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Disciplining the Workshy?
Social Policy Constructs the Policy Subject

by

Willow Scobie
BsSc (Hons), University of Ottawa, 1998

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in
The Department of Sociology and Anthropology**

Carleton University

September, 2000

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the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
acceptance of the thesis

**Disciplining the Workshy?
Social Assistance Constructs
the Policy Subject**

submitted by Willow Scobie, B.Soc.Sc.

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for

the degree of Master of Arts

Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Walter DeKeseredy, Supervisor

Chair, Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Carleton University
September 19, 2000

Abstract

Social policy enables the scripting of normative qualities on a citizenry and establishes consensus around those qualities. It produces its subjects and objects and contributes to a seemingly uncontested view of 'common sense.' Engaging with this process, this project problematizes the assumption that individuals on social assistance are 'nonworkers', a principal thesis which is at the crux of the welfare agenda. By using data from face-to-face interviews with individuals on social assistance, it illustrates the extent to which the 'nonworker' profile is an inaccurate description of the day-to-day life of social assistance recipients. Furthermore, it calls into question our views on work, unemployment and leisure. As Illich points out, we neither identify with nor value a scenario which enables an individual to spend the bulk of their time doing things that are useful to themselves, their neighbours, or their family (1978).

Work is the broadest English word to label both the process of doing something and the state of something done. It is instructive that the English word *work* is derived from the Indo-European root *werg-on*, that is, 'to do, to act.' Compare also the High German and Low German *werk*, 'work, action, performance,' and the Greek *ἔργον*, 'work,' and *ῥέξαι* 'to do.' It is interesting that in the French roots of the English language and related culture is the word *travail*, meaning, in English, both 'exceedingly hard work' and 'intense pain and agony.' This word, in turn, stems from the Old Latin *tripalium*, or an instrument of torture composed, as the word informs of 'three stakes.'

Gamst, 1995: 2

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Introduction

At various points in our lives, at various points over the course of a year, and at different points in our day, we experience one or more of the multiple social categories to which we belong. Some may be personal and private, such as roommate or parent or lover; some may be more public, such as commuter, employee, or citizen. Some of these identities we assume voluntarily. Others are defined within the collective interaction of our community or society, such as citizen. However, there are no definitive boundaries between the personal / private and the public, as the distinction is neither historically fixed nor universally agreed upon (Brodie, 1997).

Corrigan and Sayer (1985) argue that the state plays a key role in defining, in great detail, acceptable forms and images of social activity as well as individual and collective identity. There is some question as to what is governable, although as those who have struggled for access to the birth control pill or to strike 'sodomy' from the "Criminal Code" can attest, we are governed in both public and personal ways. Competing ideological claims about values and mores have turned these issues into sites of struggle and opposition. These debates are always political, whether the actor has invoked religious, partisan or academic privilege, to name just a few perspectives. "Women, workers and others have sought to expand the realm of the public and, in so doing, make so-called 'private' matters subject to political negotiation and collective provision" (Brodie, 1997: 229).

In the context of neo-liberalism, individual identities are being re-constituted along the lines of the 'lean' person (Sears, 1999). The shift from a Keynesian Welfare State to a neo-liberal market-oriented regime has been characterized by a transition from

valuing the idea of collective rights and responsibility (Armstrong, 1997), to individual responsibility, avoiding dependence (Sears, 1999). Transformation of the conditions of citizenship have involved a reorientation of the relationship between the individual and the state, as well as the way that individuals are expected to self-identify. "State disciplinary activities reinforce market discipline by visibly suppressing forms of 'deviant' conduct which threaten the norms of commodity exchange" (Sears, 1999: 105). The citizen-subject, therefore, must discipline themselves in accordance with the new mode of production. What is problematic, above and beyond the 'individualization' of the basis of citizenship, are the unequal ways in which this impacts upon different people, but also the very specific and narrow activities that are either valued or rejected. The "ideology of self-reliance" (Sears, 1999) disregards those activities which are most clearly inter-dependent, such as caregiving roles, although we are all inter-dependent in multiple ways. It is my position, therefore, that not only is the identity of the new 'lean' citizen constructed along particular ideological lines, so too is the old 'fat' citizen.

Project Outline

Within popular discourse, it is relatively common to encounter a narrow range of assumptions about individuals on social assistance. Presumptions about their work ethic, their marriage status, their level of education, the degree to which they use drugs and alcohol, their immorality and a general sense of anomie seemingly characterize these individuals. Labels such as 'welfare bums' distinguish those who are on social assistance from those who engage in paid work, delineating the 'worthy' from the 'worthless'. Being a real 'worker' is not a banal observation, but an important signal demarcating the subject from someone who is lazy and probably 'dependent on the system.' The time that one

spends helping or caring for others or for oneself is not valued to the same extent as the time one spends pursuing paid employment. Objecting to this construct, feminist academics and activists have challenged the way that caring work and domestic activities are valued, although this project has largely focused on validating domestic activities. Examining the lives of individuals on social assistance can add a new dimension to blurring the distinction between 'productive' work and nonwork.

This project problematizes the assumption that individuals on social assistance are 'nonworkers', a principal thesis which is at the crux of the welfare reform agenda. By using the data from face-to-face interviews with individuals on social assistance, I will illustrate the extent to which the 'nonworker' profile is an inaccurate description of the day-to-day life of the social assistance recipients who participated in this research project.

In the first chapter, I examine the literature which addresses welfare policy discourse. One strategy that I explore invokes a debate concerning the responsibility of the state in regards to supporting women as full-time caregivers. For example, several authors suggest that social assistance enables single women in their parenting role so that they may be unbridled by the need to seek income in the labour force (Mulroy, 1988; Dowd, 1997; Schein, 1995). Invoking the popular icon of the welfare mother, empirical research on social assistance recipients highlights the impoverishment that single-parent women experience (Lero & Brockman, 1993) relative to two parent families. Although this is an interesting and important tactic through which our notions of citizenship and the constitution of community responsibility can be redressed, defending social assistance on the basis that it provides a source of income so that mothers can mother essentializes women's experiences as maternally-oriented and neglects a broader scope of

circumstances. The numbers of unattached individuals on social assistance, particularly men, and recipients with intimate partners suggests that assistance is sought for reasons that have some, little, or nothing to do with a tension between full-time parenting and paid employment.

Another aspect of the literature which I investigate is that which identifies welfare policy reform and citizenship redefinition as the result of neo-liberal compulsions. Consistent with the logic of an ideological system in which the good citizen is an innovative, competitive, efficient, entrepreneur (Watkins, 1997), social assistance reform and the implementation of workfare are manifestations of a right-wing agenda to integrate the 'workshy' into the new regime. From a critical perspective, we need to consider those changes in the economy that have driven up welfare caseloads and identify structural barriers that are faced by individuals, as well as critique those assumptions which state that individuals on social assistance are not working. Towards that end, we must critique the narrow definition of work so that we may recognize the multiplicity of ways that individuals and groups contribute productively to their communities.

In the second chapter, I define my theoretical framework. I focus on the role of the state in the construction of the policy subject, or more specifically, explain the relationship between the state, policy programs as a mode of regulation and the individual as both the object of ideology and a nuanced subject. My inquiry is thus framed within Marxist and neo-marxist literature, as well as feminist welfare state literature. Of interest to me is the basis for, and the process of, scripting normative qualities of a citizenry and establishing consensus around those qualities, in the specific context of a particular time and place.

Marxist theory offers useful insight into the 'state project' at a macroscopic level, as it can be applied to welfare state analyses with respect to the creation and management of conditions which are favourable to capital accumulation (Panitch, 1977). This argument has subsequently been elaborated upon and critiqued by neo-marxist theorists and feminist welfare state theorists on the grounds that this view of the welfare state agenda is economically deterministic (Jessop, 1990). These perspectives have furthermore highlighted the significance of social cleavages as they pertain to citizen-state relations.

Although the macro-narrative tells part of the story, it offers little insight into individual identity formation. Brodie (1997) proposes that the institutions of government make 'impositional claims,' which in essence are assertions about reality. Impositional claims stabilize a society, "through state and other institutional discursive and regulatory practices, at the level of individuals as they struggle through their everyday lives in the workplace, home and community" (Brodie, 1997: 226). In other words, impositional claims produce their subjects and objects and create consensus in regards to what becomes 'common sense.' I develop this idea by exploring the construction of both the policy subject and the concept of 'work.'

In the third chapter, I provide a brief description of the catchment area , as well as critically explore the feminist approach to pursuing research, I also outline my justification for using a reflexive method, which I have applied to a secondary analysis of qualitative data. The data has been selected from face-to-face interviews with individuals from a study entitled "Economic Change, Joblessness, Poverty and Crime in an Urban,

Disenfranchised Neighbourhood." I have examined the details of eleven interviews¹, nine of which were conducted with individuals on social assistance, and two were with individuals who provided rich observations of their neighbours on social assistance. The advantage of using secondary data is that I have been able to save time and expense, although it has been limiting in terms of the restrictions imposed by the constraints of the data. In terms of adopting a reflexive stance when analyzing the data, I argue that this is the most equitable strategy to pursue.

Analysis of the background Census data shows that almost twenty-six percent of the residents are immigrants, almost a third of which immigrated within the five years prior to the Census year. Between seventy and seventy-eight percent of the population speak only English, between 7 and 12 percent have French as their first language, and less than 2.5 percent have a first language other than English or French. Almost thirty-eight percent of the residents have less than a high school education, and the unemployment rate is as high as 15.5% in some sections. Finally, close to twenty percent of the households in the census tract areas fall below the low-income cut-off.

In chapter four, I illustrate my key argument by drawing on qualitative data on single parents who are engaged with full-time parenting duties, as well as those who volunteer on a regular basis, who work under the table and who have, in the recent past, held paid employment. I juxtapose this analysis with the reasons that the respondents give in terms of why they do not 'work' in order to highlight the paradox between experience and the ubiquitous explanations assumed within neo-liberal discourse.

¹ I conducted eight of these interviews; the other three were conducted by three other members of the research team.

By calling into question the foundational assumptions that have been made with regards to the social assistance policy subject, I am addressing a significant gap in the welfare state literature. The bulk of the literature which either chastises or defends social assistance and its users defines the tension as either one of communal or individual responsibility, or a critique of normative rules. There are serious implications for strategies like workfare if the premise upon which it is based: that welfare recipients are nonworkers and require incentives in order to 'ease' their way into paid employment, are incorrect. On a larger scale, it is important to examine policy discourse and the social, political and economic narrative that it constructs. Nobody believes that social policy is created in a neutral, bias-free zone, and an analysis of qualitative data collected from participants in a particular social program such as social assistance illustrates the extent to which the picture that has been painted of them is incorrect. To have good policy, you must have a good idea of the problem.

In the fifth chapter of my thesis, I discuss the role of social policy in the construction of the 'problem,' as there are limits to proposing a progressive alternative to workfare within the boundaries of social assistance policy. In order to think beyond workfare, we need to think beyond the constraints of social assistance policy entirely.

Chapter One: A Review of the Literature on Social Assistance Policy

Introduction

In the course of examining the extant literature, my focus is on the policy itself, the dialogue which emerges within its parameters and the policy 'subject' that it creates. My goal is to demonstrate that the social assistance subject with which we are presented is frequently cast as a single mother, dependent on the system, and who lacks essential qualities which prevent her from achieving self-sufficiency. I will explore both the sympathetic and the oppositional literature which takes up the question of who is on welfare and why, and outline how they perpetuate this archetype.

It will be evident that there is a gap in the literature concerning a progressive analysis of how individuals on social assistance are spending their time. Whether it is a sympathetic defence or intolerant critique of collecting social assistance, no one has examined how people on social assistance make use of their days.

Social Assistance in Ontario: Its Recent History

The success of the Tory campaign in 1995 and again in 1999 wrought drastic changes to social services, social assistance being one of them and high on the Tories' list of priorities for reform. Just a few months into their first term in office in 1995, the Harris Tories had cut welfare benefits by 21.6 percent (Ibbitson, 1997). Their punitive stance toward social assistance recipients was not simply an isolated move, however, but rather a reflection of change in funding at the federal level. With the elimination of the Canada Assistance Plan and the creation of the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST), the changes to funding transfers and stipulations that the federal government had set in motion implied that there would be new conditions to receiving income

assistance. Harris' government simply pushed forward the agenda submitted by the Liberals: protective stipulations had been removed and recipients were no longer exempt from accepting work as a condition of welfare.

The changes that Ontarians have experienced are reflective of neo-liberal policy directives that have characterized policy reforms both nationally and globally. A combination of a series of recessions, increasing national debts and the removal of trade barriers since the nineteen-seventies has had a significant impact on the climate and spirit in which social programs were created. Although social provisions have not completely disappeared in Canada, most of our programs have been repackaged to reflect these changes. Canadians have noted that employment insurance, health care, post-secondary education, as well as others, have all been subjected to budget cuts.

The Keynesian Welfare State developed in Canada after World War II as a response to demonstrated needs, expressed by unions, professional organizations, community groups and by the business community (Armstrong, 1997). Consistent with Keynes' ideas, the State would intervene in the name of promoting general prosperity and providing personal protection or support (Bakker & Scott, 1997). Keynes argued that during periods of heavy unemployment, the government should use its taxing and spending powers to offset the loss in private incomes, and in the process address the concerns of both labour and capital (Bakker & Scott, 1997). Publicly funded income-security initiatives replaced the former system of private charity and municipal relief by the 1960s (Armstrong, 1997). These income security programs fell under the rubric of the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) at the Federal level, although each province administered their own social assistance program. CAP introduced cost sharing which

would lessen, remove or prevent the causes of poverty, child neglect or dependence and included rehabilitation, casework, counselling, etc. (Moscovitch, 1997). Potential recipients had to undergo a needs assessment in order to qualify, and although able recipients were always expected to accept paid labour if the opportunity arose (Vosko, 1998), employment could not be a condition of eligibility under CAP.

Over the last two decades, spending on social programs has been constrained, frozen or reduced. Neo-liberals have insisted on a state that subordinates social policy to the demands of labour market flexibility and structural competitiveness (Armstrong, 1997). The withdrawal of the welfare state is posited as an issue of affordability, and the state-citizen dynamic is increasingly becoming one based on ownership and consumption rather than citizenship.

The Archetypal Image of the Social Assistance Recipient: The Single Mother

In opposition to these cuts, authors call upon state to support single women in their parenting role so that they may be unbridled by the need to seek income in the labour force (Mulroy, 1988; Dowd, 1997; Schein, 1995). Invoking the popular icon of the welfare mother, empirical research on social assistance recipients highlights the impoverishment that single-parent women experience (Lero & Brockman, 1993).

Why play on this stereotype and elicit sympathy for this particular group? Historically, there has been good reason to distinguish the legitimacy of the claims and invoke sympathies on bases such as motherhood due to the distinctions made by legislation. In 1966, Ontario established two tiers to the welfare system: "(1) the Family Benefits Act with joint federal-provincial funding on a 50/50 basis for long-term or 'unemployable' recipients and (2) general welfare assistance (GWA) with federal,

provincial, and municipal funding on a 50/30/20 basis for short-term or 'employable' recipients" (Little, 1998: 121-142). As Little (1998) points out, lone parent mothers would most frequently access assistance through the FBA tier. In 1997, Bill 142 passed through the Ontario legislature, eliminating the FBA and the GWA, making everyone's eligibility, with the exception of people with disabilities and lone parents with preschool children, tied to employment and employment-related activity (Little, 1998). "The (*Ontario Works Act*) requires that all people on welfare, including single parents with children in school, to participate in Ontario Works, the mandatory workfare program" (Ontario, 1999: 5).

Although single mothers are a social category with whom we can commiserate, Scott's analysis of women in social assistance families² indicates that the largest group of women receiving social assistance are married or common-law women living with a partner (43 percent, a total of 544 000) and the second largest group of adult female social assistance recipients are lone-parent mothers (27 percent, or a total of 339 000) (1998). If we compare these figures to those of men on social assistance, "the largest group of men receiving social assistance is also of those who are married or common-law men living with a female partner (46 percent, a total of 506 000)" (Scott, 1998: 18). Interestingly, the second largest group of men on social assistance are unattached men (24 percent of all men on social assistance, or 264 000) (Scott, 1998). The number of unattached females on social assistance is 202 000, or 16 percent of female social assistance recipients (Scott, 1998). The data from Ontario during the same period reflects

² Scott based her research on the data in Statistics Canada's Survey of Consumer Finances, 1995 (which analyzes income from 1994).

a similar pattern: there are nearly twice as many unattached males (99 600) as females (52 500) and the breakdown of recipients with partners indicates that men comprise 61 600 of the population and women comprise 12 200³ (Ornstein, 1995).

The figures become dramatically different when we consider the numbers of lone parent women on social assistance. In terms of the breakdown of non-elderly adult women who are the *direct* recipients across Canada, female lone parents are much more likely than any other groups of women to receive social assistance (Scott, 1998). "Four in 10 (42%) lone-parent mothers received social assistance income at some time during 1994, compared to 9 percent of all married or common-law women" (Scott, 1998: 19). The figures are all the more stark in Ontario. There were 183 400 lone parent women on social assistance in 1994, or in other words, they made up 43 percent of the total population of welfare recipients (Ornstein, 1995). It would be interesting to know why the numbers of lone parent women in Ontario relative to the total population on social assistance are disproportionately higher than the ratio in the national averages in 1994.

Further research may tell us how important the delineation within the policy (i.e. FBA versus GWA) is in terms of which segments of the population access assistance. It may indicate that social assistance policy legitimizes some claims over others, rather than reflecting the composition of need. The percentage of single parent women who rely on social assistance as a portion of single mothers is alarming and clearly warrants special attention. I would hesitate, however, to assume that the experiences faced by this segment of the population should inform social policy to the exclusion of all others as this would clearly not capture the wide range of needs. The numbers of unattached individuals, particularly men, and recipients with partners tells us something beyond

simply the existence of a tension between full-time parenting and paid employment.

Disciplining the Workshy

Although the Ontario government has not, as Murray has advocated in the American context (1985), scrapped the entire welfare and income-support structure for working-age persons, the Ontario Tories have committed to 'easing' every man and woman off of welfare and into the labour market. "Those who were offered work or training and refused it would be cut off" (Ibbitson, 1997: 233).

What is the scenario that awaits social assistance recipients post-welfare? One alarming trend in the workforce, for example, is the increasing polarization between 'good' jobs and 'bad' jobs (Armstrong & Armstrong, 1994; Courchene, 1994; Economic Council of Canada, 1990). At least 24 per cent of part-time employment, in which women are concentrated, has been entered into involuntarily, and furthermore, "nearly half of all part-time jobs created since 1981 have been classified as 'involuntary' part-time" (Economic Council of Canada, 1990: 11). Part-time workers are "much more likely to be short-term employees, to be nonunionized, and to be employed in very small firms. They are less likely to be covered by a range of employee benefits; and in general, they earn less, on an hourly basis, than full-time employees performing similar kinds of work" (Economic Council of Canada, 1990: 11-12). Relatedly, Moscovitch (1997) argues that the number of persons collecting social assistance rose significantly in Canada in the 1980s due to the recession at the beginning of that decade.

At the end of the 1980s a deeper, more profound recession manifested, with an impact on employment exacerbated by the underlying changes in the labour market and by the federal government's monetary policy and abandonment of full employment as an economic and social policy. (Moscovitch, 1997: 117)

³ These numbers are based on who is a direct recipient.

Thus individuals who are cut from welfare rosters may not simply 'ease' into a decent paying, stable job. Opportunities in the labour force are subject to the economic cycles which may furthermore leave some at a greater disadvantage than others. Finally, there are class, gender, ethnic, ability and racial barriers which are prohibitive to entering the workforce on an level playing field. For example,

Women's earnings are considerably lower than men's, approximately 70 cents to every man's dollar. Women are still primarily responsible for providing or finding child care and taking care of domestic chores. (Albelda & Tilly, 1997: 1)

Despite an abundance of analysis which has highlighted such barriers, liberal emphasis on individual merit has prevailed and it is up to the individual to realize their potential. In response to the limitations with respect to unavoidable needs such as child care costs, the Federal government advocates solutions such as child tax benefits as an alternative to social assistance (Canada, 1994), although the implication is that this would be a top-up to income earned through paid employment.

Is it Fair to Assume that Social Assistance Recipients Are Not Working?

"Edin & Lein documented that virtually all welfare mothers depend on a variety of income sources - surreptitious child support, non-reported earnings, as well as gifts from family, friends and paramours" (Stoesz, 1999: 59). Stoesz makes the argument that welfare families are more resourceful and industrious than previously thought. He refers to this phenomenon as Merton's constant: "In the absence of legitimate institutional supports, the poor will deviate from conventional norms, inventing opportunities and exploiting resources illegitimately in order to survive" (1999: 56). This type of argument taps into the perception that the provision of social assistance encourages worklessness (Murray, 1985; Walker, 1999). In other words, there are those that believe that social assistance creates as many social problems as it aims to solve (Walker, 1999). In the

U.S., for example, by the 1980s, it was the program itself and the dependency it was said to produce that had come to be seen as the problem (Wexler & Engel, 1999).

In contrast, Little's research challenges the idea that social assistance recipients are abusing the system (1998). The women who participated in her study described incidences of scrutiny and intrusion, of having to account for the source of new-looking mattresses and having a portion of their monthly cheque deducted because a parent may have bought someone a car (Little, 1998). Furthermore, their neighbours reported them if there appeared to be a man around on a regular basis, despite the fact that their boyfriends rarely, if ever, contributed financially to the household (Little, 1998). Although it would be naive to assume that some welfare recipients do not subsidize their income in creative ways, we cannot underestimate the degree to which they live under constant surveillance (Little, 1998). Furthermore, in terms of popular myths and stereotypes which beleague those who collect welfare, it is important to debunk the myths concerning the number of welfare recipients who defraud the system. "The (Toronto) Star figured out that, in truth, the government made actual savings of only \$5 million in winning convictions against only 1.7 percent of 'cheats' who were investigated - that's just 0.43 percent of the total welfare caseload" (Landsberg, 2000: L1). The scenario becomes even more absurd when you consider that Andersen Consulting has been awarded a \$180 million contract to cut the welfare rosters in order to save money on a system that only costs somewhere between \$50 and \$70 million (Landsberg, 2000).

Government discourse addresses more than the perceived rates of fraud. The image that is imposed upon individuals is one of dependence, as well as a focus on the conflict between the mandate and capabilities of the 'lean state' and the reliance of

individuals upon the state for support. The solution is constructed as an obvious choice that every capable adult should make.

Too many recipients spend many years on social assistance even though, with the right sort of employment and training support, they could successfully make the transition from welfare to work, from dependency to self-sufficiency. (Canada, 1994: 72)

The objective is to remove disincentives that discourage welfare recipients from getting a job and to reduce child poverty, which is directly linked to employment for parents (Canada, 1994). The discourse, therefore, not only imposes the idea of individual responsibility, but also a parental responsibility to be a self-sufficient worker.

Subsequent to the release of Canada's benchmark document, *Agenda: Jobs and Growth*, the National Association of Women and the Law (NAWL) published a critique of the aforementioned document and of social security reform in general. In regards to the notion that social assistance is a disincentive to work, they respond:

Statistics show that as of March 1993, 37 percent of social assistance beneficiaries were children, 20 percent were persons with disabilities, and 15 percent were sole support parents, largely women. For unattached individuals, maximum provincial social assistance rates provide annual incomes ranging from 24 to 62 percent of the poverty line, and for families of four, from 45 to 73 percent of the poverty line. It stretches the imagination to believe that individuals would choose to live in such strained circumstances if they were able to obtain secure employment, providing a decent wage. (NAWL, 1994: 43)

Furthermore, Walker points out that welfare cannot really be juxtaposed with work since many welfare recipients are actively engaged in the job market (1999).

Scott's findings in regards to women on social assistance supports this view.

In 1994, 41 percent of women who received social assistance had employment in the paid labour force at some time during the year, while 59 percent did not work, that is they were either 'unemployed' or were not in the labour force. Of those who worked, 57 percent worked full-time and 43 percent mostly worked part-time. (Scott, 1998: 36)

NAWL points out that the emphasis in *Agenda: Jobs and Growth* on the benefits that a job will bring and the positive repercussions that this will have on children grossly neglects the realities that are experienced by the working poor. Employment, even full-

time employment, is not a guaranteed path out of poverty. "In 1996, 5 percent of Canadian families headed by full-time, full-year workers fell below the Statistics Canada low income cut-off" (Mitchell, 1999: 9).

A Profile of Social Assistance Recipients

Superfluous use of terms such as 'dependency' places the emphasis on individual deficiencies and downplays changes in the economy that have driven up caseloads. Furthermore, it neglects the existence of structural barriers that are faced by individuals and that impact on the opportunities with which they are presented. In response to the proposal that such inequalities exist, right-wing pundits like Murray, for example, take positions such as the following:

Some people are better than others. They deserve more of society's rewards, of which money is only one small part. A principal function of social policy is to make sure they have the opportunity to reap those rewards. Government cannot identify the worthy, but it can protect a society in which the worthy can identify themselves. (1984: 234)

Conversely, I contend that capability is frequently overshadowed by prejudice. Barriers which arise are socially created, determined by factors such as gender, race, age or social networks rather than skill, capability or competence. Reid (1998), for example, examines the effects of sex composition of an occupation on wages and concludes that occupations are devalued in proportion to the percentage of women present. Wilson (1996) presents rich qualitative citations which illustrate the racist views of employers concerning the work ethic of Black people, describing Black men in particular as lazy, dishonest, and likely to steal from their employer. Black men who come from a middle class background, some employers felt, were the exception (Wilson, 1996). Baldi and McBrier (1997) analyze the links between racial inequality and job promotion. They conclude that Black workers are significantly less likely to be promoted than are White

workers with similar levels of education and work experience and in firms with similar levels of characteristics and organizational environments (Baldi and McBrier, 1997). In terms of age barriers, Walby argues that "older, less educated women have the largest divergence from the wages of men of their own age (1995: 75). On the other end of the age spectrum, Lucas (1997) demonstrates that teenagers are among some of the most vulnerable and exploited of the working class.

Furthermore, Wilson (1996) draws a correlation between the persistent unemployment experienced by an individual with systemic unemployment experienced within that individual's neighbourhood. Russell's research, entitled, "Friends in Low Places," supports this view, demonstrating that social networks are determinant in opening up employment opportunities.

In terms of my examination of who is on social assistance, I have drawn rather heavily on Scott's (1998) research for this section of the paper, due to the breadth and detailed presentation of the data, as well as its recency. As her research has shown, intervening factors, such as the presence of children, do not appear to have an effect on the rate of demand for married or common-law mothers, as far as women are concerned, although it appears to have somewhat of an impact on lone mothers (Scott, 1998).

"Forty-three percent of lone mothers with only one child under 18 received social assistance in 1994, whereas 50 percent of lone mothers with two or more children under 18 received social assistance" (Scott, 1998: 24-25). Interestingly, while the number of children does not seem to have a large effect on receipt of social assistance, the age of the child appears to be linked with social assistance receipt (Scott, 1998). "Of all adult

female social assistance recipients in 1994, one of every four (26 percent) had at least one child under seven years of age" (Scott, 1998: 25).

In terms of ethnicity, according to estimates provided by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, in 1990, approximately 28 percent of the Aboriginal population, including registered Indians and others who identify as Aboriginal people, relied on government transfers as their largest source of income, compared to 17 percent of the non-Aboriginal population (Scott, 1998). The importance of government transfers is most pronounced among Aboriginal people living on reserve: 45 percent received most of their income from sources such as social assistance (Scott, 1998).

In regards to visible minority persons, Scott looked at data from the 1991 Census. The problem with using the Census data, she notes, is that it does not specifically identify income from social assistance (Scott, 1998). However, by looking at the figures under the broader category "other government income," Scott has surmised that visible minority women, for example, are slightly less likely than non-visible minority women to receive 'other government transfers' (Scott, 1998). Although recent immigrants appear to be disproportionately represented among social assistance recipients, the patterns suggest that the numbers drop significantly with length of time spent in Canada, until their numbers are lower than those of Canadian citizens (Scott, 1998).

There are a number of possible explanations for the higher rate of social assistance among recent immigrants. This number includes refugee claimants, who until recently were prohibited from working before their claims for asylum were heard. In addition, immigrant women face significant barriers to participating in the labour market, such as language, lack of recognition of foreign educational credentials in Canada, different social and cultural norms and expectations, and racism. (Scott, 1998)

The incidence of social assistance receipt among individuals with disabilities is higher than the average rate (Scott, 1998). In 1991 for example, 270 000 individuals with disabilities were direct recipients of social assistance (Scott, 1998). "Overall, the

incidence of social assistance for this population was 13 percent in 1990, compared to a general rate among all direct recipients of 7 percent" (Scott, 1998: 31).

Finally, in terms of age, the data shows that there is a slightly greater proportion of younger women (under 25 years) and a slightly greater proportion of older women (aged 55 to 64 years) on social assistance (Scott, 1998).

The male social assistance population also contains a higher proportion of younger men compared with the non-social assistance population. However, the proportion of male social assistance recipients in the 25-to-34-year age group is again higher than men in the non-social assistance group. The reverse is true for men aged 35 to 44 years and those aged 45 to 54 years. (Scott, 1998: 20)

We can conclude, therefore, that there are a number of factors which appear to increase the likelihood that an individual will collect social assistance: lone parenting, particularly of young children; Aboriginal status, particularly if they live on reserve; recent immigration, and presence of disabilities. If, as the numbers would suggest, rates of social assistance receipt cluster around these factors, I would argue that these individuals encounter structural disadvantages in the labour market which prohibit them from being able to compete for jobs.

Research in the areas of childcare, people with disabilities, the first Nations population and the prevalence of racism in the workplace supports the view that structural barriers exist. Considering the significance of the cost of child care in enabling parents to seek paid employment, it is startling to note that, in Canada, "daycare can more than double the annual cost of raising younger children and is usually the greatest single child-related expense a family incurs" (Baker and Lero, 1996). Furthermore,

In 1991, there were 2.2 million children twelve years of age and younger who required care for at least twenty hours each week while their parents worked or studied. Yet there were only 333 000 licensed spaces for children in Canada, which suggests that only 15 percent of these children could be served by licensed care arrangements. (Baker and Lero, 1996: 91)

With respect to racial discrimination, a study of 199 large companies (with more than fifty employees) revealed that 51 percent of management surveyed "held negative views on people of colour (Gupta, 1996: 11).

Twenty-eight percent felt [people of colour] do not have the ability to meet job performance requirements; 13 percent perceived them as threatening, particularly if they gained promotions over Whites; 7 percent experienced outright contempt for people of colour. (Gupta, 1996: 11)

Clearly, the effects of discrimination are far-reaching. In 1988, the Disabled People for Employment Equity filed a complaint against nine major companies, "including Canada Post, the CBC, Bell Canada and the five major banks" (Gadacz, 1994: 210). The coalition claimed that these nine companies "hired on 94 disabled individuals out of 13 000 people that were hired in total" (Gadacz, 1994: 210). The First Nations population also cite discrimination as a barrier to employment, as well as the shortage of opportunities located on reserves (Ponting, 1997).

Human Capital and Personal Deficiencies

In terms of their ability to compete for jobs, the empirical data suggests that social assistance recipients have limited 'human capital' due to lower than average levels of education and work-related skills. With this in mind, the previous discussion concerning the growth of 'bad' jobs, the increase in non-standard work and part-time positions relative to full-time employment indicates that welfare recipients find themselves in precarious situations in the labour market. Ornstein demonstrates that social assistance recipients in Ontario have significantly less formal education than the average in Ontario (1995; Mitchell, 1999). "He found that between 60 and 65 per cent of the respondents (depending on the family type) had a high school education or less.

Between 38 and 45 per cent had not completed high school⁴" (Mitchell, 1999; Ornstein, 1995). The National Council of Welfare reported that "70% of the municipal caseload in Ontario had a high school education or less" (Mitchell, 1999).

There is a direct relationship between the level of education achieved and a person's chances of leaving welfare for employment (Mitchell, 2000). Mitchell argues that employment growth is concentrated exclusively among those with post-secondary education: "(In Ontario), between 1993 and 1996, in the so-called 'recovery', the number of jobs for people with less than a high school education *fell* by over 100 000 and their employment ratio continued to fall, from 41% to 38%" (2000: 4-5). Furthermore, the level of education attained affects a person's chances of having to return to welfare.

In Metropolitan Toronto, a survey of people who left social assistance in 1995 and 1996, found that the people with less education had a much greater chance of having to return to assistance than those with higher education. The most common reason why people went back on assistance was because of job loss (32%). (Metro Community Services Division, 1997 cited in Mitchell, 2000: 5)

Handler and Hasenfeld suggest that low-skilled women, for example, move in and out of jobs that disappear, but they also leave work because of child care, health or other family problems (1997). Born, Caudill & Cordero argue that social assistance recipients who are burdened by personal problems will find it most difficult to make the transition from welfare to work.

In this study, we find a clearly identifiable cohort of on-welfare families for whom problems, often such long-standing ones as substance abuse, physical or mental disability, teenage childbearing, domestic violence, criminal justice involvement, acting singly or in combination. (1999: 31)

Brush's findings on battered women on social assistance support these arguments (1999).

Brush claims that battering creates short-term safety and health crises, that abusive

⁴ It is important to note that Ornstein's research, although not conclusive in this area due to language barriers, suggests that social assistance recipients who were educated outside of Canada tended to have higher levels of formal education than the average recipient (1995).

control sabotages women's success in job training and waged work, and that long-term consequences can include disabling injuries, disrupted education and cognitive and emotional symptoms (1999). "For example, in New York City, 'key informants' from employment training sites estimated that battering was a problem for between 30 and 75 percent of their clients" (Brush, 1999: 50-51).

Butler & Nevin report similar findings (1997). Other intervening factors include disabilities (often the result of employment-related injuries), a lack of or insufficient child support from their children's fathers, health problems, and/ or a lack of employment opportunities with schedules that enable them to accommodate the demands of parenting (Butler & Nevin, 1997).

Mental health issues also appear to impact on the ability of some individuals to 'make the transition from welfare to work.' DeParle, a journalist for the New York Times, has spent years tracking welfare 'reforms' and discovered that between 24 and 42 percent of the welfare caseload in various states were made up of women who were sexually abused as children (Landsberg, 2000). The case workers that he interviewed suggest that these women are too emotionally fragile to complete training or hold on to marginal jobs (Landsberg, 2000). DeParle also cites instances where the recipients themselves express that depression and low-self-esteem, amongst a number of problems, pose as barriers to leaving welfare (1999a: A1, A11; 1999b: A1, A26; 1999c: A1, A20).

The problems that kept people from maintaining steady employment comprise a catalog of inner city ills: drug and alcohol abuse; jealous or violent boyfriends and husbands; conflicts with employers, unreliable babysitters and cars, and generally flagging spirits. (DeParle, 1999a: A1, A11)

Governments do recognize the need for short-term investment in human capital: "If Canadians seek to return welfare to one of its most important original purposes of

offering short-term emergency assistance, then we must provide better stepping stones off social assistance" (Canada, 1994: 70). Paid work, they surmise, is a sufficient basis for developing individual self-worth (Baker, 1999). And with regards to barriers, right-wing pundits such as Mead argue that joblessness is not strictly involuntary: many of the individuals on social assistance lack interest in doing 'dirty,' menial jobs, refuse to accept low pay, resist authority and have been influenced by a culture of poverty (1986). "The poor may want to work in principle, but a great many in practice accept welfare as an alternative to low-wage jobs" (Mead, 1986: 80).

Joblessness and Workfare

Preceding the provincial election in 1995, the Ontario Conservative Party campaigned on promises of less government, tax cuts and elimination of the deficit (Ibbitson, 1997). Areas such as health care, the police and courts were off limits in terms of reducing expenditures, and so they strategically promised to cut welfare spending (Ibbitson, 1997). Propagating the notion that it isn't smart to transfer money to people so they can sit at home, the Tories complained that welfare rates were so generous they served as a disincentive to employment (Ibbitson, 1997). The 'hand up, not a hand-out' sermon which permeated the proposals to reform the system and reduce the amount that individuals would collect on social assistance assumed and implanted the notion that recipients were nonworkers and would require a paternal push into the workforce.

In the face of accusations that the recent changes to social assistance legislation are mean-spirited (Ibbitson, 1997), how can our governments account for these actions? One justification points to Canada's high unemployment rates and the extent to which this

is correlated with our relatively high wages. Grubel and Bonnici (1986)⁵ argue that real wages in Canada had risen 40 percent faster than wages in the United States during the period 1965 to 1984. "(T)his real-wage pressure has forced employers in Canada to use labour-saving capital and technology at a rate greater than U.S. employers" (Grubel & Bonnici, 1986: vi). It is, therefore, cheaper to buy machines than pay workers in Canada. The solution to Canada's unemployment, they suggest, is to close the real-wage - productivity gap. In the intervening years and in implicit agreement, Ontario's provincial government has followed this advice. A few months after they formed government in 1995, the Tories passed legislation which froze minimum wage at \$6.85 an hour indefinitely (Ibbitson, 1997). "With inflation, it would fall in real terms 1 to 2 percent each year of the government's mandate" (Ibbitson, 1997). With restrictions on social assistance becoming more severe, the pool of low-skill workers will expand, putting the advantage in the hands of employers by ensuring that there will be a captive group of workers willing to 'accept' minimum wage work.

Thus the federal and provincial governments in Canada are changing the landscape in order to fit the climate. Politicians maintain that in order to reduce their expenditures, they need to cut the fat. The state can no longer support people who should be working anyway. Jobs are out there, they contend, and a little effort is all that is required:

Our welfare reform initiatives are based on the premise that people are better off working than relying on welfare. Ontario's economy is improving and there are more jobs being created. Overall, 1998 promises to be one of the best years in Ontario's history for job creation. Our programs are aimed at helping people on welfare take advantage of these opportunities. (Ontario, 1999: 9).

⁵ Although this reference is almost fifteen years old, it speaks to the data that was available in the early years of social policy reform in Canada, i.e. pre-Free Trade.

Sharply critical of the suggestion that there are countless opportunities waiting to be filled, Boychuk's assessment of a study commissioned by the Government of Alberta to ascertain what had become of the people who had left the social assistance rosters⁶ raises some interesting points in regards to the desperate situation that people face post-welfare:

Of respondents cut off social assistance, two-thirds remained either unemployed or out of the labour market. This dispels the notion that recipients cut off social assistance are able-bodied employables who would work if they only were refused the option of accepting assistance. (Boychuk, 1998: 101)

Boychuk further notes that most respondents stated that they remained in serious financial need, despite the contention of governments that employment is more conducive to drawing a living than social assistance (1998).

Conclusion

Fraser and Gordon's (1994) genealogical examination of 'dependency' illustrates the extent to which the dependent subject has been constructed and re-constructed at various points in history. They argue that the definition of this term is specific to context and that it changes over time. Furthermore, it is frequently subverted in order to achieve particular socio-political objectives (Pulkingham, 1998). Relatedly, Pulkingham (1998) demonstrates that unemployment insurance policies have acted to entrench certain dependency relations, for example by privileging the contributions of men over those of women.

For the moment, dependency is a pejorative label that is copiously applied to the lives of those who collect social assistance. Based on the political stance of the speaker, the social assistance policy subject is either a lazy, greedy, leech, sucking at the teat of the nation, or an individual/ parent/ victim who is down on their luck and deserves

⁶ "The social assistance caseload in Alberta fell by nearly 50% from 1993 to 1996" (Boychuk, 1998: 91).

support from their community. As Walker (1999) points out, the stereotype of the welfare recipient is an individual who will neither work nor marry. They are, in all likelihood, "substance abusers or criminals and inhabit an underclass through which they transmit anti-social behaviour to their children" (Walker, 1999: 545).

It is important to put the data into perspective. By virtue of being single parents, not having completed high school, having a disability, being an Aboriginal, arriving in Canada as a refugee, inadequate child care and a lack of reasonable-paying job opportunities all appear to correlate positively with incidences of social assistance receipt. Furthermore, it is important to think about the consequences of our arguments about causal factors where welfare is concerned. The discourse concerning teenage pregnancy and welfare which is characteristic of anti-welfare campaigns in the US, for example, has simply created a new problem. In response to self-congratulatory remarks made by the Right in the U.S. regarding a recent decrease in the rates of teenage pregnancy, Carlson points out that "the Alan Guttmacher Institute estimates that up to 80 percent of the 'gain' is attributable to the mounting use of Norplant, a contraceptive implant, and Depo-Provera, an injectable contraceptive" (1999: 46).

By situating the problem in the context of teenage pregnancy, the chemical-based solution may result in fewer births to minors, but it does not address the social factors relating to early sexual activity of young women. The construction of the problem is therefore paramount to the impact on the policy subject. Punitive measures such as forcing welfare recipients to participate in workfare ignores the complexity of individual experiences. Whether it is an issue of work/pay ethic; a need for childcare; systemic prejudice; a lack of mental health services or community despair, it is clearly not a matter

of greed and laziness. We do not know enough about the dynamics into, through, and out of social assistance as it is experienced by different groups. Welfare and work for pay are not diametrically opposed realities for many people. Quite often they are complimentary. The social assistance policy subject is more complex than the stereotype would suggest. Unfortunately, the stereotype serves the interests of a government intent on locating responsibility for support squarely on the shoulders of the individual.

By analyzing the way that individuals on social assistance spend their time, we can better understand their abilities and limits, as well as be able to give them credit for what they already contribute. As I will show in the next chapter, many state policies are constituted to serve the interests of capital accumulation and validate only those activities that further that agenda. Concepts such as productivity are synonymous with performativity in a state system which privileges the 'lean' worker citizen.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework

Introduction

This project is framed in the tradition of Marxist, neo-Marxist and feminist welfare state theories in order to explain the macro-level context within which the Canadian Government and the Government of Ontario have implemented changes to policies which modify the conditions of receipt of social assistance. In terms of how these changes influence individuals, I invoke Brodie's (1997) suggestion that a meso-level analysis can bridge the gap between macro-level theory and the sum of shared experiences which are the product of the formative role of state discursive practices. This has enabled me to cull from my transcripts significant common experiences which confirm Brodie's (1997) theory of impositional claims, as well as challenge political assumptions.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, those who kept a watchful eye on Wall Street became increasingly alarmed by the threat that Canada's credit rating was about to be downgraded from its top triple A rating to Aa1 (McCuaig, 1995). In terms of the implications, Canada's investment community suggested that they would be far reaching and that Canada would witness a retreat of foreign purchase of Canadian bonds (McCuaig, 1995). In contrast, Wall Street firms expressed little concern: if the downgrade were to occur, it would only imply a slim increase in risk due to a slightly higher probability of a default on loans (McCuaig, 1995). Any perceived risks would be simply theoretical, and no real threat to Canada's rank among the top 24 'low risk' nations (McCuaig, 1995).

Nonetheless, Canada's financial community propagated the notion that the integrity of our credit rating was in jeopardy; that Canada's deficit and growing debt were the cause, and that irresponsible spending on social programs created this predicament. Political discourse has furthermore embedded the idea that there is no alternative to cutting back on social expenditures (McCuaig, 1995). For example, according to Human Resources and Development Canada (1994: 8):

As government revenue growth slackened accordingly, we made up the difference by borrowing. For two decades, as a society we consumed increasingly more than we produced - on credit. The result is one of the highest levels of government debt, proportionately, in the world. Combined, federal and provincial government debt is equivalent to over 98 per cent of the entire annual value of the nation's economy. The interest costs on that debt are choking governments' ability to deliver services that the public needs and depends on.

Sensitive to the likelihood that the average Canadian will resist the idea of less from their government due to Bay Street's insistence, credit ratings and bonds are removed from the official dialogue and it is constructed as a necessary amendment to the practice of arrogant social spending. In other words, the government is simply making right what has gone wrong. Once it is conveyed to the public that this is *their* problem, the retrenchment of social programs is posited as an issue of inevitability and affordability (Armstrong, 1997). Thus, the role of government has shifted from one that protects its citizens, to some degree, from the vagaries of the market, to one that facilitates private sector solutions.

Restructuring of the economy and a reorientation of Canadian social policy have been premised on a new business model of 'lean' production which features a set of 'management strategies' that have been designed "to intensify work by eliminating 'waste'" (Sears, 1999: 91). Critiques of the viability, or appropriateness, of importing market thinking into government planning do not enter the debate. Thus, the Canadian

Government adopted neo-liberal ideology and neo-liberal values, which are premised on individual rights and responsibilities (Armstrong, 1997).

The 'neo-liberal' business model has furthermore been transposed onto the state's citizenry. With the replacement of the social contract by a commercial contract (Armstrong, 1997), entitlement to make claims on the state is increasingly based on ownership and consumption (Armstrong, 1997; Broad & Antony, 1999). An ideological seepage from the private sector into government has thus reconstituted the social policy subject. Those social relations in which the state intervenes are the products of the semiotic tools of corporate hegemony, i.e. the association between productivity and participation in the formal economy. Marxist theory of the state suggests that material life is determined by industry and exchange, and that the activities of the state are determined by the interests of capital. To further explore the intersection of state activity and the individual, I examine the contributions of Foucault and Gramsci with respect to state influence on, or regulation of, the subject. I also explore Brodie's concept of impositional claims with respect to the manner in which regulatory practices of the state, mobilized at the level of the individual, and presented as 'common sense,' produce ideas about the self and community that are consistent with the dominant ideology. Brodie does not suggest, nor would I, that this is a monolithic phenomenon, absent of social cleavages. Socio-economic factors such as sex, ethnicity, race, age, ability, sexual orientation intervene in this dynamic, as do forces of resistance. In the case of persons on social assistance, however, the relationship between the individual and the state is direct and, more so than in most other circumstances, the recipient is exceptionally vulnerable to the direction of the state mandate.

An Instrument of Capitalist Hegemony - Marx's Theory of The State

As a point of departure, I invoke a Marxist theory of the state - an economically deterministic view of the relationship between the role of the state, capitalist interests and the implementation of policies such as workfare. Although this is a monolithic characterization of the state's activities, it is an insightful place to begin to examine the consistency of logic which underlies social programme reform and accumulation strategies.

In Marx's view, the capitalist class evolved a justifying ideology and a political system of domination that served their collective interests with respect to capital accumulation, having assumed not only positions of corporate power, but also political power. According to Marx, "... since the establishment of Modern Industry and of the world-market, [the bourgeoisie has] conquered for itself, in the modern representative State, exclusive political sway" (1972: 337). Justification, therefore, is symptomatic of power, wherein the institutionalization of the social, political and economic agenda are coterminous activities, and the political and economic elite are one in the same: "The executive of the modern State is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie" (Marx, 1972: 337).

The dynamic between social circumstance and industrial force is a dialectic one, wherein the social is determined by the economic. "The class which is the ruling *material* force of society, is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force" (Marx, 1981:64). Capitalist interests, therefore, are not only implicated throughout the creation and management of an infrastructure which is conducive to capital accumulation, but are also articulated discursively (Panitch, 1977).

It is, however, problematic to assume that the economic agenda is always the determinant factor in political circles, and that the expression of capitalist interests are consistently cohesive and unanimous. Furthermore, as Esping-Andersen (1990) points out, capitalist states manifest themselves in different forms. The variations between the social-democracy exhibited by Sweden versus the conservatism espoused by Germany versus American liberalism,⁷ for example, suggest that there are other factors at play.

Jessop's argument supports this view:

Particular forms of state privilege some strategies over others, privilege the access of some forces over others, some interests over others, some time horizons over others, some coalition possibilities over others. (1990: 10)

In addition to the variations between capitalist governments, as O'Connor, Orloff and Shaver (1999) demonstrate, different social policies implemented by the same government in the same term may reflect different or contradictory ideas. My intent, therefore, is to focus on particular policy within specific political borders, i.e. the Province of Ontario, in order to demonstrate that it is consistent with a pro-capital, neo-liberal plan.

Neo-Liberalism in Canada

Neo-liberalism demands that:

Institutions such as the state and the market should reflect the motivations of individual self-interest; that states provide a minimum of public goods along the lines of the nineteenth-century 'night-watchmen' state; and that the most efficient allocation of resources and maximization of utility occurs through markets" (Bakker, 1996: 4).

In accordance with a belief system which promotes individual responsibility, the semiotic tools of neo-liberalism include entrepreneurship, innovation, capitalist development, competitiveness, efficiency, minimal government and workfare (Watkins,

⁷ These were the government systems in place when Esping-Andersen conducted his research in the late 1980s.

1997: 34). According to Miller and Rose (1993), the neo-liberal language of entrepreneurship forms a matrix of thought wherein individuals are encouraged to seek to assemble their lives along the lines of returns based on personal success and achievement. Locating this ideology within a discourse which constructs the subject as a consumer, they argue that the "world of enterprise is reconceptualized as one in which productivity is to be enhanced, quality assured and innovation fostered through the active engagement of the self-fulfilling impulses of the employee" (Miller and Rose, 1993: 100). Of course the neo-liberal notion of the productive individual does not emerge in isolation - it develops within the context of global changes in terms of the liberalization of markets and the international competition for profit, also referred to as globalization.

The reigning interests therefore revolve around limiting restrictions on the flow of capital in order to facilitate fertile conditions for capital accumulation. Relatedly, social programmes which impact on the cost of doing business, through taxation, are a burden and corporations simply look elsewhere on the globe for business-friendly, tax-free shores. Subsequently, nations experience pressure to reduce barriers and harmonize their market incentives so that they are not left behind.

The philosophy of the welfare state sharply contrasts with the 'New Right's' notion of productivity, arguing that welfare programs are parasitic upon the productive segment of the economy. Hill points out that neo-liberal economists, for example, presume that welfare provisions pose as disincentives in regards to capital investment, and that taxes discourage business activity (1996). Hill suggests that the 'New Right' sees the Keynesian welfare state as "damaging the productive sector, deterring entrepreneurial risk taking and reducing work efforts" (1996: 295). With regards to the cost of labour,

the primary concerns driving down the cost of doing business in order to maximize profits. It becomes problematic if the state shelters potential workers from selling their labour at globally competitive price. Whereas it is imperative that nations attract foreign investment and retain domestic capital, protective measures such as provision of a minimum level of income run contrary to a neo-liberal mandate to privilege market demands.

In terms of the Canadian government's agenda, Canada is on this trajectory for three reasons:

(1) rapid evolution toward a globally integrated economy based on market principles; (2) the emergence of highly dynamic economies in what used to be called the Third World, and (3) a revolution in technology, based on the microchip and related innovations, that has put knowledge and information at the cutting edge of economic progress (Canada, 1995 quoted in MacDonald, 1997: 190).

"(N)eo-liberals have (thus) seized the occasion to advocate for a welfare state that subordinates social policy to the demands of labour market flexibility and structural competitiveness" (Bakker, 1996: 6).

How Does This Impact on the Individual?

Corrigan and Sayer (1985) interrogate the location of the individual policy subject in terms of the impact of policy on their lives; they ask how subjects define themselves and how social policy plays a role. Following in the Foucauldian tradition, Corrigan and Sayer suggest that it is through the cultural conditions and / or results of a complex matrix of state apparatus which govern peoples' lives (1985). They argue that the idea of the state as a coherent unity is a fiction, and that the state-society relation is "less directive than coterminous and discursive" (Brodie, 1995).

In terms of Foucault's ideas about the state, Jessop points out that Foucault is only interested in the existence of power in the modalities of its exercise, rather than

accrediting any specific motivational interests which might lie behind state programs (1990). Whereas Hewitt suggests that the 'agents of bio-power' strive to enhance the manipulability of the population through the deployment of regulatory technologies (1992), Jessop describes the relationship between regulatory mechanisms and political rationalities as one that is more complex than a simple causal relationship. Furthermore, where the state does get involved, Foucault did not presume that it was always subordinate to economic imperatives, but rather that the network itself must be analyzed in order to comprehend the complex matrix through which the population is governed. Further on this subject, Jessop proposes the following:

Foucault focused above all on different technologies of power, programs of normalization and the flexibility of strategies. In this way he pointed to the various social ensembles involved in creating, regulating and linking subjects and the specific combination of power and knowledge on which they rest. (1990: 226)

The value of this contribution is that it provides a basis for a potentially interesting analysis of the sites of influence in relation to the construction of the social assistance recipient as a nonworker through governing apparatus such as social workers and caseworkers. Little's genealogy of women on social assistance in Ontario from 1920 to 1997 and its description of the manner in which social workers have regulated their lives is an example of the fruitfulness of a Foucauldian approach. However, in the case of social assistance policy, the state is explicit and is consistent with dominant ideology. With respect to this particular policy, there is an assiduous and coherent logic to its reform. For example, the implementation of workfare policies reflect a right-wing policy direction. Therefore, I turn to neo-Marxist and feminist theories of the state for further insight regarding policy impact on individuals.

Gramsci⁸ suggests that the State project is one of influential pursuits, seemingly complicated by its dual perspectives on political action and economic life, wherein they appear paradoxical as they include force and consent; authority and hegemony; violence and civilization (Gramsci, 1971). In order to ultimately achieve its ends, however, Gramsci argues that the body politic integrates the citizenry by virtue of the instrumental role of the production of consensus (Corrigan & Sayer, 1985):

Undoubtedly the fact of hegemony presupposed that account be taken of the interests and the tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised, and that a certain compromise equilibrium should be formed. (Gramsci, 1971: 161)

To clarify, Jessop argues that the nature of the hegemonic project is not simply reducible to questions of 'consensus', but depends on specific modes of mass integration which channel, transform and prioritize demands, and manage the flow of material concessions that are necessary to maintain the state system (1990). In order to achieve this level of integration,

Governments can often mobilize the support of the mass media and other ideological instruments, partly because the various elites, political or otherwise, share similar world-views and life-styles, and partly because the institutions of civil society, whether or not they are directly controlled by the state, must operate within a legal framework of rules and regulations. (Femia, 1981: 28)

⁸ I have also examined Althusser's work which distinguishes between the intervening state forces of the Repressive State Apparatus and the Ideological State Apparatus (Althusser, 1971). Whereas the Repressive State Apparatus invokes the idea of 'strong arm of the law,' which is used to preserve and maintain the interests of the state in a manner which may be described as coercive and/or oppressive, the Ideological State Apparatus refers to those institutions which intervene on behalf of the state in more subtle ways. One might argue, for example, that the twenty-two percent cut to social assistance cheques (Ibbitson, 1997) is a coercive measure that was implemented to force a particular agenda on social assistance recipients. I am more interested, however, in Althusser's notion of the Ideological State Apparatus as it pertains to the idea of the nonworker on welfare. Although social policy is a rather more obvious example of a site of political power than the Church or school (Althusser, 1971), the invocation of the contrast between working citizens and those who are on social assistance which permeates the policy documents pertaining to welfare reform is characteristic of an ideological battle rather than simply a coercive struggle. Althusser's point that "a state functions not only by power but also by ideology, and it does so for the sake of its own reproduction" (Ricoeur, 1994: 52), has provided me with some instructive insight.

Unfortunately, I find Althusser's theory unsatisfying in regards to addressing state involvement in the production of discourse that is consistent with the larger state project, i.e. the facilitation of capital accumulation. It does not make any attempt to give agency to the citizenry in the sense that it does not theorize the role of the population in terms of accepting or rejecting the ideological agenda of government.

In Gramsci's own words, specific ideological perspectives are mobilized when particular agenda tend to prevail and become propagated throughout society, "bringing about not only a unison of economic and political aims, but also intellectual and moral unity" (Gramsci, 1971: 181).

The merit of Gramsci's contribution is that it broadens the terrain that state leadership addresses by including a moral and intellectual discourse, explaining the state's involvement in extra-economic coercion in 'securing various preconditions for an accumulation strategy' (Jessop, 1990). For the purposes of this paper, I am interested in state efforts that are both clearly economic-driven and those that are extra-economic, articulated through social policy. "A strategy can be truly 'hegemonic' only where it is accepted by the subordinate economic classes" (Jessop, 1990: 201). Since we cannot assume that this takes place, I would argue that the process of impacting upon or influencing the individual requires further explanation.

Brodie (1997) proposes that the institutions of government make 'impositional claims' which in essence are assertions about reality. Impositional claims stabilize a society, "through state and other institutional discursive and regulatory practices, at the level of individuals as they struggle through their everyday lives in the workplace, home and community" (Brodie, 1997: 226). In other words, impositional claims produce their subjects and objects and create consensus in regards to what becomes 'common sense.' They attempt to make politically contestable positions appear to be "non-political and uncontestable – part of the natural order of things" (Brodie, 1995).

Reluctant to adopt a grand narrative with respect to the dominant discourse and its impact on individuals, yet convinced that the micropolitics of a Foucauldian analysis

"errors in its extremeness and discourages any analysis either of systemic axes of domination or of continuities in state practice" (1997: 227), Brodie argues that impositional claims are articulated at the meso-level. Meso-narratives are:

Historically defined templates which underlie a policy field, shaping the content and delivery of public goods, and allowing for a certain measure of coherence in state activities, identity formation and forms of political contestation. (Brodie, 1997: 227)

In so far as the State defines acceptable forms of individual and collective identity (Corrigan & Sayer, 1985), Brodie argues that subjectivities are actively shaped by public policy (1995, 1997). Relatedly, O'Connor, Orloff and Shaver argue that social policy is prescriptive, and emphasize the effect of social policy regimes on systemic relations and social structures (1999). Put another way, the State structures social *relations* (O'Connor, Orloff and Shaver, 1999, emphasis added). Identity formation is a social process, made complex by the implications of gender relations, as well as race, socio-economic status, ability, and sexual orientation (O'Connor, Orloff and Shaver, 1999).

The Constructed Policy Subject

An example of the constructed policy subject is that of the 'saver.' The increasing privatization of the responsibilities of saving for post-secondary education, retirement or accidents has spurred growth in the investment (Stanford, 1999) and insurance (Beck, 1999) industries. The active role of the Government of Canada, by subsidizing these investments in registered retirement or education funds, for example, implies that it is helping to create the saver citizen. Being in charge of your own destiny, putting your money to work so you don't have to, and planning for the future are seemingly innocuous slogans aimed at ensuring that Canadians invest so that they can look after themselves (Stanford, 1999). By virtue of providing tax incentives to buy RESPs and RRSPs, the

Government has not only put the onus on the individual to be a worker, but that they put their money to 'work' as well.

The Construction of Work

Work is an idea (Gamst, 1995). It is relationally defined and valued (Gamst, 1995). According to Ronco and Pealtic (1988), it is difficult to operationalize what exactly work entails, although they can identify what it is not: "'fooling around,' being unemployed,' 'hobby,' 'being on welfare,' 'being a housewife' (715). A contentious definition, fortunately feminist academics such as Waring (1999) have problematized the limits that such distinctions imply.

Although they suggest that the social context in which the activity is carried out is a structuring agent, Ronco and Pealtic (1988) fail to critique the factors which create these contexts. For example, they distinguish fishing or pottery for commercial purposes from that which is performed as a leisure activity (1988). The value, however, is assigned based on whether or not there is a transaction. In other words, value is determined by the presence of the market. This definition perpetuates an economic view of work.

Work and labour and economic activity are used interchangeably (though different schools of economics will argue that this is not the case). So my grandmother did not work, and those mothers I see with their infants are not working. No housewives, according to this economic definition, are workers. (Waring, 1999: 21)

However, it is not simply an issue of recognizing more activities as valuable 'work,' but to unpack the concept of 'work' entirely. By shifting the focus away from work altogether, for example, it becomes apparent that a transition must be premised on a whole new set of values, such as a new emphasis on leisure time.

A more genuine and humane shift in social policy would involve a complete recasting of priorities, rooted in the recognition that the right to a decent income and the right to work should not necessarily be linked to a paid job in the conventional sense. This does not imply some

pared-down version of the welfare state. A genuine and human shift would speak to the need for a 'policy of time.' (1995: 235)

We are decidedly limited towards that end by the extent to which existing values and relations of power are entrenched. To those who suggest that changing technology and advancement of concepts such as the 'leisure-focused society,' or the replacement of the work ethic with a 'life ethic,'⁹ Applebaum (1995) contends that a new ethic can only be the result of structural and economic changes. And unless there is a clear economic imperative for corporations to advance this notion, it is unlikely that it will take place at a structural level. Fortunately, the subversive element will remain a constant alternative.

Social Policy and Gender Analysis

In order to address some of the social cleavages, I have examined the contributions of feminist welfare state theorists regarding the extent to which men and women experience social policy programs differently (O'Connor, Orloff & Shaver, 1999; Pascall, 1991). They have argued that social policies are neither objective nor neutral, and that furthermore, they affect women's social and economic equality (Baines, 1996). What has been revealed by a gender based analysis of social policies is that the benefits that men collect are more frequently tied to paid employment, such as private pensions or employment insurance, whereas women more frequently access social programs by virtue of being wives and mothers, such as widow's pension or social assistance (Collins, 1998).

In the literature on social assistance, the single-parent mother, or sole support mother has been singled out for a number of reasons. She has been vilified by government representatives and become a rallying point for feminists. She has become a

⁹ A life ethic is concerned with the full development of human beings which would replace the notion that occupation is the major contribution to society (Applebaum, 1995).

symbol of everything that neo-liberal governments want to do away with, and a marker for all the reasons why governments should keep delivering social programs.

In terms of some of the points which emerge from feminist discussions of single-parent women on social assistance, a strategy which I frequently encounter is one which focuses on the intersection of women's roles, i.e. those of citizen, mother and worker (Baines, 1996). The argument which is presented is that women are 'different' than men, and that those elements which differ for women, i.e. motherhood, must be examined in the interest of creating an equitable society (Mulroy, 1988; Dowd, 1997; Schein, 1995). Within this framework, authors invoke maternalist arguments and call upon the state to support single women in their parenting role so that they may be unbridled by the need to seek income in the labour force. The results of empirical research highlight the impoverishment that single-parent women experience (Lero & Brockman, 1993) relative to two parent families, their tenuous relationship to the labour force (Dooley, 1993), their elevated levels of stress (Lero & Brockman, 1993), as well as the problems they face in terms of securing housing (Spector & Klodawsky, 1993). Women are confronted by the dual nature of the labour market which privileges men and typically male jobs, and discriminates against women. Unable to seek recourse in the world of work for adequate income and still limited by the shortage of childcare spaces, there remain few options to care for their families. Motherhood, it is argued, is a legitimate basis upon which to claim state support.

Relatedly, but along a different vein, other theorists have focused on the consequences of the liberalization of economic policies and the spin-off in terms of diminishing protection through social policy (Brodie, 1997, Scott, 1996). Bakker argues

that we are witnessing a shift in political strategies which involves a movement away from the 'crisis' of the Keynesian welfare state and toward one in which it is no longer fiscally responsible to allow citizens to be 'dependent' on the government (1996). The idea that the basis of citizenship is now 'gender-neutral' (Brodie, 1997, Scott, 1996) thus reflects the view that we are experiencing a more restricted interpretation of the basis for claims against the state as narrowly limited to workers. From this perspective, therefore, similar to those arguments which demand a re-legitimation of motherhood as a basis for citizenship claims, this view suggests that citizenship has been reconstituted and is now singularly focused in its new form: 'rational economic man.'

Why Focus of Single-Parent Women?

Academics and activists who engage with this material argue that the Canadian welfare state has historically delineated access to social programs in a manner that has been 'gendered' (Scott, 1996), a characteristic which has been altered by the neo-liberal agenda (Brodie, 1997; Scott, 1996). Both Brodie (1997) and Scott (1996), as have others, have identified this transition as a process which re-situates the routes of access as gender-neutral. In other words, it is no longer legitimate for women to make claims on the basis of their motherhood. I contend, however, that this counter argument to social policy restructuring essentializes women's experiences. As Butler (1995) points out, we need to question those claims that suggest that there is an ontological specificity to women as childbearers that forms the basis of a specific legal and political representation. It is short-sighted to simply focus on one portion of those who collect social assistance, for although single-parent women with small children may capture our sympathies more easily than single men on social assistance, two parent families, or single women with

adult children, by broadening our focus, a better picture of the politics of the need for social security and the impact of its erosion should emerge.

Further Research Questions

As I will examine in more detail in the following chapter, the tension between work-for-pay and receipt of social assistance is a frequent theme. Recognition of mothering as a job and/or a need for support to make the 'transition' to work are commonly cited as important considerations. Although the provision of job-related skills are important, there are still many other factors which much be taken into account. Is social assistance what people want and why do they need it? As I will show, clearly it contravenes in factors that extend beyond enabling women to parent on a full-time basis. We need to locate our discussions within the context of people's lived experiences in order to write policy that ensures that we are moving toward an equitable society in which social justice is a pillar upon which all else is created.

Conclusion

Feminist welfare state theorists and other progressive theorists document the implications of the reconfiguration of the character of Canadian social security as one that has moved from welfare to workfare. As many of them contend, this marks a withdrawal of the state from intervention in the provision of that which facilitates the realization of social rights. Rather than acting as an intermediary between the market and its citizenry, interjecting on behalf of its population in the redistribution of wealth, our governments are no longer in the business of facilitating social citizenship. The spin-doctors would have us believe that as tax payers we can no longer afford to pour billions of much needed dollars into social programs. Instead, if we are all to prosper from

increased foreign investment and international trade, we must support ourselves. We are to believe that foreign-based multinationals, as well as domestic corporations, cannot afford to locate in Canada if our government subsidizes its citizens *not to work*.

The social programs in Canada may be influenced by social democratic and conservative forces (O'Connor, Orloff and Shaver, 1999), in addition to neo-liberalism, however in the case of social assistance policy, recent reforms unabashedly articulate capitalist interests. Emphasis on individual responsibility and private solutions for personal problems have shifted the onus of support from the community to the individual (Armstrong, 1997). Neo-liberalism has 'imposed' upon social assistance recipients the idea that they are nonworkers, and the Canadian and Ontario governments have enacted this idea through the implementation of workfare.

Chapter Three: A Critical Discussion of Feminist Research Methodology

Introduction

I have examined the transcripts of eleven face-to-face, semi-structured interviews, drawn from a study which began in the winter of 1998 and consisted of four parts: analyses of census tract and enumeration area data; preparatory research; the Quality of Neighbourhood Life Survey; and in-depth interviews¹⁰ with 54 people, most of whom live in West Town public housing estates or their immediate surroundings. I analyzed the content of eleven of those interviews, eight of which were interviews that I conducted as a research assistant on this project.

Structured questions about whether they are employed or unemployed and what it is that they do lead to discussions concerning social assistance as their source of income and provided them with an opportunity to highlight their volunteer commitments. In this context, their own views on this predicament made it evident that the respondents had absorbed neo-liberal views on social assistance.

This chapter provides census data for the communities in which the respondents live, as well as an in-depth discussion of the epistemological stance that I have assumed as a researcher. In light of the fact that my project examines the construction of individuals on social assistance, it is only appropriate that my methods chapter be a critical examination of the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee. I have examined the literature with regard to a feminist approach to conducting face-to-face interviews, including but not restricted to, woman-to-woman interviewing. My concern, as I will explore in this chapter, is the assumption that the establishment of an equitable rapport is a progressive approach that respects and preserves the subjectivity of the

research participant. I examine those elements which make this strategy problematic and propose that reflexivity may be a reasonable solution.

I have focused some of my discussion on the literature pertaining to woman-to-woman interviewing for two reasons: the majority of those conducting the interviews from which I have drawn were women, as were the participants; and furthermore, I needed to reflect critically on my own bias.

General Demographics: Context of the West Town Study

The principal researchers on this project, Walter DeKeseredy, Shahid Alvi, and Andreas Tomaszewski have generously shared the results of their analysis of the census tract and enumeration data with me. The following chapter is a synopsis of their analysis. All credit for this information goes to them.

Profile of West Town

As of May 1996¹¹, the catchment area identified by the research team contained twelve census tract areas, five of which enclose six public housing residences. Almost half (28,743) of the population of these tracts (60,675) live in public housing. Between 1991 and 1996, the population increased slightly (.59%), with a 2.19 percent increased in the public housing tracts and a decrease of .85 percent in those without public housing.

Almost 26 percent (25.45%) of the study area are immigrants and 28.85 percent immigrated within the five years prior to the 1996 Census. DeKeseredy *et al.*'s analysis of the Census data shows that recent immigrants are increasingly concentrated in public housing. Despite a drop in the proportion of recent immigrants in the tract with two

¹⁰ The interview schedule is presented in Appendix A.

¹¹ The Census Tract data reported in this section reflects changes between the Census years of 1986, 1991, and 1996.

public housing (-14.11%), the four other public housing census tracks experienced a range of increases in the proportion of newcomers among the immigrant population from 18 to 100 percent.

Ethnicity

Africans (e.g. Somalians, Ethiopians, and Eritreans) constitute the largest group of visible minority people in public housing enumeration areas. A considerable number of people are also from Arab countries (e.g., Lebanon). DeKeseredy *et al.*'s research further demonstrates that the proportion of people who identify themselves as Canadian in five out of the seven enumeration areas is 18 to 26.67 percent.

Knowledge of Languages

Between seventy and seventy-eight percent of the population in six of seven public housing enumeration areas only speak English. Twenty percent are bilingual (speak both English and French), although in two of these enumeration areas, close to one-third speak both languages and one quarter do in another. It is interesting to note that those who are bilingual tend to have French as the first language learned. In terms of those who identify French as their first language, the rates were between seven and 12 percent in the public housing areas. In all but one of these enumeration areas, less than 2.5 percent reported having a first language other than French or English.

Education

Slightly more than 37 percent (37.79%) of the individuals in the public housing areas do not have a high school diploma and 12.13% have less than a grade nine education. Slightly more than fifteen percent (15.2%) of those who live in the public housing areas have a high school certificate.

Family Size

Families in the public housing enumeration areas are larger than those in areas that do not have public housing. Approximately forty percent of the families in the public housing areas are comprised of four or more people, and in five of the seven areas, between 37 and 67.5 percent of the families have four or more members (DeKeseredy *et al.*, *pending*). The family size in the other two areas, 73.68% and 59.46% respectively, are composed of two or less members. The area with the highest number of senior citizens has the highest number of households with two or less members.

Employment

Official unemployment rates for the adult population are higher than the national average in four of the five public housing census tracts and range from 10 to 15.5%, with the one exception being 7.6 percent (DeKeseredy *et al.*, *pending*). These rates have increased from 1986 between two and 5.5 percentage points.

Poverty

Close to twenty percent (19.71) of the households in the census tract areas with public housing fell below the low-income cut-off (LICO). Further, in three of the five public housing census tract areas, "at least one in three households falls below the LICO, and the percentage of private households having incomes below the LICO in the entire study area was 14.33 percent in 1986, 16.17 percent in 1991, and 24.58 percent in 1996" (DeKeseredy *et al.*, *pending*).

In terms of the incidence of low income among single-parent families in the study area, most of which are headed by women, it has increased in every census tract between 1991 and 1996 (from 16.51% to 19.51%).

Concluding Remarks

The profile of the public housing residents compiled by DeKeseredy *et al.* supports much of the research on social assistance recipients. Although it is unfortunate that we do not know how many individuals in these census tract areas collect social assistance, the higher than average rate of unemployment, coupled with some of the other corresponding variables, is a telling point.

DeKeseredy et al.'s analysis of the census tract data confirms the following demographic trends with social assistance receipt: recent immigration, lower than average levels of education, and lone parenthood. Missing in the profile is a distinction within the category 'Canadian' those who are Aboriginal, details about household composition, as well as a count of those in the catchment area with disabilities.

Methodological Debates

Within methodological debates, there exists a tension in regards to the grounds upon which data should be collected. From the ideographic perspective, "one can only understand the world by obtaining first-hand knowledge of the subject under investigation" (Burrell and Morgan, 1979: 6). In contrast, a nomothetic perspective stipulates that by using a 'systemic protocol and technique,' a social scientist can effectively test their hypothesis (Burrell and Morgan, 1979), without any personal tie to the phenomena at hand. Feminist researchers, however, have challenged this latter notion: that the distant, neutral and objective scientist conducting social inquiries can give credence to lived experiences. The critique of this positivist stance is such that it objectifies and stifles the voices and experiences of women through assessments which have been based on male models and frameworks.

Although it presents an alternative, the preference for an ideographic approach remains somewhat unresolved. Despite the initial appeal and seeming credibility of adding to the breadth of social science by drawing on an experientially based body of knowledge, there is a significantly growing collection of literature which challenges the essentialist assumptions which may lie at the heart of a feminist version of this design. The expectation that women could come together and share some grounds for a science based on some reasonably similar take on their experiences has lead to a simplified category of 'Woman' and has privileged a narrow group of women's concerns. White, middle class women have been over-represented in the data, as their contributions seem most readily accessible to white, middle class scholars. DeVault has pointed out that theorizing the links between experience and knowledge has ever increasingly become a central concern within feminist methodologies (1996). If the promise of locating scholarship within particular women's realities has come up short, where do we go from here?

It is crucial to acknowledge that feminist processes have developed from a politically motivated interest in addressing systemic sexism (and subsequently racism, heterosexism, elitism, etc.). The imperative has been to collectivize interests and present a united front among women in order to effectively bring about change. The empirical evidence collected by feminist academics and activists alike would fuel a movement and assist women in gaining ground towards equity. Through women-initiated projects, our consciousness has been raised on issues such as violence against women, pay differentials, systemic barriers within various institutions and the erasure of women's contributions to 'public' and 'private' life. Feminist, qualitative methods such as woman-

to-woman interviewing have held the promise of bringing forth these stories, while women bonded over their shared oppression. The benefits, it was assumed, would be twofold: feminist academics would contribute to the emancipation of women and their research participants would have the opportunity to be heard. "The orthodoxy," as Reay suggests, "is that women like being interviewed" (1995: 205). Accordingly, everyone wins.

These were the expectations that I held when I entered the field as a research assistant. Prepared to meet women and engage in non-hierarchical, reciprocal conversations, hoping for the bond of 'sisterhood' to develop, I was not prepared for the rejection I encountered. As I reflect on my experience, I return to the feminist research literature, reconsider my epistemological stance, locate these issues within larger political tensions and examine the contributions of postmodernism to epistemology. Finally, drawing on my experience as a learning opportunity, I attempt to synthesize this information by looking at the potential in the use of reflexivity in feminist research methods.

Reciprocity and Non-hierarchical Approaches to Feminist Interviewing

Some of the standards which have been proposed in feminist approaches to interviewing involve creating an interactive, non-hierarchical, intimate relationship based on reciprocity (Cotterill, 1992). Reciprocity refers to the offering of some sort of exchange. Oakley outlines this novel approach to conducting interviews (1981). Explicitly breaking with the tradition in which researchers were prompted to remain distant, detached and neutral, where objectivity was highly valued, Oakley advocates a conversational approach which is based on warmth and which focuses on developing an

interactive rapport. Oakley encouraged the women she interviewed to see her as more than an instrument of data collection. She further claims that she unabashedly invested her own identity into the research by becoming personally involved with the participants, sometimes maintaining a friendship with the women after the project had been completed. Oakley confesses that "the women were reacting to my own evident wish for a relatively intimate and non-hierarchical relationship" (Oakley, 1981: 47).

Finch describes her own surprise in regards to the willingness of women to open up to her. She states, "It seems to me that there are grounds for expecting that where a woman researcher is interviewing other women, this is a situation with special characteristics conducive to the easy flow of information" (Finch, 1984: 74). Finch saw these interviews as a particular type of dialogue which she describes as close and familiar. Evidently appreciative of the bond which seemed to develop, Finch also notes that at times her role as an interviewer became blurred, perhaps slipping into that of a counselor, tending to the needs of women who felt lonely and isolated. Reflecting upon the way in which her presence became relevant to the research experience for the women who participated, Finch addresses the social and political needs which exist simultaneously for women who are struggling with their silence.

It is not, however, only in the few cases where one is clearly being used as a social worker that women's need to talk is apparent. Almost all the women in my two studies seemed to lack opportunities to engage collectively with other women in ways which they would find supportive, and therefore they welcomed the opportunity to try to make sense of the contradictions in their lives in the presence of a sympathetic listener. (Finch, 1984: 75)

The purposes of conducting feminist research are clearly more complex than to simply contribute to sociological knowledge. What Finch has expressed, as have a number of other feminist scholars committed to feminist academe, is a personal, invested interest in contributing to the lives of women. It is enabling women to share with other

women, as it is to bring forth women's stories - writing them into the sociological body of knowledge. The invisibility, and perhaps a presumed irrelevance, of women's lives is altered when their narratives become recorded and published. Thus, the gathering of data from women becomes an important process unto itself. The net effect can become the interweaving of the explicit goals of the feminist researcher to tell women's stories and that of the women participants who, in their own unstated way, need to be heard. As Reissman describes of her own interviewing experience, "gender is a haunting presence in this interview, constituting both a spoken bond between the interviewer and the interviewee, enabling certain things not only to be said and understood but also to be joked about" (1987: 178). Within a feminist framework, therefore, an interview which is based on a non-hierarchical, reciprocal relationship enables the researcher to implicitly recruit interested women into a collaborative process of speaking their lives (Reissman, 1987). Thus one of the benefits can be the emergence of a gender-based¹², politically oriented bonding experience.

When she describes her own attempts to interview women land surveyors (the researcher's own professional background) over the phone, Greed noted the impact that the common ground which she shared with her participants had on their interactions. In reference to being able to approach the mandate of her inquiry in an unstructured format, she expressed gratitude in regards to the easy flow of the interviews: "As we talk the women usually answer most of [my questions] without my having formally to 'ask' them. It is as if almost telepathically we share a knowledge of what we think is obviously important and of relevance" (Greed, 1990: 148). It would appear, therefore, that there is

¹² Currie and MacLean (1997) argue that the gender dynamics of qualitative research should not preclude a role for male interviewers and female interviewees. In fact, they found that women were more likely to

a clear advantage to sharing a common set of experiences. So many things can go unsaid as the women involved support each others' endeavours. As women's stories unfold, the implicit desire for the development of a supportive community of women also seems to emerge in the process.

In order to facilitate such a process, a much touted strategy which is often cited by feminist researchers, as I have mentioned, is to offer reciprocity within the research dynamic (Matsumoto, 1996; Acker, Barry and Esseveld, 1991; DeVault, 1996). It is within the context of this tradition that I reflect upon my interviews with the participants in the project. I was prepared to share my own experiences of living in a densely populated, low income neighbourhood and to relate to the tales which would be told. I now return to the literature on conducting feminist interviews in order to critically reflect on the idea that it is conceivable to form a relational dynamic.

During the process of recruiting participants in the research project, I would strike up a conversation with women that I had encountered in the catchment area. At some point I would encounter some tension when I described why I was there, and the conversation would shift to the purpose of my presence, which was clearly instrumental. This element, unfortunately unexamined in those moments, affected the dynamic, despite the personal history that I could bring to our dialogue.

A number of authors have reflected on similar dilemmas. Reminiscing about her own experiences, Finch remarks:

The moral dilemmas which I have experienced in relation to the use of the data thus created have emerged precisely because the situation of a woman interviewing women *is* special, and is easy only because my identity as a woman makes it so. I have, in other words, traded on that identity. I have also emerged from interviews with the feeling that my interviewees need to know how to protect themselves from people like me. (1984: 80)

disclose incidents of wife abuse to male interviewers (Currie and MacLean, 1997).

Thus with the intention of 'relating' to the research participant, problematic elements became evident. Acker, Barry and Esseveld (1991) suggest that there is an unarticulated tension between friendship and the goal of research. "The researcher's goal is always to gather information; thus the danger always exists of manipulating friendships to that end" (Acker, Barry and Esseveld, 1991: 141). The authors further state that by consciously eliminating the power differences between researcher and researched and in trying to create a more equitable relationship, the result, paradoxically, may become exploitation and use (Acker, Barry and Esseveld, 1991). Cotterill expresses concern in terms of making the women that are interviewed more vulnerable through the process, particularly in light of the fact that the interviewer will eventually walk away (1992). DeVault reiterates the point that such relations can pose a danger to women who participate in interviews (1996). The expectation, perhaps, is that through the familiar and intimate conversations to which women bring a personal part of themselves, feminist scholarship will provide tangible grounds upon which women will be enabled to unite in a common struggle. How can it be, therefore, that the ideals set forth by feminist scholars to give 'voice' to invisible individuals, through the very process of attempting to achieve those goals, could bring harm to those who participate?

Epistemological Bases for Woman-to-Woman Interviews

According to Burrell and Morgan, epistemology can be described in terms of the "assumptions about the grounds of knowledge - about how one might begin to understand the world and communicate this as knowledge to fellow human beings" (1979: 1). Can, therefore, knowledge be ascertained or acquired, or must it be experientially based? Until recently, my leanings have been toward experiential bases for research mandates.

With respect to bringing forth women's subjectivity and gathering their narratives through an inter-relational exchange of information, the shared experiences between researcher and researched become instrumental aspects of the dialogue. As Cook and Fonow argue, an essential element within feminist epistemology is "the need to challenge the norm of objectivity that assumes that the subject and object of research can be separated from one another and that personal and/or grounded experiences are unscientific" (1990: 72). Predicated on this premise, Driscoll and McFarland suggest that the "researcher's own participation and experience should be a consciously used part of the research process" (1990: 189). A double agenda thus emerges in which previously taken-for-granted grounds for academic credibility are being challenged and, on an individual level, women's personal experiences become legitimated.

Explicitly challenging positivist epistemology, Harding has defined the grounding of one's philosophical position within the experiences of those who have historically been silenced, such as women, as a 'feminist standpoint epistemology' (1996). She suggests that feminist researchers must begin their inquiries by being firmly rooted in women's experiences, and must furthermore address to what extent they are themselves embodied in their work (1996). Relatedly, Collins claims that living as a woman and writing as a feminist are factors which must be integrated (1991). Although Smith argues that being both a social scientist and a woman are necessarily contradictory endeavours, reflecting on the tensions that are inherent to practicing both the conceptual activity of thought and the daily, practical maternal activities of being a woman (1996), these distinctions are not irretrievably irreconcilable, as this is the very point of basing one's comprehension of the grounds of knowledge on real life. Collins suggests that by grounding one's work in her

own experiences, the academic pursues a project which investigates the intersection between one's own biography and the larger impact of historical times (1991).

Certainly this approach involves a personal investment, an element that is not often discussed in mainstream research literature. Griffith and Smith, for example, drew on their own experiences as mothers in order to relate to the women they interviewed (1991). They addressed some of their own emotions which surfaced as a result of conducting the interviews around issues of motherhood, such as their own feelings of guilt and inadequacy (1991). Within a standpoint epistemology, which privileges women's experiences, emotions are not out of place. In fact, as Fonow and Cook argue, they are indeed quite relevant if they provide a seam with which to tie everything together:

Another major feature of feminist epistemology is its refusal to ignore the emotional dimension of the conduct of inquiry. Feminist researchers often attend specifically to the role of affect in the production of knowledge. (1991: 9)

The emotions which are evoked speak to the efficacy of the researcher in creating an intimate environment in which the research participants' voices may emerge. Stanley suggests that this gives rise to a distinctive feminist nature of being: it is distinctively 'feminist' to be concerned with research processes and that this constitutes "an invitation to explore the conditions and circumstances of a feminist ontology" (1990: 14). This preoccupation with how feminist scholarship affects the way in which women perceive their existence in the world is a crucial ingredient if the process is to benefit all of those involved. Therefore, feminist researchers, because of their philosophical position, pursue relationships with their subjects which are social and dynamic. By integrating the identity of the interviewer and by preserving the subjectivity of the participant, reciprocity becomes an instrumental tool towards an end. A feminist approach to

interviewing enables scholars to bring forth women's stories in a manner that does not objectify them. By integrating their own identities and experiences into the research, feminist researchers can legitimize their role in the research process. By adopting an epistemology which is thus decidedly anti-positivistic (Griffith and Smith, 1991), feminist epistemology breaks down the barriers between researcher and researched in order to preserve women's presence as agents of their lives, dissolving the power differential between the individuals involved. Matsumoto (1996), for example, sent copies of the questions she intended to ask in her interviews prior to the interview. This, she claimed, was an intentional attempt to demystify the process of the interview and to give the interviewees as much control as possible. Furthermore, in an explicit sample of reciprocity, Matsumoto encouraged her interviewees to interrogate her at the outset of each session in order to allow them to gain some sense of who she was and where she was coming from (1996).

Although the project is grounded in women's experiences, feminist research is frequently tied to a larger political project. Whereas scholars approach these projects with some emotional investment, the political aspects bear some discussion.

A Feminist Political Mandate

Levinson describes the basis of feminist inquiry as one in which representations of experiences are "informed by a political and intellectual commitment to the empowerment of women and the creation of more equitable arrangements between and among specific, culturally defined genders" (1998: 339). The implications of the definition of gender will be further explored later in this paper, but my immediate interest is in the political mandate of an explicitly feminist project. Levinson, drawing on the

work of a number of feminist ethnographers, suggests that the goal of feminist research is to "produce mutually empowering knowledge for reflection and emancipation" (1998: 339). The dismantling of the power relationship between researcher and researched becomes not only an epistemological commitment, but one that reflects the political commitments of a feminist scholar. In pursuit of a more engaged feminist praxis and supporting a 'view from below' approach, Mies advocates that when documenting women's collective life histories, one must necessarily be a part of a political enterprise (1983). Furthermore, in order to reveal the nature of women's oppression, feminist researchers must integrate their own experience of oppression into the research process (Mies, 1983). The political imperative for placing emphasis on the shared experiences of all involved becomes the creation and development of a materialist theory of women's oppression, in contrast to one that is based on idealism (Stanley and Wise, 1983). A mandate which addresses women's oppression, an epistemology and methodology which are based on women's lives will explicate the social matrices of experiences and shed light on their oppression. This in turn becomes an important commodity in the struggle for equity.

Each step in the production of knowledge which is based on women's experiences has been a political move. Centering the attention on women, challenging the *status quo*, suggesting that the canon is inadequate in its obliteration of women's work, creating women's studies programs and not allowing even ourselves to slip into complacency has been an on-going and important effort. The inclusion of gender-based analysis in public policy and affirmative action plans are just a few of the fruits of women's labours. Just in this century, and mostly in the last few decades, women have won the right to vote, to

work after marriage and for paid maternity leave, to choose abortion, to enter university and to take out a bank loan in their own name. All of these factors may range in significance for different women, but they speak to just a few of the results that continued political pressures have brought about.

Of course not all of these 'gains' have been shared by all women at the same time. Some women still find that they face barriers. Furthermore, strategies such as affirmative action are hollow victories for women who may have won entrance to the institutions of their choice, but who know that the systemic racism and/or sexism which permeate the organization mean that she will not be fairly promoted. The assumption that there exists a matrix of oppression upon which any woman may locate herself has led to a notion that women share a sort of 'sisterhood.' Although this myth has been shattered from various angles by authors and scholars of colour, differing sexual orientations and socioeconomic class, there remain aspirations that have survived these critiques and which, I believe, underpin some of the assumptions which are latent in use of reciprocity and 'friendliness' (Cotterill, 1992) in feminist interview techniques.

The Myth of 'Sisterhood'

DeVault suggests that much of the earlier feminist writing, was based on the idea that "women's shared interests and concerns would provide resources for dismantling the hierarchies, fictions, and avoidance of research based on positivist frameworks; the argument was that women could talk together more freely and reciprocally" (1996: 37). She points out that often authors depicted feminist research as a comfortable and cozy pursuit (DeVault, 1996). Over the course of the last twenty years of academic work, these myths have been dispelled and some changes in our thinking have come about. As

philosophical and methodological tensions emerge and have been addressed, knowledge construction becomes an on-going negotiation (Code, 1995). DeVault addresses the salience of 'standpoint epistemology' by referencing critiques which challenge the idea that women possess an intrinsic capability to understand each others' experiences.

Identity is not automatically associated with superior insight, and the sociological literature on insider/outsider dynamics certainly calls into question any easy assumptions about the consequences for research of particular identities, which are always relative, crosscut by other differences, and often situational and contingent. (1996: 40)

The promise of 'sisterhood' breaks down as 'Woman' is revealed to be an inadequate descriptor. Other intervening factors and priorities disrupt the idea of reciprocity and non-hierarchical efforts. Stacey argues that feminist researchers suffer from a delusion of alliance when they purport to idealize woman-to-woman interviews (1998). It is her contention that feminist scholars cannot resolve the incompatibility of the relationship between the constructions of the self and Other (1988). In so much as our own identities are complex and difficult to disentangle from the web of social factors in which we find ourselves, how can we propose to get 'inside' the heads of other women and understand their lives?

Postcolonial Contributions

Drawing on the contributions of postmodern ethnographers, Stacey remarks that writing is a constructive rather than a 'representative' project (1988). Feminist scholars are not simply re-presenting stories verbatim, but play a significant role in their creation. Further contributions to this debate from a postmodern perspective challenge "feminism's dichotomous frame of reference around biological and philosophical essentialism and historical reification" (Brooks, 1997: 92).

Situating the debate on the micro scale of her own experiences, Bhavnani describes the issue in terms of the micropolitics of the research situation (1993). Bhavnani further stipulates that the differences which exist between researcher and researched must be analyzed, as they affect the research relationship (1993). Whereas divisive factors may be more pervasive than localized, issues which emerge within the politics of personal relations must be analyzed within a wider context. The implicit understanding that women immediately enjoy the advantages of 'insiders' must be systematically challenged and dismissed. As Mohanty argues, these assumptions have kept Western feminist writers in constant pursuit of knowing themselves (1988). Rather than enabling women to create a knowledge base on the basis of equity, the search for commonality of experience has limited the potential breadth of sociological knowledge. Some hope that postmodernism can resuscitate sociology and give it a much needed reinvigoration. Specifically, I am interested in one particular stream of postmodern epistemology: that of postcolonial theory.

Trinh argues that postcolonial theorists have recommended that a vision which extends beyond categories be adopted (1989). The essentialist basis and universalist ambitions that have created the dream of 'sisterhood' must be debunked. Rather than falling into the trappings of 'identity enclosure,' Trinh calls for the whole notion of identity to be unpacked (1989). Trinh furthermore refers to attempts to dismantle power differentials as idealistic, and that the simplified view of the 'duality' of power is a fantasy (1989). Power and position are interwoven factors which are complex - too complex to be eliminated by women of privilege (or who do not possess privilege), who represent

guarded institutions, by creating a semblance of equity through research which aims to reveal the commonality of 'Women.'

Also a critic of the notion of universality among women, Mohanty describes the homogeneous depiction of women as oppressed as problematic. By depicting women as an already constituted and coherent group, feminist scholars utilize a measuring rod which is based on a Western construct (Mohanty, 1988). Challenging the belief that a shared 'gender' is sufficient grounds for unity, Mohanty claims that it is a myth that all women share the same experience of oppression (1988). Rather, women must be seen as the material subjects of their own history. "Sisterhood cannot be assumed on the basis of gender; it must be forged in concrete historical and political praxis" (Mohanty, 1988: 67). Therefore, as we deconstruct categories and resist previous temptations toward an oversimplified social analysis, multiple sites for research become necessary. Does this mean, however, that each inquiry must be presented as the results of one particular scenario?

Back to Politics

Hess addresses the current backlash which is systematically dismantling the progressive gains that women and other people of minority have won over the course of the second half of this century (1999). Citing such examples as cutbacks to welfare spending, scapegoating single mothers, and a retreat to commitments to affirmative action policies, she suggests that these are indicative of an alarming trend. She argues that it is up to academics who gather and interpret data to contribute to a revitalization of social movements (Hess, 1999). The ability, however, of academics to involve themselves in this endeavour has become limited by the intellectual battles within the academy. Sociologists have turned their attentions inward as they deconstruct their own

discipline. In reference to some of the divisive in-fighting which has perhaps paralyzed academics, she identifies this as a disengagement from the concerns of the general public.

Hess states:

Many of us have been deeply involved in the emergence of identity-based social movements, with their divisive potential. Yet, surely, our most enduring contribution to sociology is precisely the recognition of race/ethnicity and gender as crucial dimensions of social structure. Fortunately, this intellectual turmoil has focused attention on the intersections and interfaces among systems of stratification by class, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, where so much ground-breaking research is currently being conducted, with the promise of transcending divisions and creating alliances across categories. (Hess, 1999: 9)

This point is a crucial reminder of the tenets and goals of sociology, particularly for those who have expanded their own knowledge base. As Hess points out, it is precisely the nature of sociology which has indulged its own growing pains and has come to broaden its parameters in order to theorize such issues as difference and power. It is still a field which can promise to provide the training and necessary instruments through which academics can collect women's individual, material and historically-specific narratives.

Reflexivity: Can it Reconcile These Tensions?

Feminist intellectual work is imbued with many simultaneous political agenda, some of which are complimentary, others conflictual. As I have discovered, there are those who believe in the political necessity of alliances among women (Hess, 1999), while others suggest that this is not possible (Stacey, 1988; Mohanty, 1988; Trinh, 1989). "(Waugh, 1992) maintains that feminism has been engaged in a struggle to reconcile context-specific difference or situatedness with universal political aims" (quoted in Brooks, 1997: 97). Although there may not be consensus on this point, the debate is important.

Rather than trying to relate on an experiential level to the women who participate in the research, which may not be possible, reflexivity may become a useful strategy.

Fonow and Cook describe it as "the tendency of feminists to reflect upon, examine critically, and explore analytically the nature of the research process" (1991: 2). In a more detailed description, Wasserfall draws a distinction between 'weak' and 'strong' readings of reflexivity.

Very broadly, what may be called the 'weak' reading of reflexivity is a continued self-awareness about the on-going relationship between a researcher and informants, which is certainly epistemologically useful: the researcher becomes more aware of constructing knowledge and of the influences of her beliefs, backgrounds and feelings in the process of researching. (1997: 151)

The 'strong' reading of reflexivity differs wherein it involves the deconstruction of the authority of the author and related power differentials in the field (Wasserfall, 1997). This exercise is thought to be highly conducive to learning about other people's lives. "Here lies that potential for change inherent in the reflexive stance - the learning itself - is viewed as empowering the scholar while the recording is a political act, and thus may help change the informants' lives" (Wasserfall, 1997: 154). The effort to comprehend becomes centered on the self, knowing the filters through which the questions emerge, through which one listens to the data and the basis upon which the data is analyzed. The goal of acknowledging the extent to which one is embodied in one's work is less an issue of connecting oneself to the research participants on an intimate basis, but rather articulating the materially-based and historically specific location of all of the actors involved, including the researcher. Unpacking the impact that status, childlessness, shyness, vulnerability, and fear of rejection (which I felt as I approached potential participants) serve to illustrate the context of the research process. Although some may fear that too much attention to micro-level politics will dilute the struggle for social change which accompanies feminist pursuits, the individual stories which emerge will enable interested parties to identify how their own stories intersect and diverge as detailed analyses of research projects unfold.

Conclusion

Reflecting upon my experience in the field, I can be critical of my assumptions and expectations with respect to the way that I approached potential participants and learn from my mistakes. Fortunately, one of the benefits of academic exercises is that they are on-going and enable us to learn from the experience. As DeVault points out:

Although these discussions have been lively and productive, one risk is that they may require a moral purity in feminist (or perhaps in women's) qualitative research that is simply unattainable, while leaving similar questions relatively unnoticed in discussions of other research traditions. (1996: 39)

Collecting data about women's lives still holds the political and intellectual necessity in which it developed. As new phenomena emerge and continue to have an impact on different women's lives in different ways, it must be attended to and analyzed. The choices that feminist academics make can never speak to all women. Tokenism is not the solution. The 'writing-in' of the researcher to the project provides an opportunity for the particulars of the situation to be illustrated, and yet should not diminish its credibility. Whereas academic work is a constructive process, these views are still valid. By carefully recording women's experiences, regardless of whether one has come to like them or has bonded with these women, and then reflecting on the entire process, women's stories will hopefully retain their significance and political activities may better represent the populous.

Chapter Four: Data Analysis

My analysis will highlight the contrariety within the lives of some of the individuals on social assistance, wherein the neo-liberal ideals they articulate are incongruous with their daily activities, activities which reflect a communal set of values and commitments. Although they identify themselves, for example, as 'dependent' on welfare and express a need to transform their present state (being on welfare) into a more desirable state (being in school, working for pay), most of these research participants are contributory members of their communities. The 'value' of those activities may fall outside of that which benefits our national system of accounts with regards to productivity, but they have a utility and mutual benefit within the context in which they are delivered. The portion of the interview transcripts that I have highlighted will demonstrate this tension and will show that the assumption that individuals on social assistance are 'nonworkers' is inaccurate.

In terms of the way that the participants in this study described how they spent their time, it was evident that many of them were neither idle nor useless. As Waring (1999) points out, there is an enormous amount of work that is overlooked when national productivity is calculated solely on the basis of monetary exchange¹³. Waring (1999) suggests that the implementation of time-use surveys in censuses will result in the redress of what we understand to be productive activities.

By recognizing that the pursuit of unpaid work is a productive use of someone's time, the data that is utilized to support this argument should not only be reflected in the calculation of the GNP, but also in assessments of the usefulness of those pursuits. This

study will challenge the notion that recipients of social assistance are nonworkers and will demonstrate that their time is used constructively.

Volunteerism

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 9th edition, defines a 'volunteer' as "one who enters into or offers himself for a service of his own free will" (1983: 1322). Thus, distinguishable from the choice within the compulsory participation in Ontario Works Program to select the community placement option, the activities that I have highlighted as counter-hegemonic in this section are examples of voluntary activities which were entered into of their own volition. Whether they are involved with group initiatives or are delivering services as autonomous individuals, the following analysis will support my critique of the nonworker stereotype.

Olive¹⁴, is a fifty-six year old, English Canadian single woman with a twenty-two year old daughter who lives on her own. Social assistance is Olive's main source of income, and has been for most of her daughter's life. I approached Olive for an interview when I visited the Popular Theatre Group¹⁵, a group of women who write and perform plays in the region in order to raise awareness of issues surrounding poverty, crime and family violence. In addition to her work with the Popular Theatre Group, I soon learned that she was also involved with the Community Intervention Project, as well as:

The Community Chaplaincy, which is one of the ones that the Community Intervention Project¹⁶ is working in conjunction with. They have different things going on. They help with the food bank and children's clothing and stuff like that. [I also observed the respondent volunteering for

¹³ "Ironmonger found that Australians do about 380 million hours of unpaid household work each week, compared with 272 million hours in paid employment" (Waring, 1999: xxix).

¹⁴ In order to protect the anonymity of the research participants, I have changed all of their names.

¹⁵ In order to maintain the anonymity of the research participants, I have changed the names of the organizations and initiatives with which they are affiliated.

¹⁶ The Community Intervention Project is run by individuals from the subsidized housing communities in the West Town who receive an honorarium to facilitate on-going support for neighbours with addiction issues.

the community lunch program, a neighbourhood initiative for school-age children who walk home at midday.]

I met Therese in another neighbourhood when I sat for a number of hours in the community house, observing the comings and goings of the community members. She is a forty-five year old Quebecoise who lives by herself. She has an adult daughter, and has been on social assistance due to a disability (a neurological disorder which affects her joints) for over five years. She volunteers as the assistant coordinator of the Community House¹⁷, out of which she also runs the community food bank.

Fran is a thirty-eight year old, English Canadian woman, single parent to two primary school-age children, and she is on social assistance. She describes how she balances her commitment to volunteer activities with full-time parenting:

And since (my eldest son) was born, I've volunteered everywhere with him when he was a baby. Same with (my younger son). I mean if I wasn't welcome to volunteer or take part in something with my children, I didn't volunteer or take part in it. I mean, I wasn't going to pay a babysitter to volunteer. I mean, it's one of the reasons I've never volunteered in a food bank, because you can't have your children in a food bank. But I've done everything else that I could. So, I've volunteered a good portion of my week day for years and years and years.

Nguyen, a woman in her mid-forties, immigrated to Canada from Vietnam in the mid-1980s with her two daughters. She now lives with her youngest daughter in a housing estate, and social assistance is her main source of income. She and her thirteen year old daughter are active gardeners who share their fresh produce with their neighbours. Nguyen's neighbours also turn to her on numerous occasions as she provides emergency childcare services free of charge.

Sarah is a twenty-eight year old English Canadian woman who has been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). She has three children, all of whom have also been diagnosed with ADD. Although she is officially recognized by the system

as a sole support parent and is on social assistance, her boyfriend is employed in the transportation industry and lives with her approximately 14 days out of each month. Sarah is a volunteer with the Community Chaplaincy and sits on the committee responsible for the Community House.

In terms of the community involvement of several other respondents who are on social assistance, Shirley is a forty year old English Canadian woman who lives with her husband and two primary school-age children, volunteers with the Popular Theatre Group and has sat on the board of directors of her community health centre for ten years. Nancy, the mother of adult children and primary caregiver to her four year old grandchild, of Spanish or Portuguese decent,¹⁸ sews voluntarily for an elderly woman in her community. And finally, Tim, a single, thirty-four year old man, volunteers at the community food bank.

The significance of volunteer activities as a conduit to multiple social benefits is supported in the literature. According to Phillips (2000), community involvement provides opportunities for people to get together in order to "debate and clarify societal values and policy issues; in identifying as members of a broader community; in enhancing a personal sense of political efficacy; and in working for the benefit of fellow citizens" (7). Furthermore, the individual benefits when a sense that individual action is important is nurtured, as well as the notion that the actions of people working together can make a difference (Phillips, 2000). In terms of a broader issue of democracy and active engagement in citizenship, Putnam argues that a "dense, horizontal network of

¹⁷ Each of the housing estates in which I conducted my interviews had set aside one unit to house community meetings, the neighbourhood food bank, English training programs, homework clubs, etc.

¹⁸ I did not conduct this interview and could only guess this woman's origin based on my interpretation of her accent.

volunteer community-based organization builds social trust and mutual cooperation among citizens, bolsters performance of the polity and contributes to more efficient government and a stronger economy" (Putnam, 1993 cited in Phillips, 2000: 7). Swift (1999) notes that activities that occur within civil society contribute to a larger democratic project, wherein it provides a space for public discourse, for the development of public values and public language, and for the formation of the public self - the citizen. If there is any doubt that it plays an important role in holding a community together, the decline of participation in civil society correlates with the lessening of social trust and general reciprocity, as well as the rise of anomie (Swift, 1999).

Contributions to Community

In order to elaborate on the 'use-value' of the activities which these respondents are undertaking, I have drawn from a discourse that is extra-economic, or rather, outside of a market-oriented language, for example by highlighting the democratizing effects of their actions. Although the notion that community involvement (engagement in civil society) enables active participation in the democratic process is marginally represented, the interview respondents primarily identified outcomes which one would associate with personal development and skill enhancement. To illustrate, the respondents expressed sentiments of gratitude for having these opportunities. Olive, for example, felt that she benefited personally in a number of ways:

And I think that now I'm feeling more self-confident. I'm getting into more groups and things like that. Finding friends is important, and sometimes when you're isolated with a small family and can't get out much, you kind of feel as if there aren't going to be too many people there for a support group. So I think having things in the community like the Chaplaincy or like the tenants group is good too because it makes you feel as if you're meeting other people and making friends, which is really important.

Additionally, respondents observed the benefits that the activities in which they were engaged had on their neighbours. Therese described going above and beyond her

duties as a volunteer in the food bank by organizing free bar-b-queues on Saturdays during the summer, as well as opening the food bank on holidays. She agreed with me that social isolation is detrimental and that it is beneficial to provide forums for social inclusion.

Relatedly, Fran focused on the gains that are generated by the Community Craft Initiative, as she described it as something that she has wanted to see happen in her community for a long time: "It's for our communities to work cooperatively, even between [the communities]."

Having watched the community in which these interviews were conducted grow and change over the last twenty years, Evelyn, a sister with the Congregation of Notre Dame and a resident in of one of the communities for seven years, considered the significance of the organizations that had developed within these neighbourhoods:

And my sense of that is that once the tenants began organizing as a tenants association and the Community House opened, and there was the Community Chaplaincy here also at the time, I think that people started.. things started getting better. There were groups who acted as advocates for the poor, for the mentally ill.

Shirley also commented on the impact of the participation of community members within their neighbourhoods:

I think that the way that the communities like [this one] who get together and do the food festival or they get together and they do that or they get together and they do anything. I mean, when it brings a community together, nothing but good can come out of that. [That neighbourhood], they get together and they have a giant garage sale. Um, any time you get a community working together like that, that's a good thing. You meet your neighbours, nobody's a stranger, you know,... if there's a problem, that things just don't get fly off the handle at once, I mean you go and talk to them. So anything that's like that is good. It's the segregation that I think is bad. The segregation is bad. That people are segregated into these pockets because of [their poverty].

I found it interesting to note that a number of respondents described their commitment to preserving their neighbours' safety. Therese, for example, helped several neighbours who were in violent relationships contact the police. Nguyen, also concerned about a neighbour who was in an abusive relationship, tells me why she called the police:

That is why I said a moment ago that there's something and I feel that I had the responsibility to report. This is our part as a member of a society. You understand? If we don't do that then it's just like [we're] dead.

The apparent willingness on the part of her neighbours to intervene on her behalf adds to Nancy's sense of safety in her community:

But at the same time we look after each other. Like at night time, when it's a little bit dark here, it's a safe place. Because I could walk from my car to my house without any problems. They know I'm a single mom with a child so they really look after me. You know what I mean? And they sort of take care of me. And I noticed they do that with other people too. When I see the children running around and falling down, the first thing I tried to do is to reach out to the child - whoever falling down. It's okay because I know that the child belongs to the community.

Having just been contacted by the Provincial Government with respect to workfare, Fran became philosophical with respect to her involvement in the community and what it means on a larger scale:

You know, and then our whole society is all about not becoming dependent and not being able to work cooperatively and not being able to do anything in the community. They like to keep all the people in the low-income communities there and not getting them riled up being independent and speaking out themselves and stuff. They want everybody to shh, shh, shh, shh, shh.

I tend to agree with Fran's observation. She may or may not be correct with respect to the instrumentality of policy makers' plans to suppress agitation, but the astuteness of her comment is provocative. She has summarized the elements of neo-liberal ideology, and inferred that the decline of communal values restricts the democratic capabilities of those who are on social assistance and who are actively involved in public activities. She is not only protesting the disregard for the value of the cooperative work that is being done in the communities, but also the interpretation of dependence/independence which preclude non-economic activities that have a social value.

It is not my position that people should be supported by the government (via a social assistance cheque) in order to volunteer their time in the community, any more than the respondents would adopt this position. Furthermore, there are countless

individuals who commit their time to both paid and unpaid endeavours. Rather, I am challenging assumptions about the way they spend their time. To illustrate the necessity of my analysis, I refer to a document on the Government of Ontario's website entitled *Breaking the Cycle of Welfare Dependence*, which states:

The welfare system is being transformed from a hand out to a hand-up. It just doesn't make sense to pay people to sit at home. Work for welfare programs are giving people the skills they need to escape the welfare trap. Along with this on-the-job experience and job counselling, those who need them will be offered basic education and training programs... The Mike Harris Team will not rest until more people have left the welfare trap behind and found the pride and self-sufficiency of a new job. (Ontario, 2000:1)

As the preceding anecdotes have demonstrated, the official government position that people are sitting at home is not always accurate. Unfortunately, many people, including the individuals with whom I spoke, have bought in to the 'workshy' stereotype.

Working for Pay Under the Table

As I noted in my review of literature, Scott's research shows that 42 percent of female social assistance recipients were labour market participants during the week in which they were surveyed (1998). Furthermore, as the most recent edition of the biannual UNIFEM report *Progress of the World's Women* highlights, there is a significant proportion of remunerated activities which are not calculated, as they fall under the rubric of the informal economy. "'Home-based work activities' - including housekeeping, home repair and maintenance, do-it-yourself building, and child care - are informal work. So are 'deviant work activities' - which include anything from organized crime to petty fraud" (Waring, 1999: 22). During the limited amount of time I spent in the housing estates, I observed people fixing bicycles in their backyards, caring for other people's children, as well as various handiwork projects. The interview participants validated my

observations with their own examples of involvement in under-the-table work or that of their neighbours'.

Olive supplements her income with child caregiving services, and Fran performs handiwork: "I'm kind of self-employed with my stained glass and my fabric art, my sewing and stuff, so basically I am self-employed kind of in a part-time situation." Furthermore, Fran observed a number of work efforts in her community: "There's a woman over there who babysits. She's Somali but no one's giving her a job because she's Somali. Uh, there's people fixing up cars, making money that way, there's.. there's.. there's the crafts in the Community Craft Initiative."

By including these comments in my analysis, I am not trying to lend credence to those critics who propose that a significant number of welfare recipients are trying to defraud the system by collecting two cheques: one from the government and one from unofficial employment activities. Essentially, I have no way of knowing if the people that I observed are on social assistance. Second of all, the net effect of such activities may merely generate an income that is barely above a subsistence wage.

Evidence of Neo-liberal Impositional Claims

Despite the meaning that these women and this man have conveyed with respect to their volunteer activities and the common views that they hold in regards to the importance of community involvement, they have clearly absorbed many of the neo-liberal ideals which constitute their status as problematic. In the context of discussions that I and a couple of other interviewers had with them regarding not working for pay, most of them correlate being on social assistance with discouragement. They tried to justify their position and frequently suggested that their current status corresponds with

childhood and adult experiences of abuse. In the words of one of the respondents, many of the people that the other interviewers and I spoke with see their lives from a 'deficit perspective.'

I am not working for pay because...

When asked if she works for pay at present, Olive answered:

Very little. I had been working full-time as a home-maker, and then my daughter had health problems. I found that I couldn't make enough on minimum wage to pay for her dentistry and eye glasses and medication. And so I found that keeping on working, I found that I was not only burning out and not having enough time or energy with her, and also really wasn't making enough money to get by on. And so I had to go on assistance. I didn't want to, but I had to.

At the time of our conversation, Olive's daughter was twenty-two, and yet Olive was still on social assistance.

Other respondents identified their health problems as prohibitive to seeking paid employment. Therese, for example, has a neurological disorder which affects her joints. Subsequently, she is unable to work full-time. Nguyen is unable to work full-time due to severe arthritis.

And health is not simply a physiological issue. Issues of mental health were cited as key factors according to the respondents. Sarah described an incident in which she felt suicidal within the last year and was kept against her will in a mental health facility.

Ellen, recently separated from her boyfriend and the father of her son, became depressed and sought the assistance of a mental health worker. Having left a partner who was abusive, trying to parent a toddler and having no source of income, Ellen's mental health worker helped her find a space in subsidized housing and register for social assistance.

Evelyn confirms that these are important variables and offers her own insight into some of the causes and circumstances of poverty:

We have a lot of people on disability too. The whole other area of disability is mental disability. And my sense is that a lot of that has to do with poverty too. It's like a viscous cycle. Poverty engenders illness if you don't have enough food or you don't have enough of the right kind of food, physically you won't be well, and when you're not physically well, you can get very depressed. It's a whole viscous cycle.

Experiences of Abuse and Trauma

Several of the women who participated in this study had experienced abuse or trauma at some point in their lives, whether as children or within their adult relationships. This is not to say that abuse or trauma were not present in the lives of the other respondents in this group, but they neither volunteered the information nor were asked specifically about what they had undergone as children.

Olive, for example, identifies her childhood experiences as a causal factor in her present state:

Well, my childhood. I had some abuse during my childhood. Some physical abuse, some sexual abuse, and some "You're stupid and you're ugly." I know that that had a major impact on me and I'm still fighting that feeling.

Fran also described the impact that childhood experiences have had on her life. She furthermore sees this as a systemic problem among those individuals who are in similar circumstances to her own, i.e. on social assistance, history of drug use, etc.:

It's really hard and... I understand why people feel hopeless and stuff. You have to try and make the best of it. You have to, you know, there's such a breakdown of families. And I come from a history of broken family and abuse and all that kind of stuff, so, you know, I think maybe a lot of people don't understand what it is to be a loving, close knit family and they come from a broken, painful... [her voice trailed off, and then she changed the subject].

Sarah's mental health worker told her that she suffers from post-traumatic stress, the result of having grown up in an abusive environment with alcoholic parents: " I have no supports, my family is alcoholic, so you know I've been through the wringer. I've been abused every way you can think of, but.. a year ago I didn't think there was any hope, you know." She expressed relief when describing the point at which her mental health worker helped her draw the link between her present problems and her history.

According to Sarah, her present difficulties include being on social assistance, struggling with parenting (although she is grateful for the support offered to her by the Children's Aid Society), and living with an abusive partner.

The following is an except from an exchange that took place between myself and Ellen which is illustrative of both her own experience in an abusive relationship, as well as her observations of systemic problems:

Willow: You were telling me when I first met you that you had to end the relationship that you were in because it wasn't good for you, it wasn't good for your self-esteem. Do you think that when you meet some of the other women here that it's a common story? That they are single parents because they got out of a bad relationship?

Ellen: There's a lot of that. There's a lot.

Willow: What are some of the stories that people share?

Ellen: Well, some get hit, some are verbally abused. Most of it's mental abuse.

Willow: What kinds of things are said?

Ellen: Oh, they just put you down in certain ways. It's their way of holding on to you. They think that if they scare you into not leaving. 'You're fat... (inaudible). That's why I left mine.

Willow: Do you think that it was a key factor leading to your depression?

Ellen: Yeah.

Suffering

When asked about their neighbours and the circumstances that they have observed with respect to poverty and/ or being on social assistance¹⁹ the respondents described feelings of hopelessness and despair:

There's a high level of stress in all the housing communities, there's no doubt about it. There's a lot of fear, there's a lot of anger, um, you know, there's more domestic violence, there's more, you know it's all on the increase because of all the cutbacks and there's just more and more stress. There's less to go around and there's... It affects everybody. (Fran)

Sarah: "...people are so worn down and so tired and so depressed and discouraged..."

¹⁹ In a rent-to-income housing community such as the ones that the respondents inhabit, there are households which pay full market rent and have full-time paid employment.

When I asked Shirley to identify some of the problems that she observed in the housing communities and how they impact on the people who live there, she replied:

Well, um.. being involved.. having your neighbours be financially as poor as you are, and having a whole lot of neighbourhood like that, there isn't much.. you sort of loose sight on goals. And, and you lose sight of how to get out of it because.. because it's..it's.. there's such large areas, large pockets of really poor people and it's hard.. I would imagine it would be hard to seek their way to get out of that situation because it seems so big. And therefore issues like self-esteem, and therefore if you have low self-esteem or if you have a low self-image of yourself.

When I asked her if people felt hopeless, she answered:

Oh yeah. Oh yeah. There's a great deal of hopelessness and helplessness and.. and.. and.. fear and.. and.. um.. and discouragement. And it's like society says, you're worth shit. You know. And there will never be any hope for you. And the government is telling you that all the time and... and...

Sarah described it succinctly when she said:

That's part of my problem: that people don't see their worth. There's every kind of worth there is: spiritually, mentally, emotionally.. they don't.. they don't see it in the community right now. They don't see what gifts they have. What always... I don't mean to call down what we're doing here today, but we always look from a deficit point of view, instead of what good is out there, you know, what good is there out there.

The Respondents Identify a Need for Change

When they talked about improving their own lives, the respondents described a desire to change their circumstances. Some of them, for example Fran, articulated a view that is consistent with neo-liberal ideology, with a focus on lessening dependency, taking responsibility for oneself and expelling the expectation that someone else will look after you:

And I've always thought that if you want things to go well, like you're in control of your own destiny, it doesn't matter if you're dependent on the government for finances, if you want to change your life, you have to do that. Other people aren't going to do that for you... I'm kind of right on the cross-roads and making that leap, you know, from being dependent on welfare to getting some education and going out into the workforce.

When asked about her recent letter from the Government of Ontario with respect to Workfare, Fran seemed to welcome the prospect:

I want to go to school and such, so I'm going to say to them, 'Listen, you know, I want to take some bookkeeping and accounting courses, how can you help me?'

When asked what she would change if she had a magic wand, Ellen answered:

Well, I'd have a job, I wouldn't be on welfare, I'd have my son²⁰. I just want him home so that I can take care of him. I just want to get on with my life. Yeah. As soon as I get him back and re-establish our relationship I'm either going to get a job or go back to school. So... [The respondent trailed off].

On a slightly less pessimistic note, Sarah pointed out:

You know, like, we are the people. We have.. we can do things, we can change things. Um, we're not all useless people. And even the person like John downstairs who is handicapped can do something.

As several participants pointed out, nobody wants to be on welfare. They identified barriers to their own ability to seek paid employment, yet they long to make the transition off of social assistance. Tim told the woman who interviewed him that he has been unemployed for eight years and has not been able to find a job. Shirley lamented that no one is interested in her skills. These are not people who are complacently accepting a hand out - they are unsatisfied and wish that they could change their current status.

They see their own deficits, but within the narrow boundaries of participation in the paid labour force. From an alternative perspective, however, these people are active, contributory members of their communities.

Conclusion

Illich (1978) critiques our present, Western understanding of productivity which he identifies as commodity-driven, and challenges the notion that 'useful work' necessarily involves the creation of a market-oriented 'value.' That which we identify as a job is a relational, narrowly defined construct, framed against the less desirable status of being without employment (Illich, 1978). Subsequently, within the contemporary context

²⁰ At the time of this interview, Ellen was waiting to regain custody of her two and a half year old son from her parents-in-law. They stepped in to take the child during her period of depression.

of liberal/neo-liberal principles, an adult²¹ who is without employment is a sad, pathological example of idleness. According to Illich, we neither identify with nor value a scenario which enables an individual to spend the bulk of their time doing things that are useful to themselves, their neighbours, or their family (1978).

Increasingly, the Canadian Government is ensuring that citizenship rights and employment are synonymous by passing punitive legislation. Brodie (1997) argues that state practices are increasingly being formulated within the terms of the market, wherein emphasis on performativity has penetrated state programs and the state subject has been re-constituted as a 'rational economic actor.'

The contradictions that I have highlighted within the respondents' transcripts give salience to Brodie's argument. Although these women and this man pursue activities that problematize the Harris Government's assumption that they are simply 'sitting at home' (Ontario, 2000), they nonetheless envisage their situation as undesirable and want to conform to social expectations.

By critiquing social assistance policy reform, I am not advocating a return to the previous system, for I have no reason to believe that the pastoral care that was offered through this policy prior to its reform in Ontario was any more adequate. Instead, my discussion is framed within an alternative discourse of communal and cooperative living in order to highlight what social assistance recipients *are* doing rather than what they are not. They do not need a policy that gets them up and off the couch when laziness and all that is implied in the pejorative version of 'dependence' is not the problem. Clearly,

²¹ I refer to adults who are not responsible for the care of a preschool child, not deemed disabled, nor too advanced in age.

nobody 'chooses' to be poor. However, we need to re-think the framework within which choice and expectations are defined and critique the set of values that they reflect.

Finally, this exercise has enabled me to reflect on why I have asked the questions that I have with respect to this data. On one level, I have thought critically about the 'gap' between myself and 'them.' I am not nor have I ever been on social assistance, but there were numerous occasions when my father, a sole support parent, went for long periods without paid employment. The conspicuous effects of these intervals, such as having our phone line cut off and an empty pantry, filled me with shame as a child and youth. Thinking in new ways about the ways that the research participants spend their time and identifying a body of literature which locates the inherent value in these pursuits, I have been able to challenge my own perceptions of my father and his periods of 'idleness.'

On another level, I have begin to be able to think about my own views concerning 'work' and about how I spend my time. Although the argument that I have injected into the discussion of 'work' has not entirely eclipsed a productivity-oriented framework, however I feel that it contribute to critical discussions concerning the location of policy in lived experiences. Finally, it is difficult for someone in my position, a full-time student with access to financial support to inject a critique of patterns of consumption and the construction of need. However, there are several benefits to learning to live with less. By working less, there is more work to go around; with less disposable income, we should concentrate on buying only what we need; and when we consume less, we use up and throw away less.

With respect to social assistance policy, I refer to Illich's (1978) proposal to acknowledge the right to useful unemployment, as well as Waring's (1999) critique of the

mainstream definition of productivity. Workfare is not a solution: it constructs the problem. In order to separate the puzzle from the propaganda, the framework must incorporate extra-economic discourse, as well as broaden our interpretation of productive and useful ways to spending our time.

Chapter Five: Does Social Policy Matter?

In this chapter, I examine the significance of social policies as constraining and binding forces with respect to the identification of the subject and the definition of 'the problem.' In terms of social assistance policy, for example, I have struggled with the limitations of the debate and the parameters within which arguments have been made. Whether our sympathy is invoked by the Left or our frustrations highlighted by the Right, the problem is too narrowly defined when it is constructed as a tension between State and personal responsibility.²² I have defined those constraints as debates about the viability and necessity of a safety net, as critiques of meritocracy and questions of entitlement. I note the absence of implicating the market when the causes and circumstances of welfare receipt are examined; and finally, I suggest that social assistance must become a discussion about 'us' rather than 'them.'

The Social Safety Net as a Political Football

In contrast to the Government of Ontario's plan to 'ease every man and woman off of welfare' in order to improve conditions for all, for example through lower taxes, those who defend collective interventions argue that they simultaneously meet the needs of the individual and serve the interests of a wider society. The political salience of a universal approach to social programmes, as Titmuss demonstrates, is that at some time or another, we may all need them:

(O)ne of the outstanding social characteristics of the 20th Century, the fact that more and more people consciously experience at one or more stages in their lives the process of selection or rejection; for education, for work, for vocational training, for professional status, for promotion, for opportunities of access to pension schemes, for collective social benefits, for symbols of prestige and success, and in undergoing tests of mental and physical fitness, personality, skill and functional performance. (1963: 43)

²² Baker and Tippin (1999) and O'Connor, Orloff and Shaver (1999), to name a few, emphasize the importance of including the household as a level of analysis in policy debates.

Our sympathies are cultivated on this notion of 'there but by the grace of a Higher Power go I.' Unforeseeable circumstances could arise and leave any one of us in the lurch. During such periods, the state can play an important role as an intermediary, or as Esping-Andersen suggests, the welfare state can serve as a 'de-commodifying' factor in all of our lives. De-commodification, he explains, "is meant to capture the degree to which welfare states weaken the cash nexus by granting entitlements independent of market participation" (Esping-Andersen, 1999: 43).²³ Relatedly, NDP MP Axworthy posits the following:

As socialists, as believers in community, as proponents of the justice of having a community that supports those who need help in times of difficulty, we must accept that those who are unable to fend for themselves, for whatever reason, are entitled to the assistance of the rest of the community - they have a right to help. (1999: 281)

In opposition to the neo-liberal emphasis on personal success and achievement (Miller and Rose, 1993), the argument for universal programmes invokes compassion and a communal sentiment. It is important to consider, however, that sometimes even the saddest cases fail to inspire this response. An article which appeared in the *Toronto Star* in October, 1995 (not long after welfare reform had begun to take shape in Ontario), an article profiled a single-mother on social assistance who suffers from manic depression and has a severely disabled child (Walkom, 1995: C4). It is a sympathetic treatment of a scenario which was designed to illustrate the necessity of social assistance, a tactic for which there are at least two drawbacks. On the one hand, it lends credence to debates about the deserving versus the undeserving welfare recipient. (It is improbable that Walkom would have profiled a single, able-bodied man with no dependents). On the other hand, this strategy may not even work. Four days after Walkom's article was

²³ Esping-Andersen (1999) notes that the concept of de-commodification presupposes that individuals are already commodified. This neglects the experiences of those who are not in the paid labour force, such as

published, a letter appeared in the "Letters to the Editor" section entitled: "Capable must be responsible for their own lives." Invoking the "we must bring down the deficit" line of reasoning, the *Torontonian* recommended that the woman featured and all others like her turn to family and friends as individuals have for centuries, and let the 'socialist' state die a proper death (Hodgson, 1995: A28). The struggle is thus over ideological positions and sets of values, only real people's lives are at stake and the consequences can be profound .

The Myth of Meritocracy

Debates regarding the myth or reality of a meritocracy back us into a similar corner. The aforementioned view cited from the *Toronto Star* 'Letters to the Editor' is symptomatic of a kind of social Darwinism that many take as their gospel, for whom dependency is pejorative and welfare a 'trap.' Conversely, proponents of a welfare system which provides a protective barrier between vulnerable segments of the society and the vagaries of the market maintain that this is a necessary ingredient in a fair and just society.

Marshall suggests that social programmes intervene in order to produce an equilibrium, as well as contribute to the constitution of the democratic project. He states, "By the social element I mean the whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society" (1963: 74). Critiques of whose 'standards' aside, Marshall put forth an important treatise on the origins of the welfare state in the West (Mead, 1997). Members of a community, Marshall contends, are endowed with rights to make claims against the state - it is something that is conferred upon them with citizenship, although it is in marked contrast

full-time mothers.

with the principles of capitalism. This argument locates the procurement of equality of outcome on the shoulders of the community.

From another point of view, there are many who would argue that, in a democracy such as ours, we all have equality of opportunity and it is up to each of us to achieve to our potential. The position espoused by right-wing pundits like Murray, are unwavering in this belief.

Some people are better than others. They deserve more of society's rewards, of which money is only one small part. A principal function of social policy is to make sure they have the opportunity to reap those rewards. Government cannot identify the worthy, but it can protect a society in which the worthy can identify themselves. (1984: 234)

A belief in a meritocratic system has particular political salience in a climate in which fear of government debt and anxiety over low national productivity are cultivated. Less tax and higher personal income sound appealing, and it is easy to understand that individuals become sold on the idea, particularly when they are bombarded with these ideas.

Questions of Entitlement and Human Capital Investments

With respect to questions of entitlement, there are conflicting views identifying those problems which are systemic. From one perspective, the links between unemployment and welfare correlate changes in the economy with a demand for social assistance. Moscovitch (1997), for example, argues that welfare provisions are a necessity during periods of recession. By moving the discussion away from inferences of deficiencies of character and cycles of poor showing on the part of individuals, the problem is presented as one that is pandemic and thus provides some basis for arguments of entitlement.

On the other hand, arguments such as those of Grubel and Bonnici (1986) concerning the rise of real wages in Canada and the impact that this has had on the implementation of labour-saving technologies and subsequent lay-offs, or the legislation passed by the Government of Ontario to indefinitely freeze minimum wages in Ontario (Ibbitson, 1997) illustrate an entirely different view of systemic problems which must be rectified. From this perspective, entitlement must be redressed and the fat trimmed.

With respect to discussions of human capital, it is interesting to note that there is some convergence of opinion regarding investment in this area. Where analysts and academics intersect on issues, however, they differ in their strategies. As I pointed out in chapter one, research has shown that social assistance recipients have significantly less formal education than the average (Ornstein, 1995; Mitchell, 1999). I also pointed out that links have been drawn between childhood experiences of sexual abuse (DeParle, 1999), health problems (Handler and Hasenfield, 1997), substance abuse problems (Born, *et al.*, 1999), to name a few.

The Federal Government has issued policy documents which are consistent with this opinion. To reiterate the point that I highlighted in a previous chapter, *Agenda: Jobs and Growth - Improving Social Security in Canada* clearly outlines the need for employment and training support. Ultimately, paid work is not only the basis of individual self-worth, politicians argue, it contributes to the economic health of the community (Baker, 1999).

Clearly, there is acknowledgement on each side of the debate that everyone is not beginning at the same starting line. But where does that get us? To make my point, let us take the example of people with disabilities. There is general consensus that this is a

group with legitimate claims for assistance. The Government of Ontario passed the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) Act in 1997 which moved people with disabilities off of the welfare system and onto the ODSP. This would ensure that their benefits would not be subjected to the stipulations of the Ontario Works Act (Ontario, 1999). For whatever reason, we accept that people with disabilities have low inventories of skills for the labour market and/or extraordinary problems, and we accept that they will rely on the state. Where do these ideas come from? I contend that notions of human capital are constructed and the skills for which people are credited or the problems that have been determined to be their barriers to success may have more to do with superficial perceptions and prejudice (i.e. the desire to avoid the cost involved in renovating a workplace in order to make it more accessible) than fair evaluation.

Role of the Market

Part of the problem is that social policies are designed and governed independent of each other. Subsequently, our approach is disciplined by this fractured approach to problem solving. Education has nothing to do with industry; defence has nothing to do with national research grants; unemployment has nothing to do with the National Bank of Canada, etc. As Graham and Lightman (1992) point out, economic activities and social programs are inter-dependent, and therefore compartmentalized thinking is problematic. In addition to analyses of the broader economic and political context of policy reform and retrenchment, progressive thinkers must invoke a debate that crosses policy disciplines. Furthermore, the sanctity occupied by the private sector must be penetrated and the implications of their conduct be examined.²⁴

²⁴ Towards this end, Vosko (1998, 1999) has conducted important research on the correlation between trends toward non-standard forms of work and workfare.

New boundaries opened up for me by Mitchell's statement: "Perhaps the problem the poor have is not a lack of a work ethic, but the absence of a 'pay ethic' in the labour market" (2000: 5). He asks: why should we value work when employers don't? Although Moscovitch's (1997) argument concerning the correlation between cycles of market place productivity and rates of social assistance is helpful, this argument does not suggest that the market place has any *responsibility* with respect to unemployment and welfare receipt. Economic downturns in the economy and periods of recession, cross-referenced with welfare numbers, appear to support the social and economic necessity of social assistance. However the trends that Moscovitch highlights do not challenge the tension between arguments for state provision versus individual ingenuity. As Baker and Tippin (1999) point out:

Unemployment rates have been rising since the 1960s in [Canada, the U.K., Australia and New Zealand], but policy makers are now accepting higher levels of unemployment as 'normal' and are encouraging the unemployed to create their own jobs to help resolve structural unemployment. (8)

The decisions on the part of corporations to pay low wages, to create part-time and precarious jobs, to resist accommodating family responsibilities, and to refuse benefits are part of the 'problem.' Unfortunately, the Ontario Works Act does not govern the employers, nor has the Government of Ontario expressed an interest in addressing these issues. In many respects, corporate codes of conduct toward employees are mandated by individual corporations and are entered into voluntarily.

Conclusion

Is there an alternative? An integral, crucial source of substantial alternatives must come from a process of citizenship engagement. Panitch cites the work of Mendelson, a former NDP politician, who argues that the two contending views on social policy - "do-

gooder welfare statism and cost-cutting, free-market individualism" (1994: 37) are incapable of providing meaningful guides for action. He proposes that a shift in thinking is becoming increasingly necessary and that it can only emerge from a democratic process:

(First), social programs would aim to reinforce and create power for their participants rather than establish or reinforce their dependence. (Second), 'social programs will assist those with a common interest to come together to help each other meet their needs and assert their role within society, so as to change the society around them.' (Mendelson, mid-eighties, quoted in Panitch, 1994: 37).

In other words, ultimately, people know what is in their best interests; furthermore, a democracy should contain some elements of a democratic process.

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Appendix 1: Interview Schedule

Interviewer: Introduce self, tell them you are researchers from Carleton University, then read following:

Thank you for agreeing to do this interview. We are doing research on people's experiences in their neighbourhoods. We are especially interested in your experiences with things like crime, the resources and services available in your community, and your overall feelings about living in this neighbourhood. The interview will take about an hour, and we would like you to complete a survey that is related to this study after the interview. We will then pay you a fee of \$10 as a token of our thanks.

Note age and sex of respondent, and the neighbourhood in which respondent lives. Do not ask address. Note interview number, date, and your name on tape and on this schedule.

READ: Let's begin by talking about your neighbourhood.

1. What is your overall view of the neighbourhood? What is it like to live there? How satisfied are you with living in this neighbourhood?

PROBE: in general for the types of problems they encounter in the neighbourhood (unemployment, job training, illiteracy, crime, safety in schools, drug/alcohol abuse, teen pregnancy, household violence, racial and other discrimination, etc.)

READ: The next thing I would like to talk to you about is your work or employment situation.

2. Are you working now? How long have you been employed/ unemployed? What do you/ did you do?

PROBE: for their skill set, what they see as the main problem in getting and keeping a job, what they plan to do for work in the future, what other ways they earn money.

READ: I want to get your views on crime in this neighbourhood.

3. Do you see or hear about crime in your neighbourhood or close to it? What kinds of crime?

PROBE: for how they have heard of this, gossip, hearsay, who is involved in it (youth, gangs, adults), who are the crimes against.

4. Compared to other communities in the city, do you think your neighbourhood has less, more or about the same amount of crime?

5. Have you or anyone you know been the victim of a crime in this community?

PROBE: for type of crime(s), when it/they happened (in the last year especially).

6. In the past 12 months has anyone deliberately hit you or used a weapon of any kind against you or used force on you in any way? Has anyone threatened you to do that? This can include strangers and people you know well. Has either of these two scenarios happened to anyone you know?

PROBE: for description of incidence(s), and whether it happened to respondent or someone they know. **PROBE** also for context, meaning and motives of incidents.

7. How safe do you think your community is?

PROBE: if respondent says community is unsafe, **PROBE** for perceptions of why unsafe, and what they do to protect themselves.

8. What do you think could be done to improve the safety of the neighbourhood?

9. Do you see any alcohol or drug problems in the neighbourhood?

PROBE: what kind of problems, level of problem, who is having the problem?

10. If you had a friend who needed help with a drug or alcohol problem, do you know of a place or program in your neighbourhood that could help?

INTERVIEWER: Note name of place if respondent knows one, how they heard of the resource.

Can you tell me something about family life in your neighbourhood?

11. In general, what do you think life is like for families living in your neighbourhood?

12. How do the members of families in your neighbourhood get along?

13. What kinds of childcare issues do you or other with children in your neighbourhood face?

14. Do you think there is any conflict in some families in this community? Do you see or hear about any wife abuse or child abuse?

PROBE: for types of violence they see in other families and **ALSO IF THEY PERSONALLY HAVE EXPERIENCED THIS** but **DO NOT** mention the term "violence" in relation to their **OWN** experiences. Try to elicit perceptions from male and female respondents about domestic violence in the community. Also, **PROBE** for perceptions of **WHY** there is domestic violence. **ASK** if they think that there is some relationship between economic factors and domestic violence. If yes, clarify.

READ: I would like you to tell me a little about everyday life in the neighbourhood.

15. Do people in your neighbourhood get together to socialize? What do people do when they get together? Youth? Adults?

PROBE: if respondent is female, **PROBE** for their perceptions of men and male social activities in the housing projects.

16. Would you say that people in the neighbourhood would help each other in a crisis or bad situation?

PROBE: for why or why not.

READ: Now I want to ask you a final set of questions. Thinking about your own life...

17. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being extremely satisfied, how satisfied are you with your own life overall?

PROBE: for satisfaction with health, job or major activity, finances, family relations, friendships, social life in the community, respondent's neighbours.

18. Can you tell me what you consider to be the most important events that have shaped your life?

PROBE: for things that may have prevented them from achieving their goals.

19. Are there any other things we have not discussed that you would like to mention?

THANK RESPONDENT FOR DOING INTERVIEW, PROVIDE THEM WITH A SURVEY, AND ASK THEM TO COMPLETE IT EITHER THERE OR LATER SO THAT YOU CAN PICK IT UP.