and race combinations relative to the labour market (Browne and Misra 2003), where class disappears from the analysis in any dynamic or active sense, replaced by indicators like educational attainment (McCall 2001).

In the spirit of such engagements with intersectionality, this chapter suggests broadening the lens offered by precarious employment scholarship: individual lives are situated within families/households that exist within labour markets and welfare states. Understanding precariousness necessitates an engagement with forces intersecting at multiple points — labour market, welfare state, household — and the underlying reproductive bargain.

NOTES

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