

Let's talk precarity (or not): Libraries, community, and conversation

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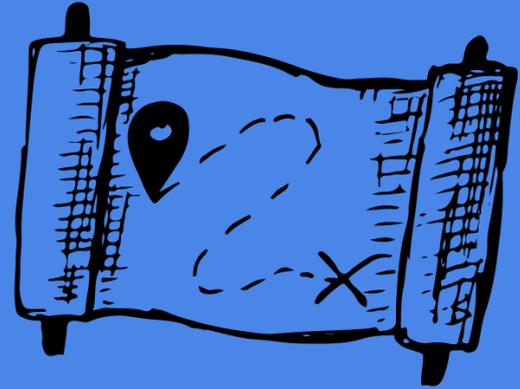
Reflection



Consider your experience working in a precarious position or working with colleagues in precarious positions. What are/were your feelings about that experience?

Outline

- Precarity as a problem
 - literature and interview data
- Prevalence of precarity
 - Partnership Job Board data
- Conversations on precarity and...
- Countering precarity
 - interactive session
- Conclusion



Created by Alex Muravev
from Noun Project

Precurity as a problem

What is precarity?

“...uncertainty as to the duration of employment, multiple possible employers or a disguised or ambiguous employment relationship, a lack of access to social protection and benefits usually associated with employment, low pay, and substantial legal and practical obstacles to joining a trade union and bargaining collectively.”

(International Labour Organization, 2012)

Problems in precarity

- Increased probability of developing mental health problems (Moscone, Tosetti, and Vittadini, 2016)
- Financial strain, social isolation and health concerns (Aronsson, Dallner, Lindh, & Göransson, 2005)
- Part of a systemic problem (Procyk et al, 2017; Premji, 2017)



Interviews on precarity

- **Population:** Library workers who are currently or previously employed at a library in British Columbia OR are actively searching for employment at libraries.
- **Methodology:** Hermeneutic Dialectic Process

“[This process] is hermeneutic because it is interpretive in character, and dialectic because it represents a comparison and contrast of divergent views with a view to achieving a higher-level synthesis of them all” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 149).



Interviews questions

- 1. What is your experience of precarious work?
- **2. Has the existence of precarious work influenced decisions you have made?**
- 3. What do you see as positive outcomes of precarious work?
- **4. What do you see as negative outcomes of precarious work?**
- 5. What do you see as factors that contribute to the existence of precarious work?
- 6. How will it change in future, are there any ways it can be improved?

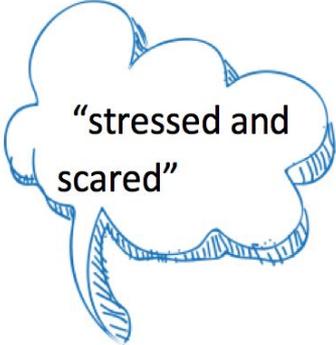
The negative outcomes of precarious work



“blind leading the blind”



“BURN OUT”



“stressed and scared”

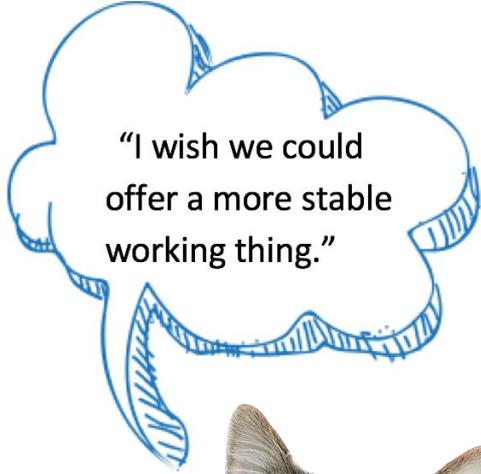


“Don't get sick.”

Individual:

- Stress: mental, physical and financial
- Lack of work-life balance
- Lack of freedom to take risks
- Lack of integration with the organization;
- Lack of professional development and training;
- Lack of time and desire to be involved in professional activities
- Superficial and slowly gained knowledge and skills
- Difficulty in transitioning to full-time work
- Vulnerability pertaining to discussions of precarity

The negative outcomes of precarious work



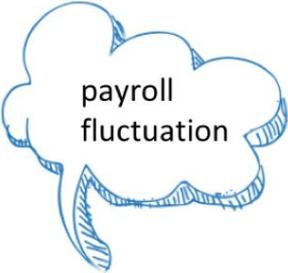
Organization:

- Higher turnover
- Higher cost of training
- Difficulty with scheduling
- Weaker relationships between employees and organizations
- Poorer library service
- Reduced capacity for teamwork
- Lack of mutual commitment

The impact of precarious work



“A reality that sucks!”



payroll fluctuation



“Everybody is afraid to talk about it very clearly.”

Personal Life:

- Decisions about where to live
- Economic pressure to support family

Career:

- Obstacle in searching for the next position
- Accepting permanent full-time positions not in preferred and specialized areas
- Lower the career expectations

Prevalence of precarity

Why collect job postings?

- Our research project grew out of a series of conversations.
- Where is the data on precarious employment in libraries?
- What capacity did we have as precariously employed workers to do this research?
- What opportunities did we have as librarians in academic libraries?



Methodology

Content analysis of job postings on the Partnership Job Board from the period of Nov 15, 2017 to May 15, 2019 (**18 months**).

Sample of 1,505 jobs posted in that period (32% were academic libraries)

Coded jobs by: geography, type of institution, type of position, number of hours, length of posting, degree required (and more!)

Limitations to method

Terminology

- Auxiliary: no regularly scheduled hours (on-call)
- Part-time: 1-34 hours/week
- Full-time: 35+ hours/week
- Contract: position with a limited term (FT or PT)
- Continuing: position is ongoing (FT or PT)

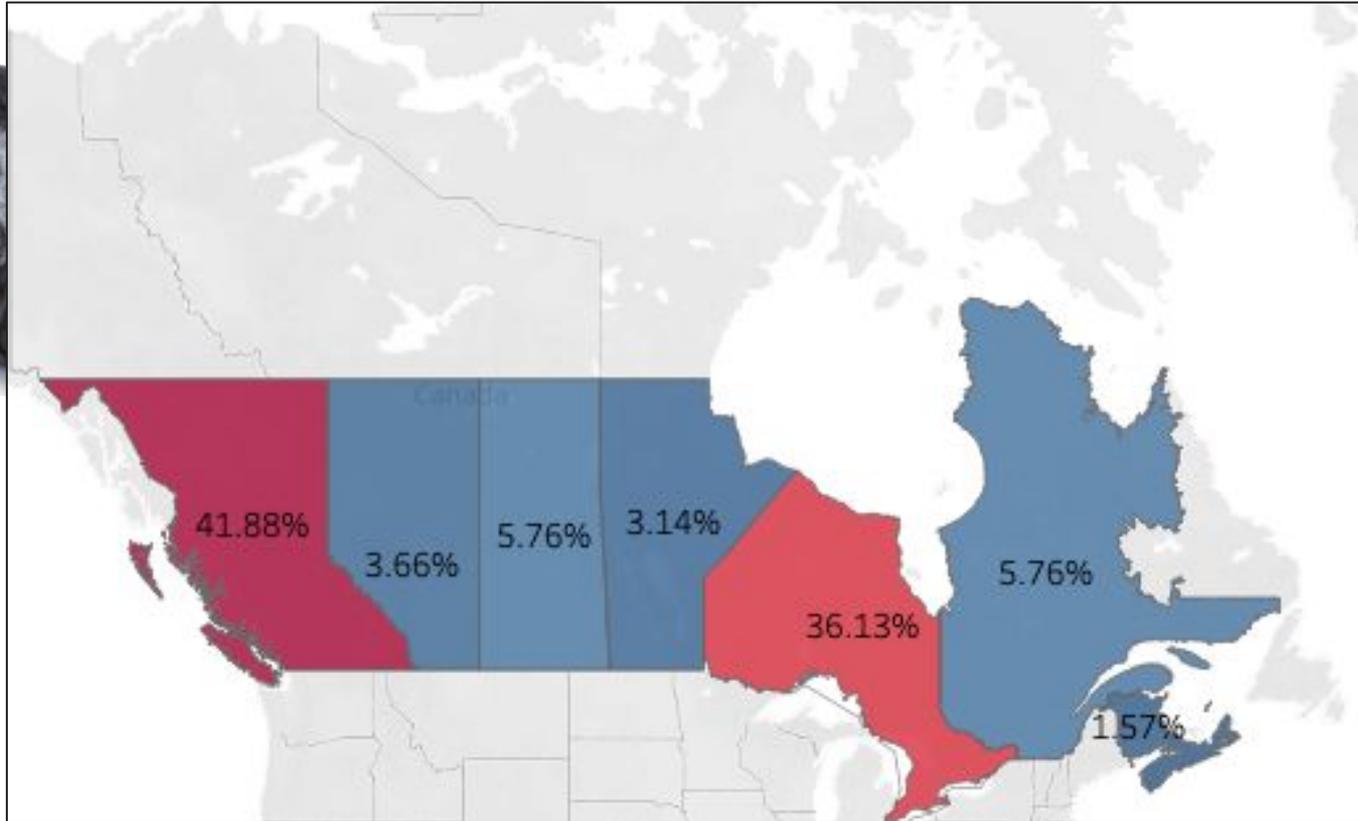


Job postings: the numbers

- Total number of job postings: **1,505**
- Ontario and BC post the most, making up **78%** of all posted jobs
- Public libraries postings make up **56%** of postings. Academic libraries make up 32%
- Librarian positions are **37%** of postings, followed by manager/administrator at 24%
 - Library technicians and assistants together account for another 28%

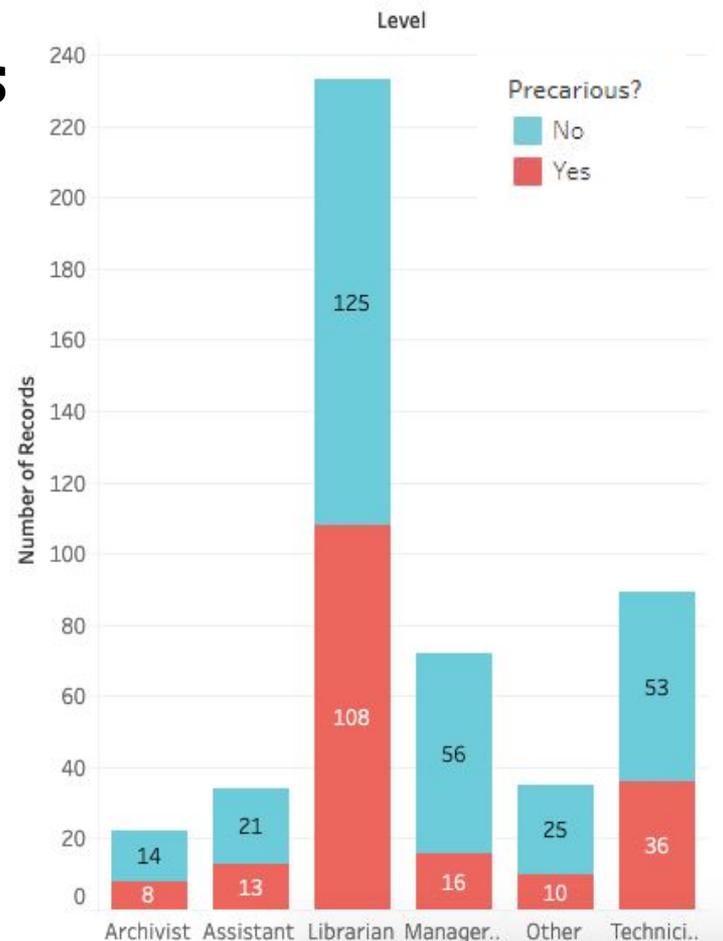
Overall 35% of jobs posted are precarious

Percentage of precarious positions by province

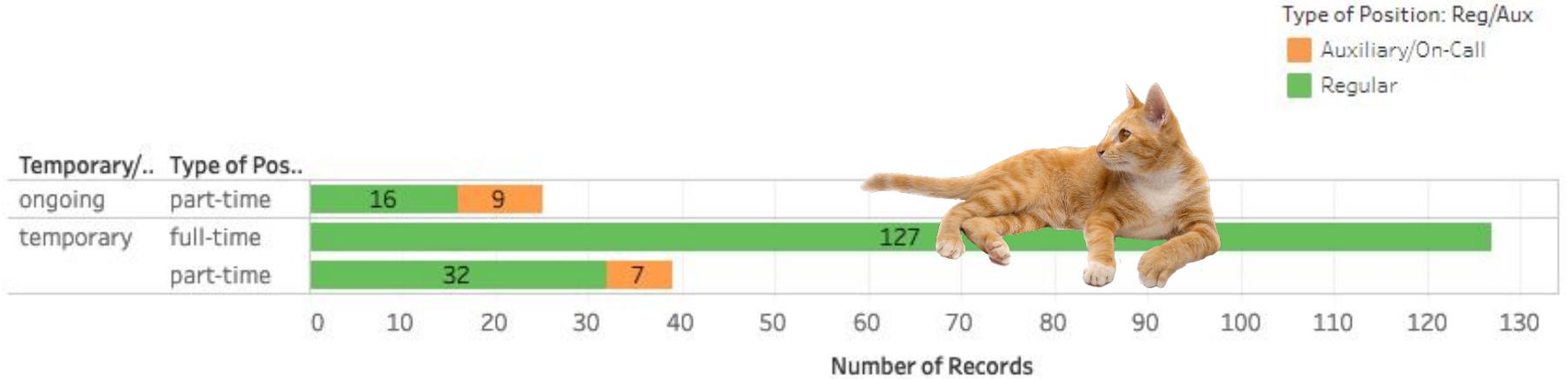


Number of precarious positions by job type

- 46% (108 of 233) of academic librarian postings are precarious
- Compared to:
 - 40% for library technicians
 - 38% for library assistants
 - 22% for managers/administrators

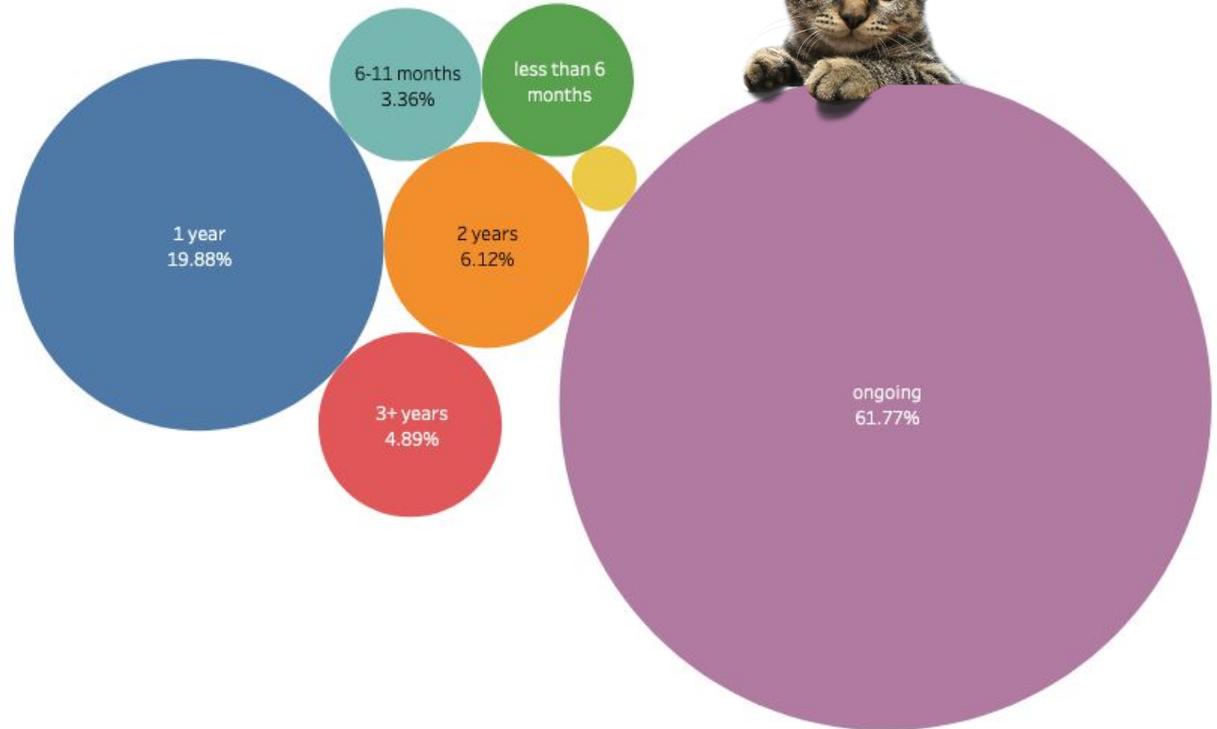


Precarity in detail

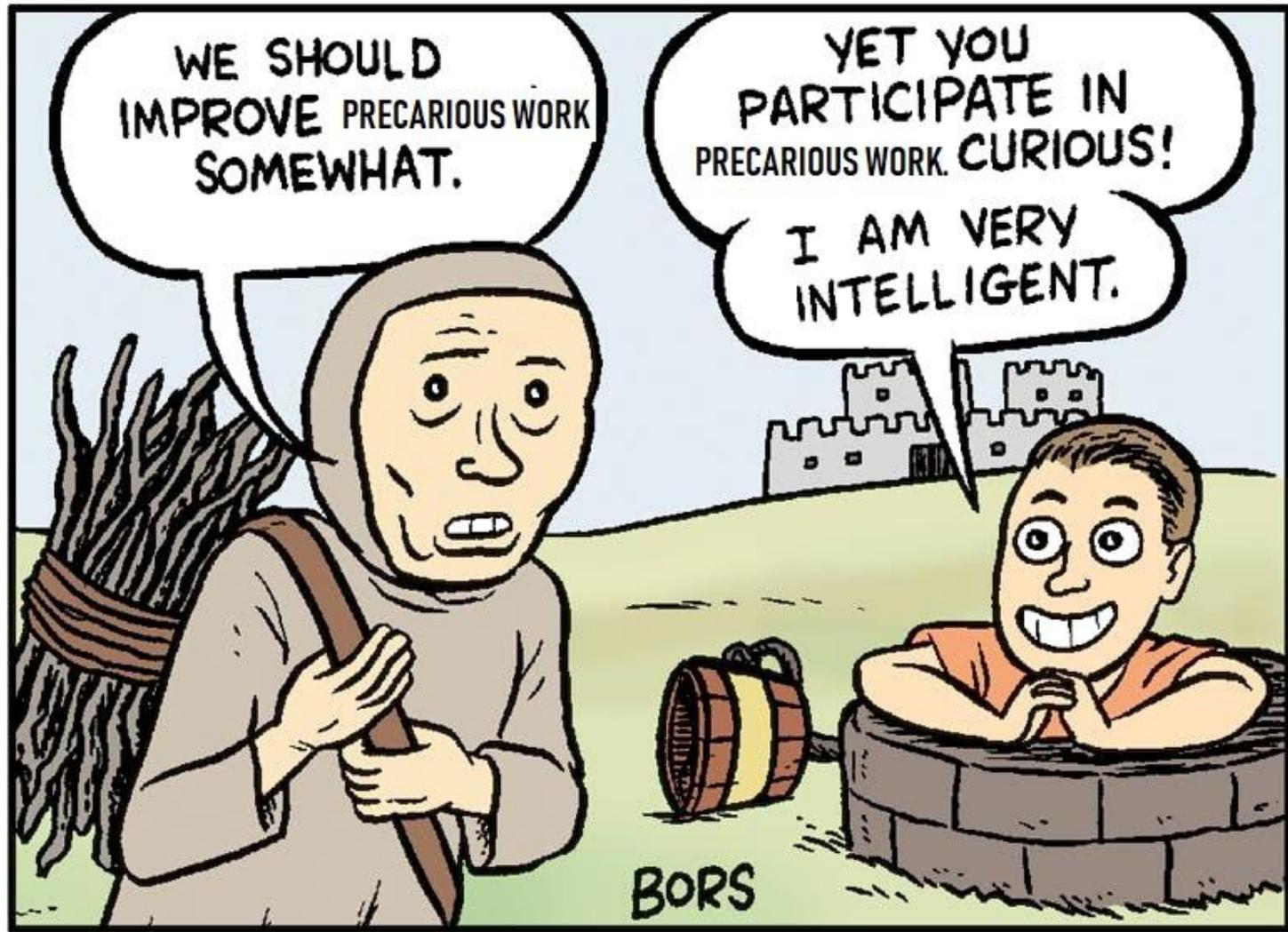


Duration of contracts

- 26.6% of positions for librarians, archivists & managers are 1 year or less



Precarious conversations



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adapted from Bors, M. (2016). Mister Gotcha. The Nib.

Conversations on precarity and...

- ...chilling effects in the workplace and profession
 - fear, reluctance, and lack of risk/creativity may result
- ...intellectual and academic freedoms
 - liberal conceptions are limited (Popowich, 2018, 2019)
 - noxious markets involve “(1) vulnerability of one of the transacting parties; (2) weak agency of transacting parties; (3) harmful outcomes for individuals; or (4) harmful outcomes for society.” (Tanner & Andersen, 2018)

Conversations on precarity and...

- ...imagined communities (Anderson, 1983)
 - (how) are precarious workers imagined?

“Rather than assuming inevitable death or irrelevance, [vocational awe] insists that libraries will continue to exist simply because they are good and important and therefore must exist. Such a mindset suggests that it is acceptable for administrators to make decisions that harm workers as long as those decisions will aid the presumed greater good of libraries and keep the institution ‘alive.’” (Settoducato, 2019)

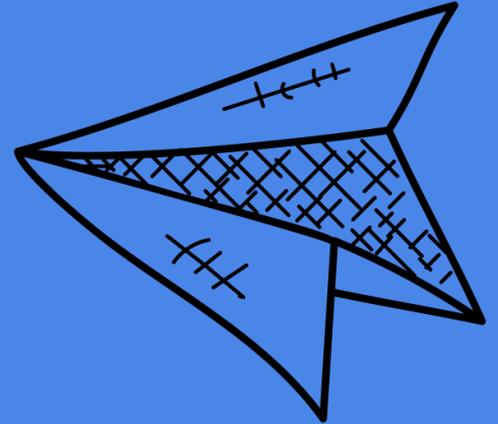
- ...spaces outside and inside of academic libraries

Countering precarity

Crowdsourcing ideas for action!

If you were ten times bolder, what big idea would you suggest to counter the effects of precarious labour in your institution?

- Write your answer to this question on one side of your index card.



What is the first step you could take?

Questions?



Open Science Framework:
<https://osf.io/ybczx/>

Twitter: @lisprecarity

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