Article

Acceptance of Prostitution and Its Social Determinants in Canada

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Abstract
The nature of collective perception of prostitution is understudied in Canada. Except some rudimentary reports on the percentages of the key legal options, multivariate analysis has never been used to analyze the details of public opinion on prostitution. The current study explores the trend of public attitude toward prostitution acceptability in Canada over a 25-year span and examines the social determinants of the acceptability of prostitution, using structural equation modeling (SEM), which allows researchers to elaborate both direct and indirect effects (through mediating variables) on the outcome variable. Results show that the public has become more acceptant of prostitution over time. In addition, the less religious, less authoritarian, and more educated are more acceptant of prostitution than the more religious, more authoritarian, and less well educated. The effects of religiosity and authoritarianism mediate out the direct effects of age, gender, gender equality, marriage, marriage as an outdated institution, Quebec, race, and tolerance. The findings may serve as a reference point for the law reform regarding the regulation of prostitution in Canada.

Prostitution[1] in Canada garnered international attention when the new legislation, known as the Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act, came into effect on December 6, 2014—The day is also Canada's National Day of Remembrance and

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Action on Violence Against Women. It is dedicated to eradicating violence against women. The newly enacted law was pushed through the Congress dominated by conservatives after the Supreme Court of Canada unanimously struck down the previous federal prostitution laws before Christmas Day of 2013 (CBC News, 2013). The critics of the new law argue that "it will make life harder for sex workers by scaring away good clients and rushing communication with sketchy ones, make the work riskier and giving them less motivation to go to the police" (Armstrong, 2014, p. A6).

Although rhetoric surrounding prostitution law reform in Canada has been ranting since 1970 (Barnett, 2008; Bittle, 2002; Cool, 2004; McCormack, 1985), little scholarly works have been produced to examine public opinion of prostitution or the characteristics that are associated with the acceptance of prostitution. In the ideologically and morally charged backdrop, the study of public opinion of prostitution is important. A few published studies on opinion polls in Canada are descriptive (see Lowman & Louie, 2012), only reporting the percentages of support or simple correlation for various options of legalizing prostitution. Although useful, they are limited in their generalizability and are often atheoretical. Explanations of variability of public attitude toward prostitution are largely from other nations. Some theoretically important predictors, such as authoritarianism, religiosity, and marriage, have not been explored. The current study attempts to fill a hiatus in the literature and to examine the public acceptability of prostitution over a quarter of century in Canada and the social determinants of this attitude, using structural equation modeling (SEM), which allows researchers to elaborate both direct and indirect effects (through mediating variables) on the outcome variable.

Prostitution Debates and Empirical Studies of Public Opinion

The Theoretical Significance of Prostitution

Prostitution is a thorny issue not only in Canada but also in the world (Cao & Maguire, 2013). The public opinion of prostitution is intriguing to study for several reasons. First, it is a sensitive issue because it deals with an unconventional behavior or lifestyle that is deemed by some as abnormal, sinful, or wicked, stemming from society's historical attempt to control sexual expression (K. Davis, 1966; G. Rubin, 1993). Most people seem to be morally ambiguous to its regulations. On one hand, prostitution represents a sexual alternative to marriage (Cao & Stack, 2010; Liang & Cao, 2013). Its existence represents a symbolic rejection of the prevailing norm of marriage between one man and one woman. On the other hand, despite thousands of years' legal suppression, prostitution as a part of larger sex industry still exists and even has a tendency to thrive in some areas (Attwood, 2009; Brents & Sanders, 2010; Zheng, 2014). Public condemnation of prostitution coexists with clandestine visits to prostitutes.

Second, the topic blurs the line between the personal and the social. It is personal because it concerns two willing individual adults, and it is a social issue because all its

related activities are illegal in Canada. Unlike in the United States, prostitution itself is technically legal in Canada, but all or most peripheral activities are penalized (Barnett, 2008; S. Davis, 1994; Morton, Klein, & Gorzalka, 2012), including clients of prostitutes in the new law (Armstrong, 2014). Keeping a common bawdy house, procuring, and living on the avails of prostitution are some examples of the type of activities that are criminalized. When there are laws regulating a private behavior between two consenting adults, the behavior is no longer personal, and it has, thus, become social. Giddens (1992) further elevated the issue of sexual partners to the politics of democracy as he regarded sexual intimacy as democracy because "it is oriented to control of distributive power" (p. 197).

Third, opposition to prostitution can be supported by both a conservative and a liberal ideology for different reasons. The left-wing people oppose it for its exploitation of women bodies whereas right-wing folks resist it from the religious tradition. The issue also splits feminism movement (Irvine, 1998; Jolin, 1994; Meier & Geis, 1997; G. Rubin, 1993; Weitzer, 2000). Since the 1970s, there have been animated debates between "pro-sex" feminists who believe that any sexual regulation limits women's rights (G. Rubin, 1993) and "anti-sex" feminists concerned about the sexual subordination of women (Dworkin, 1997; MacKinnon, 1982). This divide is particularly evident in debates about prostitution, with some feminists affirming the rights of sex workers to practice their profession without being criminalized or stigmatized, and others operating from the perspective that most prostitutes are coerced and exploited.

Finally, it is a theoretically important issue for scholars because its acceptance seems to be related to the rise of cosmopolitan culture of more progressive societies (Giddens, 1992; Inglehart, Nevitte, & Basanez, 1996; Stack, Adamczyk, & Cao, 2010; Welzel & Inglehart, 2005; Welzel, Inglehart, & Klingemann, 2003). As a consequence of the ever-more radical break of the institutions of modernity with tradition, and growing intrusion of its system of control across preexisting external boundaries of social action, "plastic sexuality," which is decentered sexuality, freed from the needs of reproduction (Giddens, 1992), has become popular since the 1960s. Inglehart et al. (1996) argued that changes in how men and women interact as sexual partners are part of the transformational processes of modern society, in which traditional norms and practices are no longer able to resist the rise of new cosmopolitan culture. In a new version of modernization theory, Welzel and Inglehart (2005) and Welzel et al. (2003) contended that the essence of human progress is the process of enlarging human autonomy and choices through freedom rights. Freedom rights give people legal space to exert autonomous choices in the private and public activities. These theories all suggest that there is a trend toward more tolerance of different lifestyles in more progressive societies, for which Canada is one of them (Cao & Selman, 2010).

Prostitution is part of the much larger "sex industry" (Weitzer, 2000). Prostitution refers to the direct-contact sexual services performed for remuneration. The sex industry includes erotic massage, erotic dancing, telephone sex operation, escorting, domination services, pornography as well as prostitution. In addition, when the public think of prostitution, they generally equate it with street prostitution, which is estimated to account for only about 20% of prostitution activity in Canada (Cool, 2004). The

official Canadian stand on prostitution is to condemn the exploitation of prostitutes, not prostitution itself. The persistence of prostitution is associated with traditionally culturally supported attitudes that encourage men to feel entitled to sexual access to women and to feel superior to women (Cotton, Farley, & Baron, 2002). Its persistence is also related to "the marketplace exchange of money for the unemotional provision of sexual gratification with no strings attached" (Meier & Geis, 1997, p. 31).

Prior Research on the Public Opinion of Prostitution

Prostitution is generally perceived as a moral issue. It embodies moral beliefs about individual autonomy, democratic equality, and unambiguous and nondiscretionary fulfillment of obligations. The use of survey data to study public opinions is not new in Canada, but Canadian academics have not paid any attention to analyze data on prostitution. The public opinion is a complex mélange reflecting a variety of political and cultural forces and institutions (Parkin, 1971). The legal status of prostitution, however, is dependent to a substantial degree upon public opinion (Burstein, 2003; Cao & Maguire, 2013; Stack, Cao, & Adamczyk, 2007). Public attitudes toward prostitution and their determinants are severely under-researched in Canada. This study focuses on prostitution not only because it touches one of more fundamental yet sensitive and ambiguous topics but also because there is a lack of understanding on the social determinants of this attitude in Canada.

The prevalence of prostitution is roughly known (Barnett, 2008; Cool, 2004), but the accuracy of such information is always questionable. There are only a few published academic studies on public opinion concerning prostitution in Canada. Marwick and Partners's (1984) report is quite comprehensive, and the public attitudes toward prostitution are a part of a wide range of legal issues regarding regulations of prostitution. The questionnaires are not well designed and there are many morally loaded wording. For example, the questionnaire contains a number of questions about the "harms of prostitution." The techniques of analyses are limited to a series of correlation matrix and percentage tables, and the information is out of date. Van Brunschot (1994) reported the results of Gallup polls in Alberta. He focused on the issues of whether prostitution was a serious problem, whether tougher laws were needed, and whether prostitutes should be confined within red-light districts. The percentages were reported, but no statistical tests were done on whether these percent differences were significant or not. More recently, Lowman and Louie (2012) reported the latest public opinion on prostitution law reform in Canada. They presented many polls on a series of issues of regulating prostitution in Canada, but no analyses were done on the social determinants of the attitudes toward prostitution except gender. It is found that females are more likely to support the idea of making prostitution illegal while males are more likely to choose the option of decriminalizing some illegal acts to allow consenting adult prostitution.

More detailed analyses of the public attitudes toward prostitution are conducted in the United States and elsewhere. Cao and Stack (2010) found that authoritarianism, family values, feminism, and tolerance are related to prostitution acceptance in China.

Peracca, Knodel, and Saengtienchai (1998) utilized 88 adults in Thailand in a focus group design, and their study showed that a majority of participants thought that it was acceptable for sex workers to marry. Rasanen and Wilska's (2007) student sample in Finland reveals a strong gender difference in accepting prostitution: male students are more accepting than their female counterparts. In testing a version of postmaterialist theory with data from 32 nations, Stack et al. (2010) reported that survivalist culture is the strongest predictor of prostitution acceptance.

In the United States, Abrams and Della Fave (1976) found that authoritarianism and religiosity are related to attitudes toward legalization of victimless crime, prostitution included. Cotton et al. (2002) discovered that there were significant differences between males and females about prostitution myths, but not between johns and other males. Basow and Campanile (1990) found that feminism and authoritarianism are linked to prostitution acceptability. Cosby, May, Frese, and Dunaway (1996) reported that males, Whites, and Catholics are more likely than females, non-Whites, and Protestants to support the legalization of prostitution. Surveying only males who have used prostitutes, Sawyer, Metz, Hinds, and Brucker (2001) observed that "johns" are a heterogeneous group, and they tend to be more supportive of legalizing prostitution and more endorsing of personal support for the prostitutes.

Beyond simple correlations and nonrandom samples, Cao and Maguire (2013), May (1999), and McCaghy and Cernkovich (1991) used multiple regression analyses. Relying on the data from the telephone interviews in Toledo (Ohio), McCaghy and Cernkovich found that older respondents are more approving of legalization and the less educated are the most approving of the suppression strategy. Based on the national random sample of telephone interviews of adults residing in the 48 continuous states in 1995, May's analyses show that educational level, age, males, Whites, non-Protestants, and the unmarried are significant predictors of prostitution acceptability. In addition, May reported that tolerance, measured by a single item of tolerance of gambling, is related to the attitude toward prostitution. Those who are more tolerant of gambling are also more accepting of prostitution. May's study does not examine the effects of authoritarianism and religiosity on acceptance of prostitution. Relying on the national probability sampling over 20-year span, Cao and Maguire found that the public acceptance of prostitution in the United States has been steadily increasing from 1981, 64% of respondents said prostitution was never justified, to 48% in 2000. In addition, they tested a comprehensive model of prostitution acceptability and found that increased age and education, together with tolerance, are associated with more acceptance of prostitution while religiosity and authoritarianism tend to reduce the acceptance. Class and gender are not statistically significant in their model.

This literature review indicates that public's attitudes toward prostitution in Canada is understudied. The rich information in public opinion polls has not been utilized fully. Many theoretically important variables, such as religiosity and authoritarianism, have not been linked to the attitude toward prostitution in Canada. Considering the importance of religion in the Canadian life, this neglect is problematic. In addition, the effect of gender found in Lowman and Louie's (2012) study has not been subject to more rigorous multivariate test. It is quite possible that the relation is spurious and

once the proper control variables are introduced, the direct relationship between gender and prostitution may not hold. Finally, Canadian specific situation, such as Quebec, has not been taken into consideration.

According to Lipset (1990), there has been a so-called "Quiet Revolution" of value transformation in Quebec, Canada, beginning in the 1960s. This revolution is reflected by the decline of the traditional influence of the Roman Catholic Church, expansion and development of the economic structure, modernization of the educational system, and the rise to power of more left-leaning political parties. As a result of this revolution, Quebec is now seen as a more liberal region of Canada (Cao & Selman, 2010). Indeed, regarding the prostitution policy, the Quebec government issued a report in 2004, which recommends a repeal of the communication laws against both prostitutes and their clients in addition to sweeping changes that tackle the important issues surrounding prostitution—poverty, schooling, health care, drug treatment, community policing, and so on (see Barnett, 2008). Therefore, we expect that residents in Quebec are more accepting of prostitution than their English counterparts elsewhere.

The Conceptual Model

In light of the limitations of the extant literature, the current investigation extends the study of acceptance of prostitution to Canada. We first evaluate the public attitude toward prostitution over 25 years and see whether there is a trend toward more tolerance of prostitution as described by Giddens (1992), Inglehart et al. (1996), and others. Then we investigate the social determinants of the attitude toward prostitution in Canada with data from 2006. Using SEM, we develop the most comprehensive model derived from the model in the United States (Cao & Maguire, 2013) and test it with Canadian data. Although there were similarities between America and Canada in terms of social liberalism—prostitution acceptance is part of this index—the effect of nations was found insignificant after controlling for the effects of races and regions (the South and Quebec) (Cao & Selman, 2010). The situated knowledge, therefore, is necessary to better understand Canada.

The proposed conceptual model highlights the importance of two intermediating variables, authoritarianism and religiosity, which are hypothesized to have negative direct effects on acceptance of prostitution (see Figure 1). These two variables represent traditional controls or moral regulation of sexual behavior (Abrams & Della Fave, 1976; Cao & Maguire, 2013). Authoritarianism is one aspect of conventionality with an aversion to anything that appears odd or different. It is therefore expected that highly conventional individuals will regard visiting prostitutes as deviant and will disapprove of it. For religiosity, Christian belief, historically, has tended to equate the term "immorality" with illicit sexual behavior, prostitution included. Almost half (48%) of Canadians surveyed in 2006 said that they are active members of a religious organization. Although the percentage of Canadians who identify themselves as religious has dropped, those who regard themselves as spiritual remains high (Carlson, 2012). Religion remains a salient factor in life as Canadians sing their national anthem, "O Canada": "God keep our land glorious and free!" In addition, 11 exogenous variables—age, class, education, employment, gender, gender equality, marital statuses, marriage-out, Quebec, race, and tolerance—are hypothesized to have direct
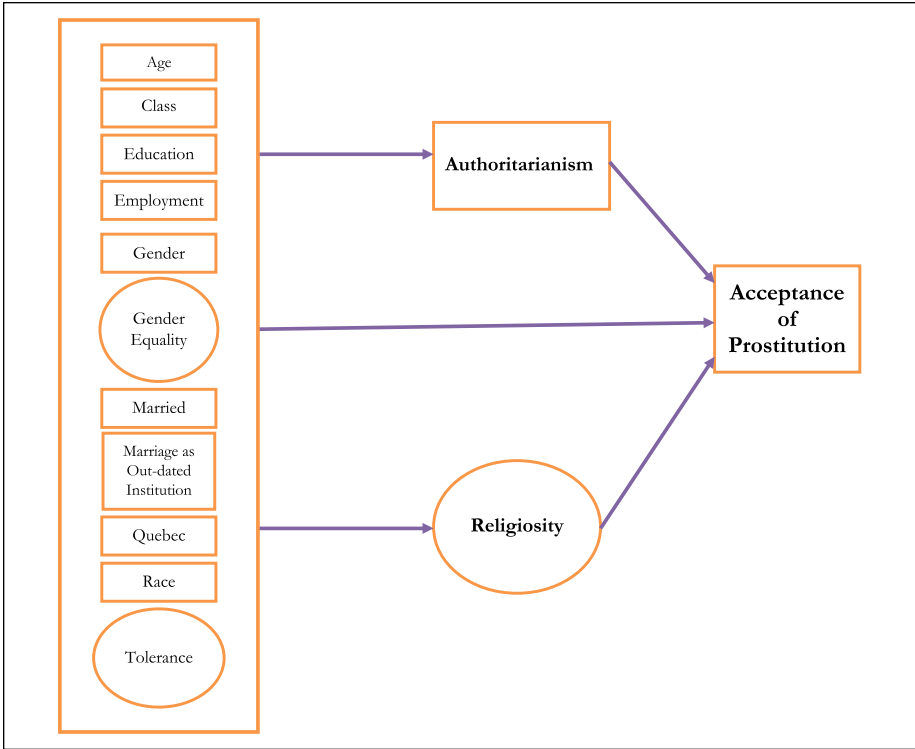
Figure 1. Conceptual model predicting acceptance of prostitution.

effects on acceptance of prostitution and indirect effects through authoritarianism and religiosity.[2] According to the common practice of SEM, circles in Figure 1 represent a latent construct that is defined by multiple items while squares are defined by a single item.

Method

The Sample

The current study uses data from the *World Values Surveys* (Inglehart et al., 2000; World Values Survey Association, 2014). The World Values Surveys grew out of a study launched by the European Values Survey (EVS) group under the leadership of Jan Kerkhofs and Ruud de Moor in 1981. It was designed to facilitate cross-national comparisons of basic values and attitudes in a wide range of concerns. The surveys have evoked such widespread interest that it is replicated in more than 80 countries. We made use of four waves of Canadian data in 1981, 1990, 2000, and 2006. The first three waves of data were collected by Gallup-Canada, and the samples sizes are 1,254 in 1981, 1,730 in 1990, and 1,931 in 2000, respectively. For our SEM, only the Canadian sample in 2006 was used. It was collected between February 14 to April 8, 2006, and the sample

size is 2,164 respondents. The principal investigator is Neil Nevitte, Department of Political Science, the University of Toronto. Using a nationally representative multistage probability sampling frame, the sample was designed to be representative of the entire adult population aged 18 years and older. All surveys were conducted via face-to-face interviews with respondents. For further discussion of the surveys, see European Values Study Group and World Values Survey Association (2005).

The Outcome Variable

Prostitution acceptability is measured with the item on a 10-point continuum ranging from *never justified* (1) to *always justified* (10). The respondents were asked, "Please tell me for each of the following statement whether you think it can always be justified, never be justified, or something in between." Prostitution is among many issues listed. Other issues include claiming government benefit, take a bribe during the course of work, divorce, euthanasia, suicide, and so on. Note that the tone of the item is quite neutral. For the 2006 sample of Canada, the responses to the prostitution item are normally distributed with the skewness score of .869. A total of 91 respondents did not answer or said that they did not know. These cases and a few others were dropped in the final analyses, and the final sample size was 2,027.

Intermediate Variables

According to our conceptual model, there are two intermediate variables: authoritarianism and religiosity. For authoritarianism, the respondents are asked whether they think that greater respect for authority is good, neutral, or bad. We reverse the original order so that those who say bad are coded as 1 and those who do not mind are coded as 2 and those said good are coded as 3. The variable is a measure of respect for authority, but it could also be a proxy for authoritarianism (Cao & Maguire, 2013; Cao & Stack, 2010) because it taps one key element of authoritarianism: conventionality—an attachment to socially accepted modes of behavior coupled with an aversion to anything that appears different (Abrams & Della Fave, 1976).

   The religiosity measure is based on four items, with an emphasis on issues such as salience, membership, beliefs, and attendance (Cao & Maguire, 2013; Zhao & Cao, 2010). Items include the following: "How important is God in your life?" "Independently of whether you go to church or not, would you say you are a religions person, not a religious person, or a convinced atheist?" "Apart from weddings, funerals, and christenings, about how often do you attend religious services these days?" and "Are you an active member, an inactive member or not a member of Church or religious organization?"

Exogenous Variables

The proposed model includes seven exogenous variables: age, class, education, employment, gender, marriage, and race. These variables have been used in the previous literature on prostitution. Age is measured as the respondent's actual age in years

at the time of the survey. Class is assessed with the subjective feeling about one's own relative standing among one's nation, where 1 = lower class and 5 = upper class (after reversing the original order). Educational attainment is assessed with nine ordinal categories: 1 = no formal education, 2 = incomplete primary school, 3 = complete primary school, 4 = incomplete technical/vocational school, 5 = complete technical/vocational school, 6 = incomplete secondary school (less than 12 years), 7 = complete secondary school (12 years), 8 = some university-level education without degree, and 9 = university-level education with degrees. Employment status is measured as a dummy variable where 1 = employed and students and 0 = all others (part-time, self-employed, unemployed, housewives, retired, and others). Gender is a binary variable where male = 1 and female = 0. Race is a dummy variable with Whites as 1 and all Others as 0. None of racial or ethnic subgroups in Canada has more than 2.2% of the sample. Marriage is a dummy variable where 1 = married and widowed and 0 = singles/never marriage and others (divorced, separated, and living together as married). It is expected that age and marriage are negatively associated with acceptance of prostitution because these characteristics represent the social establishment within a society and, as control theory suggests, that people with intact or strong social bonds are less likely to be deviant (Stack et al., 2010). Education is expected to be positively related to accepting prostitution because its effect is often regarded as a proxy for social liberalism, a global symbolic orientation that signifies one's openness to new concepts and ideas (Stack et al., 2007). Being males and Whites are expected to be positively related to acceptance of prostitution because they are the beneficial of the services provided by prostitutes. Although it is possible for both males and females to be prostitutes, the overwhelming majority of prostitutes are female, and the problem of prostitution is largely regarded as the exemplars of gender subordination and exploitation (Jolin, 1994).

Four additional variables are also included: gender equality, marriage-out, Quebec, and tolerance. For gender equality, respondents were asked about their attitudes toward several statements that concern gender equality: when jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women, men make better political leaders, university is more important for a boy than for a girl, and men make better business executives than women do. For the first statement, the answer was coded as from 1 to 3, with 1 indicating *agree* and 3 indicating *disagree*. The rest of the answers were coded as 1 = strongly agree and 4 = strongly disagree. High scores on the final combined index represent more support for gender equality. For marriage-out, the item asks whether family is an outdated institution, and those who agree are coded as 1 and those who do not agree are coded as 0. Quebec is a binary variable with those who live in Quebec coded as 1 and those who do not were coded as 0. The latent concept of tolerance was created based on four items. The respondents are asked with the lead question, "Could you please sort out any that you would not like to have as neighbors?" Then the following items are displayed: people who are immigrant or foreign workers, people of a different religion, unmarried people who are living together, and people who speak a different language. The answer *yes* is coded as 1 and *no* is coded as 0. Higher scores on the final combined index represent more tolerance.

Estimation Methods

SEM is used for the analyses because it has the advantage of using latent variables derived from observed measures, and it can model the structural relations pictorially to enable a clear conceptualization of the theory under study (Byrne, 2010). SEM allows researchers to rule out spurious effects while elaborating and testing direct and indirect effects of exogenous variable (through mediating variables) on the outcome variable, and it can address one major drawback of traditional regression analyses: the assumption that independent variables are perfectly reliable (Geiser, 2013). By specifying a regression analysis at the latent level, SEM allows researchers to correct for the measurement error for the latent factors.

In this study, all analyses were conducted by using Mplus Version 7, and parameters were estimated using weighed least square mean variance adjusted (WLSMV) algorithm. The sample was weighted based on their demographic characteristics. The absolute fit index includes chi-square (χ^2) statistics, where χ^2 is the likelihood ratio statistic used to test whether there is a statistically significant discrepancy between the correlation matrix and the model-implied matrix. Although a nonsignificant result is preferred, a significant chi-square value is acceptable when there is a large sample size. Another absolute fit indicator is the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) which takes the error of population approximation and degrees of freedom into account and characterizes the lack of fit of the hypothesized model to the population covariance matrix. The cutoff point of RMSEA is below 0.06 (Hu & Bentler, 1999; also see Steiger, 2007) to constitute a good fit.

Among incremental fit indices are a group of measures that attempt to answer the question of how well is the model doing, compared with the worst model that there is. The comparative fit index (CFI) assesses "the fit of a user-specified solution in relation to a more restricted, nested baseline model," in which the "covariances among all input indicators are fixed to zero" positing no relationship among variables (Brown, 2006, p. 84). It ranges from 0 to 1.00, with values greater than 0.95 indicating a reasonably good fit between the hypothesized model and the empirical data (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Simiarly, a cutting point of .95 of Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI) indicates a good fit.

Missing data are not a serious problem for this research. In general, the missing rates of most variables do not exceed 10%. However, to take the most advantage of the data, we used the full information approach in the current research. This method is one of the most popular ways to address missing values because it does not impute any values nor discard any data (Acock, 2012; Enders, 2010).

Results

Our analysis first examines whether there is a trend toward greater acceptance of prostitution over time. To address this question, we focused on the most unwavering category—those who said that prostitution is never justified—and calculated the percentages at four points in time (1981, 1990, 2000, and 2006). In 1981, 49% of respondents said that prostitution was never justified, followed by 41% in 1990 and 44% in 2000. The most current data suggest that 40% of Canadian respondents feel prostitution is never justified (see Figure 2).
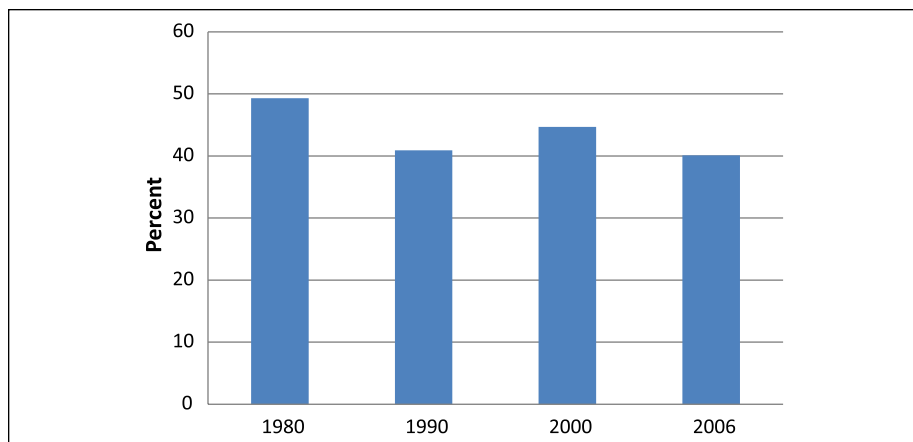
Figure 2. Intolerance of prostitution in percentages.

The findings show that intolerance of prostitution decreased in Canada over a 25-year period. Tests of the mean differences between 1981 and 1990, and between 1981 and 2000 confirm that these changes are statistically significant, but the mean between 1990 and 2000 as well as the mean between 2000 and 2006 are not significant.

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the variables included in our model. The means are reported for continuous variables (standard deviations are in the parentheses) and frequencies are for categorical variables. For the dependent variable on a 1- to 10-point scale, the average acceptance level is 3.24, with 1 representing *prostitution is never justifiable* and 10 representing *is always justifiable*. The majority of the respondents are female and White. Their average age is almost 50 years. There is an equal distribution of respondents who are married and otherwise. About 24% of surveyed citizens are from Quebec. On a 1- to 9-point scale, the average highest education is 6.7, indicating that the majority of respondents have secondary school education or higher.

Most of the respondents say that they respect authority and do not view marriage as an outdated institution. For religiosity, there is almost equal distribution among the three categories of "rather important," "not very important," and "not at all important"; almost half of the respondents are not active members of religious organization; about 70% of respondents do not consider themselves as a religious person; and the mode response (31.9%) for attending religious services is "never attend religious services." For gender equality, the vast majority disagree or strongly disagree with the statements that men make better political leaders, university is more important for a boy, and men make better business executives than women do. There is also a high tolerance level among the respondents as almost every person stated that they can tolerate their neighbors as immigrants or foreign workers, people of a different religion, unmarried couples living together, and people who speak a different language.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics (*n* = 2,164).

Items	Frequency %/M (SD)	% missing
Outcome variable		
Justifiable: Prostitution	3.24 (2.446)	4.2
Manifest exogenous variables		
Age	48.2 (17.8)	1.0
Education	6.71 (2.0)	1.0
Gender (male = 1)	41.6	0.4
Married (yes = 1)	49.2	0.4
Marriage as an outdated institution (agree = 1)	17.8	4.1
Quebec (yes, =1)	24.8	0.3
Race/ethnicity (White = 1)	89.9	0.5
Authoritarianism	2.65 (0.60)	2.7

Partially Structural Regression Analysis With WLSMV Estimator

In examining the correlation matrix (see the appendix), correlations (*r*) among exogenous variables range from .013 to .350 and multicollinearity is not a problem. As the outcome variable is ordinal in nature, probit regression is applied. Using SEM, this study ran the comprehensive models with the weights added in calculating the percentages for inferential purpose. This variable was created to make the sample characteristics, such as age and sex, consistent with the Canadian national population characteristics. Because our model contained both manifest and latent variables, we used partially latent structural regression analysis to predict an ordinal outcome. With CFI = .957, RMSEA = .036, and TLI = .948, our data fit the model well. The effects of class and employment were not statistically significant, and we dropped them in our final model. The rest of exogenous variables on acceptance of prostitution were mediated by moral regulation variables (authoritarianism and religiosity) except education (see Figure 3). People who have more respect for authorities and are more religious have lower level of acceptance of prostitution. Respondents with higher level of education are more likely to accept prostitution ceteris paribus. The direct effect of religiosity is the strongest (−.314), followed by authoritarianism (−.138) and education (.099).

The effects of Quebec and tolerance on acceptance of prostitution are totally mediated by religiosity. All effects on authoritarianism and on religiosity are in the expected directions. Overall, about 17% of variance of prostitution acceptance is explained by the model. Table 2 presents all standardized probit coefficients shown in Figure 3.

Discussion and Conclusion

The nature of collective perception of prostitution is understudied in Canada. Without a better understanding of the issue, another public panic about sex might occur as such panics swept the Western world twice in the last century (Herdt, 2009). By understanding
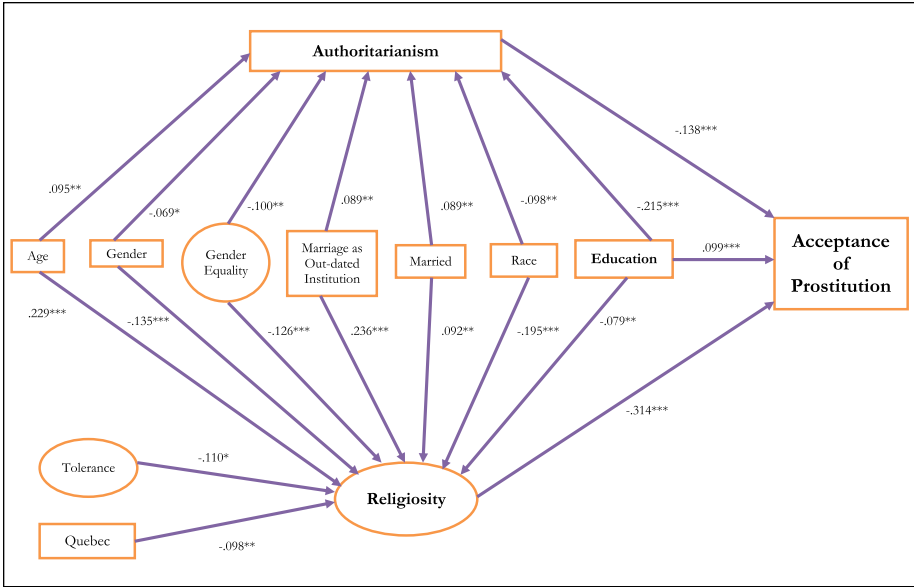
Figure 3. Final model of prostitution acceptance with standardized probit coefficient.
Note. χ² = 572.627; *df* = 155; *p* < .05; RMSEA = .036 [.033–.040]; CFI = .957; TLI = .948; RMSEA = root means square error of approximation; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis index.
*p < .05. **p < 01. ***p < .001.

Table 2. Model Direct and Indirect Effects on Prostitution Acceptance With Standardized Values (*n* = 2,027).

	Direct effect	Indirect effect via authoritarianism	Indirect effect via religiosity
Authoritarianism	−.138***	—	—
Religiosity	.314***	—	—
Age	—	−.013**	−.072***
Education	.099***	.030***	.025**
Gender (male = 1)	—	.009*	.042***
Gender equality	—	.014**	.040**
Married (yes = 1)	—	−.012*	−.029**
Marriage as an outdated institution	—	−.012**	−.074***
Quebec	—	—	.031**
Race (White = 1)	—	.013**	.061***
Tolerance	—	—	.035*

*p < .05. **p < 01. ***p < .001.

"public feelings and feeling publics" (Irvine, 2009, p. 242), the present study intends to enhance the understanding of the nature of public opinion on prostitution in Canada. Results show that by 2006, most Canadians (about 60%) agree that prostitution is justifiable under certain circumstances. A strong minority (about 40%) is adamant that prostitution is never justifiable under any circumstances. There seems to be a trend that is consistent with the similar trends in the United States and elsewhere (Cao & Maguire, 2013; Inglehart et al., 1996; Welzel & Inglehart, 2005). The downward trend of opposing prostitution gives a limited support for the emancipation thesis that Canada, as one of the more progressive societies, is moving toward a more general tolerance of the cosmopolitan culture, where the acceptance of prostitution is a part of the culture. With recreational sex growing more socially acceptable (Hamilton & Armstrong, 2009; L. B. Rubin, 1990; Zheng, 2014) and with sex being mainstreamed (Attwood, 2009; Brents & Sanders, 2010), social control of sexual expression, including prostitution, is standing on shifting sand and has been slowly eroding. Britain's Office of National Statistics went a step further on May 30, 2014, by announcing that prostitution and the import, manufacture, and consumption of illegal drugs would be counted when making the government's quarterly calculations of gross domestic product ("Drugs? Prostitution?" 2014).

The SEM on the social determinants of the acceptance of prostitution largely confirms the conceptual model. As expected, acceptance of prostitution can be explained by a confluence of religiosity and authoritarianism. Those who are authoritarian and who are more religious are less acceptant of prostitution. These results are consistent with Abrams and Della Fave's (1976), Basow and Campanile's (1990), and Stack's (2003) early analyses on authoritarianism, and with May's (1999) and Cao and Maguire's (2013) findings on religiosity. Religiosity maintains a salient role in Canadian life. Regardless of their specific religious affiliations, congregations can be highly cohesive. Under these environments, opinion tends to converge (Cao & Maguire, 2013; Olson, Cadge, & Harrison, 2006): These collective activities produce social solidarity. Consequently, religiosity serves as a powerful insulation for its members and shields them from the penetration of the ubiquitous secular influence of mass media such as movies and TV news. The followers, who also tend to be more authoritarian (Stack, 2003), can adhere to the church's long-held positions on the social issues and preserve their attitudes in an ever-changing society that has become more acceptant of prostitution. The effect of authoritarianism shows that the public consider prostitution as unconventional (Abrams & Della Fave, 1976). Education, as a proxy for social liberalism and openness to new ideas (Stack et al., 2007), has both a direct positive effect and two indirect effects through authoritarianism and religiosity on acceptance of prostitution.

In addition, authoritarianism and religiosity mediate the direct effects on acceptance of prostitution, such as age, gender, gender equality, marriage, marriage-out, Quebec, race, and tolerance. These exogenous variables' effects on acceptance of prostitution are indirect, either through religiosity (tolerance and Quebec) or through both authoritarianism and religiosity (age, gender, gender equality, marriage, marriage-out, and race). The measure of tolerance is broader and more refined than that used in May's (1999) study, which only asked the tolerance of gambling. The effect of

Quebec on religiosity is negative: Residents in Quebec are less religious. Gender's direct effect is not significant, a result that is consistent with the finding from American data (Cao & Maguire, 2013). The indirect effect of gender indicates that Lowman and Louie's (2012) bivariate analysis may be misleading because the relationship between gender and attitudes toward prostitution seems to be a spurious one. Without the help of SEM, such more nuanced result would have been remiss.

This analysis is the first such detailed analysis of public opinion of prostitution in Canada. The sample is national and random. One of the beauties of factor analysis and SEM is that each factor consists the true reliable variance. The systematic and random error are left out and not calculated in the equations (Geiser, 2013). SEM allows researchers to rule out spurious effects. Although our outcome variable is a single-item scale, the longitudinal data from 4 points in time (1981, 1991, 2000, and 2005) are examined, and the largely consistent results alleviate the concern of accuracy from a one-time sample. Panel data are better suited for controlling the effects of population heterogeneity (i.e., time-stable characteristics of the units of analysis and year-to-year shocks that affect all units of analysis simultaneously). The outcome variable of acceptability of prostitution touches a sensitive topic, and the responses may be subject to an unknown amount of social desirability bias. The item has both merits and disadvantages. It is general and not legalistic, which means that everyone has an opinion on it. Some more technical term such as "decriminalize" may turn off some respondents or confuse others. The disadvantages of the item are that it is a single item and it is subject to different interpretations. In addition, it may have missed the nuanced differences in policy options. It is, therefore, less policy-specific and choice-nuanced.

These shortcomings aside, this study has advanced our understanding of variability of Canadian public opinion on prostitution. Public opinion is important in a democratic society because there is relationship between public opinion and public policy (Burstein, 2003; Cao & Maguire, 2013; Stack et al., 2007). Effective criminal justice policy depends on the public cooperation (Garcia & Cao, 2005; Ren, Cao, Lovrich, & Gaffney, 2005; Stack et al., 2007). Good criminal justice policy leads to law and order for society. When the majority of a population have doubts about a law's justice and when many actually disobey a particular law, the question regarding that law's fairness is naturally raised (Rawls, 1971).

The delicate nature of Canadian public opinion (an unwavering minority and a flexible majority) means that any prostitution law reform will be difficult and will be contested. The newly enacted legislation, like its precedent (O'Doherty, 2011), has already been criticized for failing to address the concerns of health and safety of street prostitutes and will wreak havoc on the lives of sex workers. The deadly inertia continues to expose danger for prostitutes' lives (see Chan & Heide, 2009; Quinet, 2011; Salfati, James, & Ferguson, 2008; Shannon et al., 2009; Sullivan, 2007). On December 7, 2014, the second day the legislation came into effect, more than 60 organizations signed a statement calling for nonenforcement and support for the full decriminalization of sex work (Armstrong, 2014). As one of the oldest professions, prostitution is here to stay as a manifesto of human foibles even if it is believed to be morally despicable by some. New legislation regulating prostitution must focus on reconciling morality, the principle of harm, and state intervention of our private lives, and it must better reflect the public mood.

Appendix

Correlation Matrix.

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Outcome												
Prostitution acceptance (1)	1.00	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Intermediate												
Authoritarianism (2)	-.236***	1.00	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Religiosity (3)	-.357***	.310***	1.00	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Exogenous												
Age (4)	-.064*	.174***	.280***	1.00	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Education (5)	.126***	-.214***	-.083**	-.210***	1.00	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Gender (6)	.077**	-.061*	-.147***	-.026	-.031	1.00	—	—	—	—	—	—
Gender equality (7)	.139***	-.166***	-.210***	-.122***	.239***	-.182***	1.00	—	—	—	—	—
Married (8)	-.101***	.120***	.219***	.270***	.051	.025	-.065*	1.00	—	—	—	—
Marriage as an outdated institution (9)	-.163***	.098***	.296***	.078**	.074**	-.060*	-.036	.228***	1.00	—	—	—
Quebec (10)	.096***	.013	-.137***	.016	-.046	-.009	.100**	-.103***	-.184***	1.00	—	—
Race (11)	.107***	-.056	-.154***	.176***	-.095**	.005	.129***	-.016	-.050	.095**	1.00	—
Tolerance (12)	-.014	-.035	-.179**	-.152**	.229***	-.100	.271***	-.055	.095	-.111*	.032	1.00

$*p < .05.$ $**p < .01.$ $***p < .001.$

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Notes

1. A variety of terms are used for those who engage in prostitution. Prostitute is generally accepted as the least value-laden term; common alternatives with varying implications include hooker, streetwalker, escort, whore, call girl, commercial sex worker (CSW), sex trade worker, prostituted woman, sex slave, and trafficking victim (e.g., Cao & Stack, 2010; Meier & Geis, 1997).
2. Two important variables identified in the previous literature are not included in the model. Items in the original survivalism index were not used for this round of survey in Canada. The variable of protestant is omitted because adding it into our model resulted in inadmissible solution.

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