“Dreaming a Way Out”: Social Planning Responses to the Agency of Lone Mothers
Experiencing Neo-liberal Welfare Reform in Western Canada

by

Silvia Leonor Vilches

B.A., The University of Victoria, 1986
M.A., The University of Victoria, 2002

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Faculty of Graduate Studies

(Planning)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

November 2011

© Silvia Leonor Vilches, 2011
ABSTRACT

Neo-liberal welfare reform in the province of BC, Canada, has set in motion a contest over the agency of welfare recipients. A critical feminist lens was used to explore the experiences of a diverse group of impoverished lone mothers (n = 17) with young children in the city of Vancouver. Grounded theory and narrative analysis were used in a qualitative mixed methodology to investigate how women are creating a future for themselves and their children, how they resist and interrogate the imposition of policy directives, and the implications for social planning.

The results of in-depth interviews from a three year qualitative longitudinal study show that women mediate between public expectations and private needs. They claim public benefits by deploying their identities to match individualizing policy discourses that frame them as people in need. Meanwhile, because of insufficient benefits, they engage in the informal economy to survive, transforming private goods, including sometimes, their bodies, into benefits through barter, sale, and assuming debt. As they scramble\(^1\) for resources, they create and care for community as a means of affirming their identity as valuable members of society, of surviving and ensuring the future well-being of their children. These women manage the risk of failing to support themselves, their children, and often others, by constituting themselves through dreaming a way out. When their dreaming is at risk of failing, the women are too.

If a key normative goal of social planning is to create an equitable and inclusive society, then these findings challenge the often racialized discourses around poverty, affirming the

---

\(^1\) v.t. to scrap or scrape, as with the claws or hands (2) to grapple or struggle with, as with the claws or hands, (3) to scrawl, scribble v.i. (4) to grab for or collect something in a disorderly way; scramble n. (5) a scratching or scraping, as with the claws or hands. (The Random House College Dictionary, 1980, p. 1182).
contribution of impoverished lone parent families, including Aboriginal families, to urban life. A key recommendation is to make a conceptual shift away from the polarized debate created by identifying poverty with a lack of finances, or “need,” and toward the capabilities model used at the international level. Recognizing place-based resourcing enables the use of spatial planning tools to help meet the dilemmas impoverished lone parent women face in their struggle to survive. I argue that without recognizing women’s agency, impoverished lone parent families remain invisible and underserved by existing planning practices.
PREFACE

This dissertation is based on data collected by the Income Assistance project (IAP) 2003-2007. As required by UBC regulations, I will describe my involvement and its contribution to my dissertation here, in the preface. Details on the data itself, and reflections on my involvement, are supplied in the methodology chapter and several appendices.

I joined the IAP project at the invitation of Dr. Gurstein, Principal Investigator, shortly after it was funded in the spring of 2003. I was fully involved until its end, in 2008. As a team member and principal research assistant, I assisted in developing the interview approach and questions, participated in a practice pilot interview, led the recruitment effort, assigned participants to interviewers, and engaged 6 of 17 participants during the 3-year interviewing process. During this time, I participated in regular IAP team meetings where we debriefed our progress, shared our evolving insights, and made decisions about next steps. Additionally, I also managed the audio files and sent them for transcription. I assisted in developing two coding frameworks, and supervised one research assistant who entered the codes (another later completed this task under the supervisor of Dr. Pulkingham). In 2008, I assisted in recruiting and facilitating three focus groups with service providers. I co-facilitated one group, solely facilitated one group, and took notes for the third, while organizing transcription, file sharing, and coding development as I had for the interviews. I also assisted with organizing a symposium in 2008.

I proposed the dissertation questions presented here in 2008, and as described in the methodology chapter, developed a new analytical approach to answer the questions. I used the interview data (transcripts) and my own field journal for the data. I also referred to the case summaries produced for the regular team meetings, and in addition, I did a brief policy review. The analysis and findings presented in this dissertation are wholly my own work.
The project had an interdisciplinary structure so analytical work, presentations, and publications occurred in pairs or groups, as it made sense. The team discussed their ideas and evolving papers at the team meetings. I typically worked with my advisor, Dr. Gurstein, in publishing, as is reflected below in the publications list. I assisted in authoring three book chapters, one peer-reviewed publication, two reports (one published), one community publication, and several presentations, some with papers. I cite some of the material in the dissertation, but this dissertation was not built on any of those papers and the analysis was developed separately. I have not yet published a paper arising solely out of the analysis or findings of this dissertation. The use of the IAP data by a graduate student was approved by the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board, file number B03-0240.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IAP Publications</th>
<th>Role of Silvia Vilches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Book Chapters and Journal Articles</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IAP Publications</td>
<td>Role of Silvia Vilches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Book Chapters and Journal Articles (cont.)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conferences/presentations</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2.</strong> Vilches, S., &amp; Gurstein, D. P. Transforming our understanding of poverty reflexively through immersion in longitudinal qualitative research: Lessons from the Income Assistance Project. <em>Lone Mothers and Welfare to Work Policies: Insights from Longitudinal Qualitative Research</em>. Vancouver, BC. September 26-28, 2008.</td>
<td>Co-presenter. Dr. Gurstein and I co-developed a paper for this symposium. Some of the material was used in developing the chapter by Gurstein, Pulkingham and Vilches (2011).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3.</strong> Vilches, S., &amp; Goelman, H. Achieving equity in community-university partnerships. Paper presentation. <em>Community-University Exposition</em>, Victoria, BC. May 4-7, 2008.</td>
<td>Co-presenter. This was based on a paper I wrote as a research assistant to the umbrella CHILD group (see below).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conferences/presentations (cont.)</td>
<td>Role of Silvia Vilches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### IAP Publications

#### Reports


   **Role of Silvia Vilches:** Minor role; assisted with details.


   **Role of Silvia Vilches:** Sole author and researcher. This 3-month project was undertaken when I was a research assistant for the umbrella CHILD project, headed by the Principal Investigator, Hillel Goelman. I interviewed all members of three of the projects (cluster 1, see Appendix A). I analyzed the material and wrote the report, which I presented. Later this was used to develop the presentation Vilches and Goelman (2008).

#### Community Publications


   **Role of Silvia Vilches:** Minor role in developing the content.


   **Role of Silvia Vilches:** Co-author.


   **Role of Silvia Vilches:** Assisted with editing.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................ ii

Preface ......................................................................................................................................... iv

Table of Contents ........................................................................................................................ ix

List of Tables ................................................................................................................................ xiv

List of Figures ............................................................................................................................. xvi

Glossary of Terms and Acronyms ............................................................................................. xvii

Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................... xxiii

Foreword ...................................................................................................................................... xxv

Dedication ................................................................................................................................... xxviii

CHAPTER 1 – Planning Responses to Lone Mother’s Poverty .................................................... 1

1.1 Social Planning Responses to Neoliberal Welfare Reform .................................................. 4

1.2 Gender Sensitive Approaches in Social Planning ................................................................. 7

1.3 Critical Feminist Approaches to Social Planning Research ............................................... 12

1.4 Research Problem Statement and Questions ...................................................................... 15

1.4.1 Research Questions ........................................................................................................ 15

1.5 Structure of the Dissertation: Looking Forward ................................................................. 15

CHAPTER 2 – Theoretical Perspectives on Neoliberal Welfare Reform and Lone Mothers .......... 18

2.1 Neoliberalism and Third Way as Welfare Reform ............................................................. 19

2.1.1 Comparative Analysis of Welfare Reform .................................................................. 20

2.1.2 Critical Perspectives on Citizen Activation Policies ................................................... 24

2.2 Redefining Poverty ............................................................................................................. 27

2.2.1. The Capabilities Approach to Poverty ...................................................................... 29

2.3 Neoliberal Reforms of Third Sector Supports .................................................................... 33

2.4 Studying the Impacts of Welfare Reform on Women ........................................................ 35
2.4.1 Citizens Who Care: Resubjectification through Social Reproduction .................37
2.4.2 Empirical Themes in Studies of Lone Mothers ........................................38
2.4.3 Sex Trade Work and Neoliberal Reform ..................................................43
2.5 Implications of Welfare Reform .....................................................................47

CHAPTER 3 – Critically Examining the Case of BC Welfare Reform ..........................49
3.1 Implementing Neoliberalism ..........................................................................50
  3.1.2 Benefit Changes .........................................................................................51
  3.1.3 Workforce Participation Rate of Lone Mothers ..........................................56
  3.1.4 Reducing or Increasing the Welfare Wall? ................................................58
  3.1.5 Disciplining Recipients through Reclassification ......................................61
3.2 Restructuring the Responsibility Mix ...............................................................65
  3.2.1 Third Sector Reform ................................................................................66
3.3 Characterizing the Consequences of BC Reform .............................................69

CHAPTER 4 – Applying a Critical Lens ..................................................................72
4.1 Recognizing Resistance ..................................................................................72
4.2 Critical Approaches to Poverty .......................................................................77
  4.2.1 Focusing on Lone Mothers’ Agency ...........................................................77
  4.2.1.1 Defining Agency ...................................................................................78
  4.2.1.2 Agency as a Context Subject: Passivity .................................................80
4.3 Everyday Experience as a Foundation of Inquiry ............................................81
  4.3.1 Methodological Dilemmas of Incorporating Voice ....................................85
4.4 Intersectionality as Critical Lens .....................................................................87
  4.4.1 Shifting the Focus: Issues of Concern to African American Populations ....87
  4.4.2 Racial Uplift: Womanist Interpretations and Collectivist Contributions ......88
  4.4.3 Community Work as Resistance .................................................................90
4.5 Constructed Citizenship Boundaries ................................................................. 90
4.6 Welfare Colonialism and Aboriginal Women’s Resistance ................................. 92
4.7 Epistemological Implications of Considering Difference .................................. 95
4.8 Survivance as Collective Resistance and Social Transformation ....................... 96
4.9 Conclusion .......................................................................................................... 100

CHAPTER 5 – Methodological Approach for the Dissertation ................................... 102
5.1 Background to the Income Assistance Project (IAP) ......................................... 103
  5.1.1 Design of the Income Assistance Project ...................................................... 105
5.2 IAP Data Used in the Dissertation ..................................................................... 106
  5.2.1 Sampling: Individual Interviews ................................................................ 106
    5.2.1.1 Development of IAP Questions and Method ........................................... 108
    5.2.1.2 Recruitment of the IAP Participant Sample .......................................... 109
    5.2.1.3 Characteristics of the IAP Participant Sample ....................................... 111
    5.2.1.4 Attrition ............................................................................................... 116
    5.2.1.5 Transcripts and Case Summaries as Used in the Dissertation ............... 117
  5.2.2 Focus Groups with Service Providers .......................................................... 118
  5.2.3 Neighbourhood Selection and Observations ............................................... 120
    5.2.3.1 Field Observations and Field Notes ..................................................... 121
  5.2.4 Policy Review .............................................................................................. 123
5.3 Analyzing the Lone Mothers’ Interviews for the Dissertation ............................. 124
  5.3.1 Drawing on Two Analytic Approaches as Mixed Qualitative Methods ........... 125
  5.3.2 Investigating Agency with Grounded Theory Methodology ......................... 126
  5.3.3 Looking at Time and Context with Narrative Analysis ................................ 128
5.4 Limitations and Strengths Using the IAP Study Data ........................................ 130
5.5 Strengths and Limitations of the Two Analytical Approaches ............................ 132
5.6 Looking Forward

CHAPTER 6 – The Economy of Poverty for Lone Mothers on Welfare

6.1 Staying Alive

6.1.1 Defining Poverty

6.1.2 Critical Feminist Positions on the Nature of Poverty and Work

6.2 A Manufactured Need

6.3 Scrabbling for Resources

6.3.1 Generating Income

6.3.1.1 Labouring for Income

6.3.1.2 Selling Assets

6.3.1.3 Using the Body for Income: Sex Work

6.3.2 Manufacturing Debt

6.3.2.1 Formal Loans: The Business of Pawning

6.3.2.2 Borrowing, Barter and Trade

6.3.3 Fighting Back: Resisting Debt

6.4 Transitioning to Work

6.4.1 Motivating Identities

6.4.2 Orchestrating the Steps

6.4.3 Balancing Family and Child Care

6.4.4 Being On-time and In-phase

6.4.5 Intention, Context and Timing

6.5 Another Way Out: Taking the Nickel

6.6 Summary

CHAPTER 7 – How Lone Mothers Use Dreaming to Create a Future

7.1 Dreaming as a Constitutive Act
7.1.1 Dreaming as Family ................................................................. 190
7.1.2 Dreaming as Lineage and Future ........................................ 193
7.1.3 Dreaming as Healing .............................................................. 196
7.2 Unrequited Dreams as Social Exclusion .................................. 202
7.3 Enacting Dreams: Resisting Public Expectations ..................... 206
7.4 Nurturing Dreams: Protecting the Self ..................................... 215
    7.4.1 Finding and Creating Supportive Environments ................. 218
    7.4.2 Helping Others: Forbidden Work ........................................ 224
7.5 Summary ................................................................................. 230

CHAPTER 8 – Mediating the Public-Private Divide .......................... 232

8.1 Falling Between the Public/Private Divide ............................... 233
8.2 The Spatialized Dimensions of Resistance ............................... 244
8.3 Revisiting the Performance of Resistance and Agency ................ 252
8.4 Reframing the Definition of Lone Parenting .............................. 259
    8.4.1 Survivance in the Interstice .............................................. 263
8.5 Transformations of Gender Exclusion ..................................... 268

CHAPTER 9 – Discussion: Social Planning Responses .................... 271

9.1 The Effects of BC Reforms on Future Life Possibilities ............. 271
    9.1.1 Research Question No. 1 .................................................... 272
    9.1.2 Characterizing the Effects of BC Welfare Reforms on Lone Mothers 274
    9.1.3 Recognizing Aboriginal Women in the City ....................... 276
    9.1.4 Recommendations for Family Research ............................... 278
9.2 The Effects of Place and Policy on Agency ............................... 282
    9.2.1. Research Question No. 2 ................................................. 282
    9.2.2 Considering the Interaction of Place and Gender .................. 288
9.3 The Implications of Interrogating Poverty Policy ................................................................. 292
  9.3.1 Research Question No. 3 .................................................................................................... 292
9.4 Imagining Social Planning Responses .................................................................................. 296
  9.4.1 Research Question No. 4 .................................................................................................... 297
  9.4.2 Planning Practice Implications ......................................................................................... 297
  9.4.3 The Dark Side of Planning: New Post-colonialisms? ..................................................... 300
  9.4.4 Planning for Gender in Place for Lone Mothers .............................................................. 301
9.5 Conclusion: Conceptualizing Planning Practice as Work in the Interstice ......................... 303
References ..................................................................................................................................... 305
Appendix A: CHILD projects ....................................................................................................... 331
Appendix B: IAP Recruitment Text and Poster ........................................................................... 333
Appendix C: IAP Screening Questions ......................................................................................... 335
Appendix D: IAP Interview Guide and Final Questions ............................................................... 336
Appendix E: IAP Focus Group Questions ..................................................................................... 338
Appendix F: City of Vancouver and Recruitment Area ............................................................... 339
Appendix G: IAP Analytic Objectives ......................................................................................... 341
Appendix H: IAP Interview Transcript Codes ............................................................................. 342
Appendix I: IAP Focus Group Codes ........................................................................................... 345
Appendix J: Development of Dissertation Codes (Grounded Theory Analysis) ....................... 352
Appendix K: Development of Narrative Analysis ........................................................................ 355
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Annual Maximum Child Benefits (July 2011 to June 2012) ................................................. 53
Table 2 IAP Sampling Frame for Interviewees .................................................................................. 107
Table 3 IAP Interviewer Assignments to Cases ............................................................................... 111
Table 4 Key Characteristics of the IAP Participant Sample Listed by Pseudonyms .................... 112
Table 5 Number of Children and Size of Household ........................................................................ 113
Table 6 Identification and Status of Aboriginal Women in the IAP Study .................................. 114
Table 7 Total Number of Interviews, Showing Attrition ................................................................. 117
Table 8 List of CHILD Projects ....................................................................................................... 331
Table 9 IAP Interview Codes ............................................................................................................. 342
Table 10 IAP Focus Group Codes ..................................................................................................... 345
Table 11 Example of Hierarchical Organization of Dissertation Codes ...................................... 352
Table 12 Example of Narrative Analysis: Life Events Timeline for Natasha ................................. 355
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Welfare Diamond Showing Neoliberal Reform ............................................. 23
Figure 2 The Process of Dreaming a Way Out ............................................................ 137
Figure 3 Unintended Effects of Neoliberal Welfare Reform on the Structure of
    Government-Citizen Relations and the Economy ................................................. 235
Figure 4 City of Vancouver, Showing Neighbourhoods ............................................. 339
Figure 5 IAP Recruitment Area, East Vancouver, Showing Social Housing Units ....... 339
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full term</th>
<th>Note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AFDC</td>
<td>Aid to Families with Dependent Children</td>
<td>National US program which distributed benefits to needy families, supplanted in 1996 by TANF.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSP</td>
<td>Basic social process</td>
<td>Term used in grounded theory methodology to describe the type of desired theoretical results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAP</td>
<td>Canada Assistance Plan</td>
<td>Cost sharing agreement between the federal government and the provinces, dismantled in 1996 and replaced with the SUFA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCRR</td>
<td>Child Care Resource and Referral</td>
<td>A provincial service to parents and child care operators that helps parents to locate spaces and helps operators understand regulations, assists with insurance, and provides referrals for business needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCTB</td>
<td>Canada Child Tax Benefit</td>
<td>Introduced in 1993 by the federal government as a universal tax credit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHILD</td>
<td>Consortium for Health, Intervention, Learning and Development</td>
<td>10 research projects focussed on early childhood, involving the four BC universities and community partners. Principal Investigator Dr. Hillel Goelman, UBC. Funded under SSHRC MCRI.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIHR</td>
<td>Child in home of relative</td>
<td>A formal child protection assignment to a relative or someone with kin status, typically in lieu of formal foster parent arrangements. Modest funding is attached.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CP</td>
<td>Child protection</td>
<td>A common way to refer to child protection services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dogwood</td>
<td>BC high school diploma</td>
<td>Named after the BC provincial tree, the Dogwood is the official name of the diploma awarded to those who complete grade 12.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full term</td>
<td>Note</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DTES</td>
<td>Downtown Eastside</td>
<td>Known as the poorest postal code in Canada this small area adjacent to historic Chinatown and on the historic main street of Vancouver is a gathering place for people with many social issues, including addictions. Although street sex work is scattered throughout other neighbourhoods, there is a street sex trade here in addition to an open drug trade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAPD</td>
<td>Employment Assistance for Persons with Disabilities</td>
<td>Income assistance administered under a separate act from income assistance, but through the same offices (2001).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Vancouver</td>
<td>East Vancouver</td>
<td>Technically the half of the city east of the dividing line of Main St. More colloquially this is used to refer to the northeast sector of the city, distinguishing it from the largely residential mid-east and southeast sectors. In common usage the term refers to the part of the city that starts where the business district ends, which is a few blocks west of Main St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAW</td>
<td>Employment Assistance Worker</td>
<td>Income Assistance Disbursement officer, so named as part of government rhetoric to emphasize employment rather than charity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETW</td>
<td>Expected to Work</td>
<td>One of 3 income assistance status (Expected to Work, PPMB and PWD). This status may be suspended for a variety of reasons (child under 3 years of age, temporary medical, and others)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>A partnership of 27 European nations operating through sets of councils (<a href="http://www.europa.eu">www.europa.eu</a>, 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FMEP</td>
<td>Family Maintenance Enforcement Program</td>
<td>Contracted program which collects child maintenance benefits on behalf of the province</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full term</td>
<td>Note</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GED</td>
<td>General Educational Development</td>
<td>Is accepted as equivalent to a high school diploma, though is generally not sufficient for college or university entrance without further upgrading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GST</td>
<td>Goods and Services Tax</td>
<td>A tax credit is available to low-income families to offset federal sales tax. This is known as the GST credit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GTM</td>
<td>Grounded theory methodology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HDI</td>
<td>Human Development Index</td>
<td>The name given to the national comparative measures of quality of life conducted by the United Nations Development Programme. The HDI is an application of the capabilities measure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HELP</td>
<td>Human Early Learning Partnership</td>
<td>Five-year study gathering data on indicators for every school age child in BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIPPY</td>
<td>Home Instruction Program for Parents and Youth</td>
<td>Similar to Head Start programs in intent; this federal government program is intended to support children at risk of developmental delays.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IA</td>
<td>Income Assistance</td>
<td>When referred to in capital letters, either the provincial program or the Ministry which disburses benefits. In lower case letters, indicating the benefits formerly known as social assistance, or colloquially as welfare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IAP</td>
<td>Income Assistance Project</td>
<td>Project 3.1 of the CHILD MCRI SSHRC funded community-university projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LICO</td>
<td>Low-income cut-off</td>
<td>A relative measure used widely as a poverty line in Canada. The LICO represents the income level below which 1/5 of the Canadian households live. The depth of poverty is sometimes indicated as an absolute measure below the LICO.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCFD</td>
<td>Ministry for Child and Family Development</td>
<td>Although the ministry names regularly change in BC, the ministry responsible for child welfare was called MCFD throughout much of the study period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full term</td>
<td>Note</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCRI</td>
<td>Multi-collaborative Research Initiative</td>
<td>A funding stream from SSHRC, a national funding agency, designed to enable large community-university partnerships. Five year grants. Funding the IAP as part of CHILD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDG</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
<td>Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2000, the MDG set out 8 goals with 21 targets, including reducing deep poverty (less than $1/day), by 2015.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEIA</td>
<td>Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance</td>
<td>Name of ministry responsible for income assistance. Preceded by Ministry of Human Resources (June 16, 2005 – June 23, 2008) - Followed by Ministry of Housing and Social Development (2008-2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAACP</td>
<td>National Association for the Advancement of Colored People</td>
<td>Dating to 1909, the NAACP advocate for civil rights for African Americans in the USA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCB</td>
<td>National Child Benefit</td>
<td>Introduced in 1998 by the federal government, the NCB is income dependent and taxable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
<td>Founded in Europe in 1948 to administer economic recovery after World War II, in 1961 the name became the OECD and today 39 countries, including many with advanced economies and high HDI ratings, comprise an economic development consortium.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPMB</td>
<td>Persons with Persistent Multiple Barriers</td>
<td>One of 3 income assistance status (Expected to Work, PPMB and PWD). Formerly known as Disability I, two year or temporary disability status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full term</td>
<td>Note</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWD</td>
<td>Persons with Disabilities</td>
<td>One of 3 income assistance status (Expected to Work, PPMB and PWD). Formerly known as Disability II, permanent or ongoing disability status.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWORA</td>
<td>Personal Work Opportunity and Responsibility Act</td>
<td>1996 US federal act which introduced welfare reform under the administration of President Clinton.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social assistance</td>
<td>See - Income assistance</td>
<td>When formally referred to, a person hired to provide social or child protection services on behalf of the government, or informally, a person providing social or health supports. Technically, someone who has obtained a Bachelor of Social Work who is certified by the professional body. This is not an income assistance disbursement officer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Worker</td>
<td></td>
<td>A hotel room rented on a weekly or monthly basis, typically at low cost.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRO</td>
<td>Single room occupancy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSHRC</td>
<td>Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council</td>
<td>One of three national research funding streams, the other two being focussed on health and the natural sciences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUFA</td>
<td>Social Union Transfer Agreement</td>
<td>Replaced the CAP as a funding transfer mechanism between the federal government and the provinces in 1996.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TANF</td>
<td>Temporary Assistance to Needy Families</td>
<td>Federal US program which replaced AFDC in 1996 under PWORA legislation. TANF ended direct federal policy by disbursing block grants to the states, which were expected to set their own policy within a federal framework of penalties and bonuses for meeting federal caseload objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full term</td>
<td>Note</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Sector</td>
<td>Third sector  Third system</td>
<td>In North America, generally referring to not-for-profit organizations. In Europe, this may also include for-profit organizations that purposefully earn income, which is wholly dedicated to supporting social issues. Third sector may also include faith-based organizations and grassroots advocacy organizations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCB</td>
<td>Universal Child Benefit</td>
<td>Distributed monthly at $100 per child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare</td>
<td>See: BC Benefits, GAIN, Income assistance, MEIA, MHR, PWORA, TANF</td>
<td>Also known as social assistance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have been surrounded by a stellar group of colleagues, mentors and friends. I could not have written a feminist dissertation without the whole-hearted support of my advisor, Dr. Penny Gurstein. Through my many life challenges, she kept the wind at my back and made the journey possible. Her concise insight was often prescient. My committee members, Drs. Nora Angeles and Annette Browne applied extremely able expertise to help me to shape my lump of clay.

I am particularly grateful to have been well-funded, initially as a research assistant to the Income Assistance Project (IAP). The IAP was embedded in a rich interdisciplinary, cross-university community partnership. The team members provided excellent insight and leadership.

- Dr. Penny Gurstein, UBC, Principal Investigator (2003-2006)
- Michael Goldberg, Research Director of the Social Planning Council of BC
- Dr. Sylvia Fuller, UBC
- Dr. Jo-Anne Fiske, University of Lethbridge, Northern project lead
- Dr. Dara Culhane, SFU
- Dr. Jane Pulkingham, SFU, Principal Investigator (2007-2008)
- Seth Klein, Director of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives in BC
- Dr. Paul Kershaw, UBC
- Research Assistants (graduate): Suzy Blown, Laverne Gervais, Jenny Haw, and Jillian Stockburger; (undergraduate) Tatiana Gadjalova.

Thanks are due to the people and funders involved in three stages of my attempts to obtain data. The opportunity to use the IAP data in northern BC disappeared due to the actual policy dilemmas we were studying. I was supported by my advisor to pursue similar data in northern the northeast of BC. I was supported for three years by the Michael Smith Health Research Foundation (Partnership Grant), the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and, later, a thesis grant from the Human Early Learning Partnership. I learned a great deal about northern research from the people of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organizations with whom I engaged in my field work. I extend a sincere thanks to Lynn Locher and the Fort St. John Early Childhood Table, Dr. Charls Bandenhorst, the Medical Officer of the Northeast Division of Northern Health, Connie Kaweesi, Chair of Academic Programs at Northern Lights College, and
Dr. Orland Wilkerson, Northeast Liaison for the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC). A scholarship in rural studies offered by the Public Health and Agriculture Rural Ecosystems group (University of Saskatoon) offered me an incredible learning experience. When the Northern project encountered community barriers, a finishing grant from the College for Interdisciplinary Studies, UBC, helped me to complete the dissertation presented here.

The School of Community and Regional Planning has been an interdisciplinary home to me on my quest to ground social planning. A great collection of Masters and Ph.D. students shared their professional development and aspirations; hopeful, optimistic, visionary, resolute, and community minded. I owe thanks to those of my own cohort year, but all my fellow Ph.D. students have been great colleagues and friends. The grounded theory club at the University of Victoria provided an expert sounding board, as did my two partners-in-crime there, Will Weigler and Darlaine Jantzen. Lastly, I must thank two special mentors; Dr. John Friedmann, who challenged me to be clear and bold in my commitment to equity, and Dr. Leonie Sandercock, Ph.D. Program chair, who applied her considerable scholarship to hearing what I really said.

Finally, I must thank my family for their support. My partner, Lori Wanamaker, has supported me generously and kindly while facing increasingly demanding duties in her work. Our daughter, Kala Vilches, grew into a beautiful and strong young woman while I was in graduate school. My parents Sherrolyn and Harry Ferguson, and Oscar and Christine Vilches, have supported me and been inspirations; thank you. I would also like to acknowledge, the passing of my daughter’s father, three grandmothers, my stepfather, my brother, an uncle and several great-aunts. In addition, there have been some serious illnesses among other family members, but also delights in the births of two new nephews. Whatever a family is, it is a source of joy, worry, love and camaraderie. I hope the love I received is reflected here.
FOREWORD

Over twenty years ago I was working as a community advocate on poverty issues, and I became frustrated with the inability to publicly communicate the message that welfare was not enough. The consequences could be extremely dire. The year my daughter was two years old, a lone mother took her children into a field, doused them with gasoline and set fire to the field. One child lived as I recall, and the rest died, including the woman. My child was the same age as one of her daughters; I knew the intensity of struggling to be a good parent. Though I do not know that particular woman’s struggles, through my advocacy work, I met many people, Aboriginal like her, and otherwise, who struggled daily with experiences of deep poverty in the context of a society that has plenty. It made the struggle to be a good parent that much harder.

To speak about poverty in a nation that rates in the top five for quality of life among all countries (United Nations Development Programme, 2008) is to talk about a humanitarian crisis, although that is not the way it is publicly framed in Western liberal democracies. Dire poverty is an unfortunate reality in the Global South, but it is not admitted to in the Global North. This denial is, itself, a problem, and makes the current End Poverty campaign in Canada seem faintly ridiculous, like a consumer advertisement to subscribe to yet one more unneeded thing. Twenty years ago, however, welfare was less restrictive. The challenges that would be faced by impoverished lone parents are much worse today. The benefits have less scope, the distribution amounts are the same as they were twenty years ago though the cost of living is higher, and the regulations for eligibility are tighter. Many benefits which were allowed, like going back to school to get a grade 12 equivalency, to learn to speak English, or to get higher education, are now prohibited. At the same time, the economy has changed; there are fewer well-paying jobs, fewer union jobs, and less job security. Pillaging the environment has exhausted BC’s natural
resources, and forestry and fishing, principal economic drivers and major political funders, have become marginal players. For women, family wages were always difficult to obtain, but the increase in employment insecurity combined with liberation of family forms has meant that women must work to support families; and the work they have is more precarious. Governments seem to be focussed on the race for global competitiveness, even if this drives domestic salaries down and makes individuals less economically secure.

The advocacy community, by which I include national organizations as well as local, has been unable to effect change in the political climate of Canada, except in the province of Quebec, where social support programs are seen as part of the nationalistic need to sustain the francophone population. However, even Quebec has not escaped the increasing income disparity of Canada. In the twenty years since I worked as an advocate, food banks have become an institution and child poverty has deepened. The flow of Aboriginal people to urban areas, part of a larger trend of rural to urban flow, has brought the poorest of the poor to Canadian cities. Today a significant proportion of children grow up in lone parent families, and these children are statistically more likely to be poor. The consequence of the neoliberal orientation toward global competitiveness has been that we are raising future generations in poverty. All the early childhood indicators point to a lifetime of disadvantage accruing from income inequality and poverty in childhood. We may be investing in a divided future; we may be utilizing the assets of today in a way that exhausts the capacity of our society to be resilient in the future. Meanwhile, it seems that city planners are ineffectively mopping up the impacts of policies set at higher levels of government. My own community advocacy work ended years ago, but I continue to search for the deeper roots of our social inability to address poverty. I heed Howell Baum (2010), a planning theoretician who has drawn our attention to the possible psychological drivers of our
need to set the poor aside as different, but I hope that this dissertation may explore some of the practical possibilities for reimagining a theoretically informed social planning response to poverty.
DEDICATION

I honour the 17 women who shared their stories with us, so that we may understand how welfare really feels.
CHAPTER I – PLANNING RESPONSES TO LONE MOTHERS’ POVERTY

Poverty is one of the traditional standing “problems” of urban planning, dating farther back than Jane Addams and the development of the Hull House collective settlement house model in Chicago in the 1880s (Hull House, 1970; Thomas, 1999). Planners continue to be interested in how land use planning techniques distribute the impoverished and help or trap them in the process (Dávila, 2004, 1987; Ruddick, 1996; Watson, 2009) and how neighbourhoods and urban (and rural) spaces are shaped by the social composition of their residents along gender, class and other divides (see, for example Borbridge, 2007; Fenster, 2005; Lykogianni, 2008).

These concerns reflect an interest in local and place-based quality of life, in the disadvantages experienced by some, and in the contribution of the diverse humanity which makes up the cityscape to the whole of urban vitality. Contemporary challenges of poverty in Canada arise from increasing income disparity, changing family forms, and the rising interest in social investment perspectives on poverty amelioration.

One of the newer demographic trends in poverty and inequality has been the growth of female-headed lone-parent households. The proportion of Canadian families with children that are headed by female lone parents has risen from 10% in 1971, to 16% in 1986, and then to 20% in 2001 (Statistics Canada, 2006), where it has stabilized. Lone parents are now a permanent feature of the social landscape, which is both an interesting development and a concern because they constitute a class with persistent poverty. According to 1998 figures, 39% of female-headed lone parent families live below Canada’s low-income cut-off (LICO) (Kapsalis & Tourigny, 2002). In 2003, the proportion of female-headed lone parent households living in poverty after-
tax\textsuperscript{2} was 38\%, comparing unfavourably to an average poverty rate for two-parent households of 7\% and for male-headed lone-parent families at 13\% (Statistics Canada, 2006). The average income, before government transfers, for low-income (working and non-working) mothers was $3,012, compared to $25,656 for non-low-income lone mothers, with the non-low income average being approximately half the average income for all family types (Kapsalis & Tourigny, 2002). The advocacy group First Call notes that on minimum wage of $10.26/hr a single person would have to work 40 hours a week for 52 weeks a year, to surpass the LICO; the actual minimum wage in BC when welfare reforms were introduced in 2002 was the lowest in Canada at $8/hr (First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, 2008).

Lone-parent families have been one of the population groups strongly affected by neoliberal welfare restructuring. Unemployed lone-parent families are dependent on government transfers, known as welfare, or officially as social assistance. Welfare reform has swept what may be called the “Global North”. Governments in all five of the Western Anglo nations – Great Britain, the United States, Canada, New Zealand and Australia – have implemented sets of reforms that have reduced rates, restricted access, increased conditions for receipt of benefits, altered the structure of delivery, and changed the intended outcomes from support to employment engagement. While the nature of reforms may be roughly collected under the rubric of neoliberalism or Third Way reform, there are important differences between the models and

\textsuperscript{2} Several distinctions are important: 20\% of all families (households) are lone-parent families; but 25\% of all families \textit{with children} are headed by lone-parent families. Of all lone-parent families, approximately 80\% are headed by women, indicating that 16\% of \textit{all families} are female-headed lone-parent families. Before tax transfers, the gross poverty rate is much higher than after tax and government pension transfers, including welfare. The LICO is a relative measure; that is, the measure is that which one-fifth of Canadian households live below. Nevertheless, it is used as a poverty line. The depth of poverty is sometimes indicated as an absolute amount above or below the LICO.
the way they are adopted within different national contexts. In Canada which is known for its distributed federalism, welfare is administered under provincial jurisdiction. This arrangement leaves municipalities like the city of Vancouver to respond to needs which are not met by income disbursements.

The challenges are not just substantive in the sense of presenting a quantitative change in income support levels: critical analysis suggests that neoliberal welfare reform is fundamentally changing, in gendered ways, the social contract established in the twentieth century after the two World Wars (Brodie, 2002b; Mayer, 2008; McDonald & Marston, 2005). The surge in assignment of responsibility to those on welfare operates under a neoliberal rubric of taking responsibility for opportunity, or what is called “citizen activation.” However, if activation is the explicit policy focus, then the question arises of who or what lies in the shadows, or, in other words, what inactivity might be why active (Jenson & Saint-Martin, 2003; Lewis & Giullari, 2005; Skevik, 2005). Kershaw, Pulkingham and Fuller (2008), for example, point out that the gendered nature of care work ensures that the focus on employment as a definition of activation overlooks the lack of engagement of men in domestic work.

Further, the logics of neoliberal reforms extend to policies which encourage volunteering and punish lack of volunteer participation on the premise that those who are not economically engaged are not busy (Fuller, Pulkingham, & Kershaw, 2008). Given the nature of responsibilities that fall to women, such expectations are, Breitkreuz (2005) argues, altering the kind of support women can expect from the state and therefore gendering the nature of citizenship. Others go further in arguing that such policies are engendering social exclusion, particularly when policies take the approach of “social investment” which focusses on the future utility of social expenditures (Good-Gingrich, 2008; Jenson & Saint-Martin, 2003). At debate is
a conceptualization of the citizen as a neutral, decontextualized being without responsibilities versus a situated, contextualized understanding of inequality within a political economy.

By focusing on traditional areas such as transportation or land use planning, or what is called “town planning” in the British tradition, planning theory and practice have neglected policy developments at upper levels of government, especially in areas of social infrastructure like welfare reform, education, social supports and health that are affecting the local urban context (Goldsmith & Blakely, 2010; Webb, 2008). A new and perhaps more coherent framing of how land use planning practice can respond to the shifting political landscape and contribute proactively to shaping the social infrastructure of the city, much as Mannheim called for in the early part of the twentieth century (1940).

1.1 Social Planning Responses to Neoliberal Welfare Reform

Reflecting on the way mainstream planning theories have been taken up in the Global South, Watson (2009) argues that planners have failed to take account of the proliferation of the urban poor and informal settlements, and therefore failed to keep up with the global reconfiguration of cities as they change from planned (formal) to unplanned (informal), as well as with the economy as it becomes predominantly informal. Miraftab and Wills (2005) use the framework of insurgent planning to look at responses to neoliberal restructuring in the informal settlements of South Africa, suggesting that active citizenship needs to be reconceptualised to fit an empowered notion of the citizen. A similar argument about the lack of attention to the changing face of the impoverished in the field of planning could be made in countries of the Global North (Goldsmith & Blakely, 2010). Nussbaum’s perspective on gender equity and the capabilities framework (Fainstein, 2010; Nussbaum, 2006), or Chant’s (2007) questioning of the
specific dynamics of the feminization of poverty across various population differences internationally could also enrich the development of planning theorizing in the Global North.

The theoretical challenges to planning may be organized as the need for (a) substantive knowledge for planning, (b) theory about the nature of planning, and (c) theory of planning practice (Friedmann, 2003). In looking at social planning responses to the poverty of lone parents, the challenges translate to a lack of accessible and relevant subject-based knowledge about neoliberal reform and its effect on lone-parent families. In addition, in spite of a very few models which are available (Friedmann, 1992), there is a need for theorizing frames of planning paradigms which could be relevant to social planning. Finally, there is a need for a coherent theory of planning practices in social planning.

Between theorizing from macro-economic data to planning for specific communities and neighbourhoods, better theory and information would enable more tailored and effective responses. A response to the first challenge must acknowledge that Canada is among countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) with the highest growth in income disparity (OECD, 2008). In addition, the specific context of BC has unique challenges as a multicultural and geographically diverse region with a growing urban Aboriginal population. Census-level data indicates that income disparity is increasing for lone mothers; that they have disproportionately low incomes and that dependency on state grants is growing (BC Stats, 2006). These broad indicators need to be understood further, though, because, as Chant (2007) argues, income measures may obscure other dynamics, including ways that at least some sectors of women are thriving. Challenging the view of impoverished lone parents also opens the way to acknowledging the vital contribution that low-income female parents make to civic life.
The second challenge to social planning in BC arises from the lack of a coherent theory or concept of social planning. BC has a robust practice of social planning, which is embedded in local governments, in addition to charitable agencies and provincially funded ‘third sector’ services. However, a lack of coherent theorization about these practices in planning means that frameworks used in other planning applications, like collaborative or communicative planning, must be adapted to the challenges of theoretically understanding how to address lone mothers’ needs or incorporating the benefits of having this family form in communities. As a result, part of the theoretical challenge is to establish an inquiry that can suggest ways of conceptualizing a robust local government practice of social planning. Such a schema must have ways of thinking about successful interactions with other stakeholders in as yet undocumented social planning arenas.

The third challenge that this dissertation may address is the ways the scope, scale and style of social planning responses to lone mothers’ poverty are imagined. A range of planning traditions are available, which address change and the making of the future, from insurgent practices, to social learning and scientific management (Friedmann, 1987). This dissertation will explore the use of place-based knowledge to move beyond reaction to poverty toward practices that address the structure-agency dilemmas inherent in state-supported family life. Developing a meta-narrative, or story, about how lone mothers are present as a subject or object of planning could support a dialogue between the disparate fields of critical feminist research and planning research. Supporting a better dialogue might help generate a set of tools that could integrate social planning practice with other planning practices to meet the needs of lone parent families.

The three challenges collectively shift the focus away from substantive issues to the intention and suitability of employing certain tools and processes, whether social and income
supports, as is the practice now, or something new. Questioning the current paradigm of delivery requires a broad vision of justice, and the intent to lay the foundations for a new, truly post-modern vision of a society. What Sandercock (2003) sometimes styles the “mongrel city,” is a city that is deliberatively co-created with processes inside and outside traditional institutional frameworks; Sandercock looks to the re-lying of narrative as a foundational work in this epistemic project, but the outcome is a society understood to rest on a bed of constantly co-created and shifting dialogues. An inquiry into lone motherhood based on this approach would first of all ask what narrative is at work, what we mean when we look to the construction of lone motherhood, and the material positioning of lone mothers as a disadvantaged group. Sandercock and Attili’s (2010) recent work investigates the ways in which colonialism has created two side-by-side communities, a context which occurs throughout BC and Canada’ north. What, she asks, would a healing narrative be that would change this story and begin to bring about change? We could similarly ask what narrative would invite lone parent families into communities as equal and honoured partners.

1.2 Gender Sensitive Approaches in Social Planning

Addressing the invisibility of lone parents in urban settings requires the development or adoption of a framework that can not only address the object, or subject, of the emergence of lone-parent families, but that can also serve as a practice framework in an inter- and intra-institutionalized setting. The widespread practice of social planning in Canada is fragmented into specific subjects of practice at the urban level, such as affordable housing, revitalization of public spaces, youth engagement, services for seniors, and recreation. Gender approaches in social planning are neither comprehensively nor deeply theorized at the level of social planning in Canada, although the ethical guidelines of the Canadian Institutes of Planning do direct
planners to attend to inequity. Several foci on gender or diversity in planning offer possibilities for framing a normative view, although they have different epistemological implications.

The first approach is built on a tradition, though somewhat thin and discontinuous, of gender-based approaches in planning. The gender-mainstreaming policy adopted by the European Union and taken up by Great Britain might be seen as one potentially applicable approach (Jenson, 2008; Lewis, 1997). Gender mainstreaming invites consideration of how to measure outcomes as well as how to move from theory to practice. As Greed, Davies, Brown, and Dühr (2002) note:

Gender mainstreaming goes beyond just ‘equality’ as defined as ‘treating everyone the same’, or traditional ‘women and planning’ initiatives, because it takes into account the different ways of life and daily travel patterns of women as against men – and the consequently different land use and development requirements that the planner must address. Gender mainstreaming has implications for men as well as women. (p. 5)

Greed (2002) notes, however, that gender mainstreaming in planning practice and foci have not successfully evidenced a noticeable change in gender-related issues. Perrons (2005) critically investigates neoliberal reforms in Europe and notes that, although gender mainstreaming has been adopted, the scalar interaction of local planning contexts and global economics means that gender inequities are deepened, rather than ameliorated, by reforms. As a result, she suggests that gender mainstreaming needs to be broaden its focus from only outcomes to an examination of the processes that produce inequality. Using Friedmann’s distinctions between planning theory which is about a subject, and planning theory of processes, gender mainstreaming is clearly “about” women as subjects/objects of planning, as well as about women as planners and about structuring the content of planning (Greed, 2005). Gender mainstreaming does have a strong
focus on formal, institutional accountability, though, it demands data gathering to measure progress. In addition, gender mainstreaming offers a model of practice, though Greed notes that if gender mainstreaming means meeting pro forma requirements, it can become a set of tick-boxes because of the complicated nature of processes between multiple players and stakeholders.

The approach to gender equity in international development work is complex and varied, differing between major institutions like the World Bank and UNICEF, as well as in models ranging from ecological approaches, which see women as an integral part of economic development or health development, to normative principles grounded in rights or standards. There is often an ethical precept to approach gender and development with participatory, community-engaging methods, which is based on values and a history of practice-based discovery (Moser, 2003). The goals in these approaches are to engage citizens in making their own solutions, with the theory being that this creates more appropriate and therefore more effective and sustained solutions (Moser, 1993). These principles and approaches are not evident in gender mainstreaming in the “town and country” tradition, perhaps partly because there is more latitude in the focus in international development, but there is no reason why they could not be.

Another approach, not exclusive to studies of gender but perhaps applicable to such issues, is exemplified by Sandercock in her 1998 book Making the Invisible Visible. Sandercock “shines the light” on stories that constitute tales of planning from communities which are often marginalized by mainstream planning, such as queer, Latino/a, and African American communities and women in planning. Through retelling unheard stories of the experiences of these communities, planning is reframed and its definitions broadened to include ways and outlooks which vary between cultures and subcultures. Isin and Ustundag (2008), for example,
detail the way in which the traditional practice of giving by women in Istanbul constructs or co-constructs a formal social structure. Similarly, Fiske (1991) describes, through the stories of Aboriginal Elders, how traditional matriarchal processes of community development that occurred through kinship development were slowly undermined and then actively blocked by colonial policies and practices, demonstrating the central role women had. Hill Collins (1994), who described other-mothering in the African American community, led the way in reframing the work of mothering, linking it to community development and resistance against racialization. These struggles are not necessarily about resolution. Staehaeli (2008) suggests that:

Community is a ‘problem’ not because it is inherently ‘bad,’ but rather, because it is a site where contests are waged over citizenship and the terms of membership in society. Community is . . . the object of struggle in which different moral geographies are imagined. (p. 5)

Surfacing “hidden” planning narratives not only reveals other ways that planning is occurring in communities, it also indicates who is marginalized by the institutions of power that official planning practices represent within society.

Developing narratives may provide a powerful foundation for changing the approach to lone parents but unlike gender mainstreaming, even a foundational narrative does not have an institutional accountability framework, making it more difficult to use as a formal response to neoliberal welfare restructuring. Fainstein (2000) argues that orientation to a clear outcome is necessary for hold planners accountable. However, focussing on hidden narratives offers the strength of focussing on how citizens create their own vision, and, in doing so, provides a blueprint for processes that incorporate citizens as partners, not merely as subjects/objects (Forester, 1999). Incorporating hidden narratives may be particularly applicable to
reconceptualising the role of lone mothers and the changing family, where a large body of work on welfare reform has not been brought into planning theory. Nevertheless, Fainstein (2000; 2005b) urges planners to utilize structural analysis so as to be able to distinguish a “pluralistic, cooperative, and decentralized form of welfare provision (from) the state-centered model of the bureaucratic welfare state” (Fainstein, 2000, p. 473). In other words, she proposes a conscious target that is justice oriented, and suggests that planners have a role in envisioning and setting that target. Both approaches have merit, but the tensions between the two may offer ways to begin to tease out a new vision and practice for incorporating this diverse family form.

Between communicative planning, which focusses on the development of dialogue as a means to justice, and the intensive call to responsibility present in Fainstein’s work, is a debate about belonging and citizenship. Critical feminist commentary on lone motherhood has focussed on the citizenship implications of the new so-called active citizen model (Kortewig, 2006; Skevik, 2005). Jenson and Saint Martin (2003) note that without an equity lens, the European deployment of the social investment model risks doubling the burden on women as they continue to struggle with traditional domestic responsibilities in addition to increased pressure to work. Dual responsibility is a concern in international reviews of global economic restructuring as well (Elson, 2005). However, critical feminist perspectives, while informative about the subject and lending considerable complexity to an understanding of the institutional frameworks that shape impoverished women’s experiences, are unfortunately unconnected to planning practice, especially urban planning, except in international arenas. As Watson (2009) argues, this separation is problematic and speaks to the need for substantive knowledge to inform the practice.
Within the developed-nation context, the question is not only a practical one demanding substantive theory about how to work with a changing citizenry, as outlined in the section on the status of lone parents, but also a problem that demands conceptualization of social planning responses, including their nexus with land use and other forms of city planning. International policy and practice incorporates women’s lived experience as data while utilizing a deep analysis of the socio-structural effects of women’s position in society (Moser, 1993). The challenge in the advanced economy nations may be a lack of information about the status of women’s urban experiences, as Greed (2006) argues, making it difficult to apply a gender lens. However, if planners are to work towards equity and justice, Fainstein (2005a) points out, they not only need the information, they also need to understand how to apply information that is available to them from a variety of disciplines. Feminist critical perspectives, which are present in Fainstein’s references, are premised on incorporating diverse women’s perspectives and gender-sensitive approaches. However, Sandercock, (1998), argues that they require a deeper process of democracy to help lift the invisible experiences of women and other intersecting marginalities out of invisibility. All three approaches, gender mainstreaming, international, and insurgent may be necessary to build a new gender-sensitive practice of social planning in the urban context.

1.3 Critical Feminist Approaches to Social Planning Research

Each of the theoretical and substantive approaches to gender-sensitive planning would have its own compatibilities with a critical feminist perspective. As an example of a critical feminist inquiry into a social planning issue, Naples’ (1998) ethnographic retrospective study of African American women who were employed under the American War on Poverty program

---

3 The U.S. “War on Poverty”, initiated with the *Economic Opportunity Act* (1964) under the Johnson administration, utilized principles of empowerment to help develop human capital in
provides an example of a critical feminist perspective on a social planning policy. A variety of acts and programs were targeted at assisting impoverished inner-city women, who were often lone mothers and who occupied positions of socialized marginalization because of racialization or other systemic disadvantages (ibid). Naples looked at whether the support of leadership made a positive impact on these women or their communities or families, not by developing a deductive leadership framework, but by looking to the women as authoritative sources of information about the subject of inquiry. Naples (2003), drawing on the work of D. Smith (1987) and Hartsock (1983) among others, deliberately and specifically focuses on everyday experience, to inductively develop new categories of inquiry and new research questions. A long perspective illuminates the tensions between the War on Poverty policy, which was designed to address individual and community empowerment through specific local programming, the way the policy shifted over time, and the community and women’s perspectives on their intentions and goals.

In Naples’ study, the approach and assumptions about authorship are consistent with the goals of a method of inquiry in which storying contextualizes meaning and reveals the tensions between social issues, policy goals, and the socially mediated experience of citizenry (Forester, 1989; Throgmorton, 2003). In Naples’ study, relevant to the questions posed here, the way the program worked and impacted recipients is revealed by focussing on the experiential interface. Though the focus on experience may mitigate gathering information about organizational structures, and focussing on the actors, such as provincial representatives, and neighbourhood impoverished cities, targeting racial minorities, principally African Americans, in an attempt to address structural and systemic poverty at a time of social unrest (Fox Piven, 2002; Mayer, 2008; Naples, 1998; Pearce, 1990). Although many modifications were made over two decades, the era of the program is considered to have ended with the introduction of the neoliberal reform of the welfare act, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996.
settings, this provides a way to compare the interactive effects of a range of stakeholders. As with Naples study, a small scale qualitative study has the potential to reveal how lone parents interact in their urban environment beyond the institutional frames of the policy delivery system.

The assumption behind investigations into everyday experience is that agency matters for understanding how change occurs and the impact that welfare restructuring is having on the lone-parent family form (Elliott, 2002). A second assumption is that women are authors of their own lives and, as free citizens, have the right and the wherewithal to disagree with state directives. While this seems obvious from a research point of view, Williams, Popay and Oakley (1999) point out that much welfare research focuses on how individuals cope with poverty, how they survive, what conditions surround their existence, and how they exit welfare or transition to paid work. Williams, Popay and Oakley (1999) suggest that a critical inquiry must also include perspectives on how women resist, fail to comply, or use frames of reference which are broader than just welfare policy. Examining the frame of welfare or even poverty is particularly important for Aboriginal women and women of colour, for whom welfare, poverty and historical disadvantage form an interwoven arena of disadvantage. If agency is important for the substantive understanding of impacts, then the close study of the minutia of everyday experience helps to overturn categories that have been developed out of perspectives, like the coping perspective, which carry assumptions that confirm those categories (D. Smith, 1974, 1987). My goal is to understand how women’s resistance and action act as counterbalances to state restraints, as well as to use an understanding of agency to move beyond the traditional concepts that local governments use to work with the impoverished. This should help to reconceptualise ways that social planning may respond to a gendered understanding of human habitation, as suggested by Fainstein and Servon (2005).
1.4 Research Problem Statement and Questions

Focusing on agency positions the focus of this inquiry on the way women’s responsibilities as parents and their rights as individuals are conceptualized within neoliberal formats of income assistance policies. The research questions prioritize women’s resistance to and subversion of neoliberal welfare policies in order to understand how agency can affect the structure-agency dynamic and inform better local social planning.

1.4.1 Research Questions

How does the current restructuring of state welfare systems, as evidenced in changes in income assistance policies, mould, constrain and direct the future life possibilities for lone mothers and their children?

a) How do the context of place and the constraints of material conditions interact with income assistance policies to affect lone mothers’ agency and resistance to create a future they want for themselves and their children?

b) How do lone mothers interrogate, resist and subvert the gaps and limitations of income assistance policies affecting their lives and the lives of their children?

c) What are the implications for social planning and policy reform of understanding lone mothers’ resistance and agency in efforts of creating a future they want for themselves and their children?

1.5 Structure of the Dissertation: Looking Forward

The structure of the dissertation follows the format for developing an inductive argument. Deductively developed research designs often begin with a theoretical question or framework which is then tested (Creswell, 2003, p. 119). However, in much qualitative research, or what Polkinghorne (2007) calls “reform” approaches, the use of theory is more varied. Creswell
(2003) notes that in some methodologies, a discussion of relevant theories may be presented first, forming a theoretical lens which grounds and guides the inquiry. In this dissertation, I have employed two qualitative methods, which both work inductively, as a mixed qualitative methodology. Using these narrative and grounded theory methodologies to investigate the structure-agency relationship outlined in the research questions means that the analysis itself takes an inductive approach. In order to set the context for this exploration, the dissertation starts in a traditional manner with a review of extant literature, but then the structure follows the lead of the analysis, building through the analysis to answer the questions.

Part 1 of the dissertation includes a review of contemporary literature that is relevant to the research questions. After laying out social planning dilemmas in chapter 1, the neoliberal third way and social investment approaches to poverty alleviation are explored in the first half of chapter 2. Each of these frames describes a different approach to the problem of poverty. In the second half of chapter 2 I explore lessons learned from studying women on welfare, including sex trade workers who have also been affected by neoliberal reforms. The concepts from chapter 2 are then applied, in chapter 3, to a review of the case of BC welfare reform.

Chapter 4 outlines a critical approach to the topic of welfare reform and lone mothers’ resistance. In this chapter, the concepts of resistance, agency and survivance are explored. Survivance is a broader concept than resistance, referring to cultural movements.\(^4\) It is used here to help expand the focus of resistance by critically examining the potential object of resistance. The last chapter of part 1 reviews the methodology used to answer the research questions,

\(^4\) Survivance is also used as an organizing concept in Indigenous post-colonial discourse (Stromberg, 2006; Vizenor & Lee, 1999; Wolfe, 2008), and it has also been picked up by Hill Collins, the scholar of African-American mothering. In this latter application, survivance describes Hill Collins’ (1994) theoretical development of alternate conceptions of mothering in the face of culturally based discrimination.
starting with the data. The data were derived from a longitudinal qualitative study of the impacts of welfare reform on 17 lone mothers living in East Vancouver. Thus the outline of the design is a review of both the project and the treatment of it through what is framed as secondary analysis. The chapter describes my involvement with the project, the approach taken by the team, and then the analytical method and research questions used by me to analyze the data.

Part 2 of the dissertation discusses the findings and includes the conclusion. There is a brief introduction to part 2 which presents an “executive summary” of the main conclusion. Chapter 6 utilizes the cross-sectional strength of grounded theory methodology and introduces the women’s struggles in the context of material constraint. Chapter 7 focusses on how dreaming of a future gives meaning to the participants’ survival activities. In chapter 8, I focus on the ways public and private domains are being rewritten by the struggles of lone mothers, even while neoliberal restructuring simultaneously attempts to shape society. I then conclude with implications for understanding the way welfare reform implements a gendered restructuring of urban life.

The final commentary, in chapter 9, is a reflection on the implications of understanding women’s resistance for the theoretical frames of about and for social planning, following the framework Friedmann (2003) laid out for theorizing planning. I look at the relevance of the findings for better understanding potential interventions in the context of BC welfare reform. I conclude by discussing the implications for understanding women’s resistance and place making, suggesting that understanding the two in combination may be highly productive for articulating more localized responses to the problem of the poverty of lone mothers and neoliberal welfare reform.
CHAPTER 2 – THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON NEOLIBERAL WELFARE REFORM AND LONE MOTHERS

In this chapter I will review some of the gender critiques of welfare reform, concepts of poverty, and problems identified by studying lone mothers in receipt of government assistance. Welfare reform occupies a very particular moment in Western democracies; women’s positions in society are changing, as is the family form. However, there are several models or trends in welfare reform models, which each frame the challenge of poverty differently and potentially impact women differently. This review provides frames with which to understand the kind of welfare reform approach that was taken in BC, and some of the experiences lone mothers have had elsewhere with reform. Consistent with critical feminist approaches, the material presented here is deliberately approached as a contested topic, unstable and subject to power dynamics inherent in research activity (Campbell & Gregor, 2004; Clarke, 2005; Payne & Payne, 2004).

Three modes of welfare reform which have been implemented in Western democracies, so-called Third Way, neo-liberal, and social investment models, are reviewed to establish a basis for contextualizing the BC reforms. These approaches to poverty alleviation are then contrasted with the capabilities model used at the international level, which I argue also offers a possible additional avenue for welfare reform in developed nation democracies. This review introduces the importance of defining poverty, as each model defines the problem of poverty differently. Each model also differently addresses what is called “the responsibility mix” between public and private, with implications for gender equity. In particular, Skevik (2005) has noted that lone parents, burdened with the necessity of caring for others, must manage even in the context of systemic marginalization and make an excellent critical indicator for the sufficiency of welfare supports. The challenge is to adequately conceptualize agency, so after reviewing the critiques of
welfare reform (in this chapter), and how they apply to the BC case (in the next chapter), concepts of agency and resistance will be reviewed in chapter 4.

2.1 Neoliberalism and Third Way as Welfare Reform

The current era of welfare reform can be traced to the early 1980s when the governments of England and Germany simultaneously abandoned the structural approaches of left-of-centre parties in what has since been identified as the “Third Way” (Hudson, Hwang, and Kuhner, 2008). The neoliberal movement, emerging out of the Washington consensus on structural debt crisis, has intersected with the Third Way to give a particular shape to welfare reform (Morgen & Maskovsky, 2003). Through these movements, the liberal commitment to equality has been exchanged for individualized equality of opportunity (Armstrong, 2003). Various models of welfare reform may be characterized by their approach to macroeconomic risk, which takes various approaches to economic liberalization as a response to individual economic insecurity (Fox Piven, 2002). The resulting models may be characterized as three orientations to risk that reorganize governments’ relationships to citizens (Hudson, Hwang, & Kuhner, 2008).

The first orientation to risk focusses on the national need to remain globally economically competitive by maintaining a responsive labour pool. Critics argue that trading flexibility against labour security undermines labour costs by attempting to compete with parts of the globe where individuals earn vastly disparate wages in very different conditions (Fox Piven, 2002). The second two orientations to risk affect the activities of government as well as policy objectives. The second response to risk occurs when states abandon the attempt to micro-manage citizenry and shift to monitoring (and demanding) processes of engagement (Hudson, Hwang, & Kuhner, 2008). The third orientation to risk arises from the way Third Way reform focusses on the risk for the global flight of capital by shifting from Keynesian demand side management to a supply
side management, focussing on training instead of income supports. These last two orientations to risk achieve their ends by reforming government practices (Hudson, Hwang, & Kuhner, 2008). Some of the tools used to accomplish these ends include reducing the cost of production by reforming tax structures, reducing the size of bureaucracy to manage expense, and assisting with preparing the workforce to be responsive to global labour needs. Income security is replaced with a staggered set of incentives which are intended to enable citizens to find their own way into employment. However, the hoped-for results overlook systemic disadvantage because all citizens are assumed to have an equal ability to be engaged in social learning, equal access to the machineries of government and economy, and to reap equal rewards, even though this is not the case (Jenson, 2008).

2.1.1 Comparative Analysis of Welfare Reform

Cross national comparisons reveal ways in which the impacts of welfare reforms can vary according to the kind of national orientations to citizen welfare, by orientation to economic risk, and by the tools used to accomplish ends. Esping-Anderson (1990) named three welfare regime types: the continental European countries which preference family supports, the Scandinavian countries which preference labour engagement, and the former Anglo British colonies (USA, Canada, New Zealand and Australia) which preference engagement with the private sector instead of social support. However, over time Esping-Anderson’s typology has come under critique for ignoring important within-nation differences that matter to welfare reform (Fuller, Pulkingham, & Kershaw, 2008).

One of the differences between policy regimes concerns the eligibility and rationale for qualifying as a recipient. Fox Piven (2002) points out that few countries have restricted eligibility as stringently or dropped rates as drastically as the USA, whereas in the OECD strong
rhetoric about social investment rationalizes expenditures to improve labour pool quality.
Contrasting Canada with the USA highlights the way eligibility varies by household type.
Depending on the state, lone adults in the USA may only be eligible for limited supports like shelter beds or Food Stamp programs (Human Resources Development Canada, 2001; Schram, 1995), whereas in Canada, even under neoliberal reform, citizens are still universally eligible. Information about baseline conditions and specific reforms adds important information to regime typecasting, and shows that countries with similar reforms may achieve outcomes which are quite different because of the interaction of specific starting conditions and policies.

Comparisons between support programs for education and work training further illustrate the difference these policy details make. In Australia, an Anglo model country, lone mothers are permitted to collect income assistance without expectations for work until the youngest child in the house reaches the age of 16. Somewhat similarly, mothers in the UK may opt into training programs, and although many do, they are not penalized if they do not (Millar & Gardiner, 2004). New Zealand, similar to Australia, has voluntary participation in work retraining schemes for lone mothers, as does Norway, even though Esping-Anderson places these countries in different regime types (Skevik, 2005). Strell and Duncan (2001) point out that countries seldom achieve supports for parenting and employment engagement simultaneously, so the balance between voluntary and forced employment participation may be more significant for lone parents. Both Clasen (2000) and Skevik (2005) agree that allowing recipients to choose their training engagements constitutes a more important point for differentiating policy approaches than the regime types Esping-Anderson identified.

Analyzing welfare reform by looking at the distribution of responsibilities across the state, the economic market, and individual citizens highlights another facet of welfare reform;
the way responsibilities have been shifted to the private or economic sector (Evers, Pilj, & Ungerson, 1994). Using a rubric which Evers, Pilj and Ungerson initially developed, later called the welfare diamond after Jenson and Saint Martin (2003) added the social service sector, reveals the way welfare reform serves other objectives, such as economic reform, or resolves state or province level politics. (See Figure 1 The Welfare Diamond). In this diagram, the four sectors of the state/government, the market/economy, the third sector, or social services, and the community/kin are depicted as realms of society in productive tension with each other.

Neoliberal objectives aim to rebalance the role of government, as seen in Figure 2 Rebalancing the Welfare Diamond, and welfare reform produces a particular alteration the relationships between the sectors, or realms, in specific ways. For example, the 1996 welfare reform in the USA\(^5\) resolved a problem which arose in 1969 when a court order struck the ability of states to tie welfare eligibility to residency (Schram, 1995). State legislators were loath to raise welfare rates out of fear of becoming “welfare magnets” to potential border crossers. The 1996 welfare reform delegated responsibility for welfare policy to the individual states permitting them to pay lower rates to out-of-state residents again. Thus administrative organization was used to end universality for US citizens, also demonstrating the way that shifting responsibility resolves market issues, in this case of labour mobility. Looking at the distribution of responsibility demonstrates the way social citizenship is being reshaped in service of economic objectives even though it changes the boundaries of social inclusion for all citizens.

---

\(^{5}\) In 1996 the Personal Work Opportunities and Responsibility Act (PWORA) replaced the federal distribution of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) with block grants to the states, which then assumed direct policy responsibility (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, or TANF).
As opposed to neoliberal reform, which emphasizes individual responsibility for economic engagement, a shift toward what is called a social investment model has been led by European nations (Lewis, 1997) and by organizations such as the World Bank (Human Resources Development Canada, 2001). Social investment approaches focus on investing in human capital, as a way of lowering barriers for trade. The implication for governance is that direct provision of services is replaced with a focus on preparation for achievement. This shifts the focus to future measurable outcomes, distancing government from responsibility for individual well-being.

Focussing on labour readiness, however, implies that some citizens have more potential for return from investment than others (Jenson & Saint-Martin, 2003; Kershaw & Long, 2003). For example, the very young become attractive targets for expenditure because of the lifetime benefits that may accrue from modest investment, though the context of early childhood, such as poverty, may also be ignored (Kershaw & Long, 2003). Similar to the neoliberal model, the social investment model curtails universal benefits, using the potential return for investment in

---

**Figure 1 Welfare Diamond Showing Neoliberal Reform (After Jenson and Saint Martin, 2003)**

![Welfare Diamond Showing Neoliberal Reform](image-url)
human capital as the metric. Social investment programs in the EU have been accompanied by mechanisms that increasingly erase structural differences tied to gender by substituting a focus on accommodating and including diversity (Jenson, 2008). The social investment model is thus another model of welfare reform that threatens gender equity (Lewis, 1997).

Among the concerns with the neoliberal shift of the responsibility mix for citizenship well-being toward the private sector of the economy are the attendant consequences for gender equity, for preventing the growth of inequity, and for social inclusion and exclusion (Evers & Laville, 2004; Evers, Pilj, & Ungerson, 1994; Jenson & Saint-Martin, 2003). As universal entitlements are abandoned, a logic of individualism in which people are assumed to be responsible for their own well-being and life paths is normalized (Leitner, Sheppard, Sziarto, & Maringanti, 2007). One of the tensions that emerges from a focus on individuals, is the extent to which difference fractures a sense of social solidarity and collective identity (Brodie, 2002b). Identifying citizenship with market engagement has the potential to demarcate the relationship of the citizen to the state according to economic status, which also occurs along gender lines and intersects with other structural and historical disadvantages.

2.1.2 Critical Perspectives on Citizen Activation Policies

Rebalancing responsibilities between state and the market has been shaped through what have been called citizen activation policies (Pulkingham, Fuller, & Kershaw, 2010). Activation has been defined as "a range of policies and measures targeted at people receiving public income support or in danger of becoming permanently excluded from the labour market" (Anders Drøpping, Hvinden, & Vik, 1999, cited in Skevik, 2005, p. 42); it is also known variously as workfare, welfare to work, or the work approach. Worker activation policies have focussed narrowly on increases in employment as measures of success, regardless of quantity
and quality of work obtained (Wallace, Klein, & Reitsma-Street, 2006). However, cross-national comparisons reveal the relative nature of this measure. A successful increase in female employment was achieved in the European Union (EU) but it occurred in the context of relatively low rates of female workforce participation (Knijn, Martin and Millar, 2007). In Great Britain, objectives were set to increase female employment from 56% to 70% by 2010, a remarkable target in the context of a high employment rate in Britain compared to the other European economies (Knijn, Millar & Ridge, 2006). Making these cross-national comparisons shows how activation policies vary widely, by context, in the nature of employment targets for lone parents, and with little consistency in the construction of employment support policies (Knijn, Martin, & Millar, 2007; Syltevik, 2008).

The rhetoric of worker activation can be seen to be fuelled by, and to fuel, a logic of independence focussed on self-support in the market economy. This logic, however, makes invisible the gendered nature of social reproduction and employment. One of the central employment challenges for lone parents is child care, a particularly female burden. Roy, Tubbs and Burton (2004), who did empirical studies in the US of mothers’ work and care time, note that time spent caring for children severely curtails the amount of free time they have. The burdens not only include direct care, but also organizing care, being available when caregivers are not, balancing child care with workplace timelines, and coordinating care with other, public, timetable requirements such as transit schedules. Not only is time to care a challenge, but from a policy perspective, freedom from economic penalties for those who opt not to work must be framed as the right to time for care work, otherwise the economic necessity of organizing care becomes another part of the burden (Ellingsæter, 2007; Kershaw, 2005b). Skevik (2005) argues that because lone mothers have the primary burden as carers, they are ideal study subjects to
embody the effects of welfare reform, reflecting gendered tensions in society and conflicts over work and family supports.

The tensions between the two burdens, of child care and employment, are demonstrated by the choices women make in Britain, where a voluntary program of work engagement included encouragement supports, including training, tax credits for working families, and child care (Millar & Ridge, 2006). In spite of the incentives, Millar and Ridge found that women balanced the need to care with income needs in ways that preserved their economic assets, including potential tax credits, calculating how they can use state supports to preserve their assets against the potential penalties or benefits offered through work activation policies. Worker activation policies that demand the dedication of time to labour in the market economy colonize caring time by displacing or requiring alterations in the way time is spent. The struggle to distribute time demonstrates the symbiotic nature of public and private time and the way policies about labouring affect private time, while so-called demands of private time affect public activities.

Worker activation policies are based on the premise that market engagement is possible, and lack of employment is a choice. However, what Kjeldstad (2000) observed in the Norwegian context is that increased regulations imposed through worker activation policies reduce the flexibility women have traditionally used to manage child care, and home and work burdens. Kjeldstad argues that in the context of economic motivations to increase workforce flexibility, worker activation policies may actually mitigate chances of success, and thereby make lone mothers more vulnerable to economic downturns. Citizen activation policies may thus enforce colonization of private time, which, because of the unequal burden of care borne by women, may create further gender inequities. Following the U.S. welfare reforms of the mid-1990s, Gault, Hartmann, and Yi (1999) predicted that, “many welfare recipients will have difficulty entering
the labour market following sanctions or time limits, unless states significantly provide for their child care needs, build their skills, and provide services to address other serious barriers to employment” (p. 225). Lewis and Giullari (2005) agree, noting that the difficulties women have in moving into the workforce belie simple assumptions about motivation or choice.

The focus on worker activation has been part of a shift in the meaning of welfare from a source of help for those in need to a system of labour market engagement support (Knijn, Martin, & Millar, 2007; Skevik, 2005). This is in spite of the fact that under some conditions welfare-to-work policies may expand the welfare state through an increase of government expenditures on creating work opportunities, as occurred in the USA (Clasen, 2000), or in improving human capital, as occurred in the European Union (EU). At the same time, policies may be increasingly coercive in terms of narrowing options and increasing surveillance (Morgen & Maskovsky, 2003). In addition, the way policies focus on class, or income, as the central “problem” may obscure a focus on structural determinants of gender inequality.

Important national differences highlight the way elements of welfare reforms make a difference to the focus and opportunities of recipients’ experience. It is important, therefore, not to rely on generalizations, but to focus on the dynamics of specific policies and opportunities, and to acknowledge that workplace activation strategies shift the responsibility to care for others from the public to the private.

2.2 Redefining Poverty

As has been discussed above, part of the outcome of welfare reform has been what is called a limiting of the commitment to being a resource of last resort and to providing for the basic material needs of citizenry. At its most basic level, social assistance is not about social investment or workforce adjustment, though, it is about poverty alleviation and basic needs.
Reductions in benefits therefore prompt questions over how little is too little at the individual level, even as restructuring is attempting to accomplish macro-economic aims.

On the surface, the facts of poverty seem incontrovertible. Poverty seems like a material object; it has visible and material outcomes, in its most dire forms, such as homelessness, hunger or starvation, ill health and the consequences of trying to cope with poverty, such as becoming a scavenger, a child sex trade worker, or a purchased bride. Early attempts to fix a poverty line beyond which incontrovertible hardship would occur, though, betrayed a careful negotiation between what might be acceptable as competition to labourers’ wages, in terms of government expenditure, and to the general public (Bowpitt, 2000). As the Chief Statistician in Canada noted, the calculation of a minimum income level requires a social consensus and decisions about whether such standards should apply internationally, or only within a nation (Fellegi, 1997). As a result, in Canada poverty is officially tracked and documented through the use of the Low-Income Cut-Off, or LICO, “that identifies those who are substantially worse-off than the average” (Statistics Canada, 1999, p. 6). This is set at the lowest quintile of the population (after some adjustments), and calculated both before-tax and after-tax, meaning after the inclusion of government transfers such as pensions, child care benefits, tax rebates, social assistance and so on. This measure therefore reflects comparative disadvantage rather than absolute disadvantage.

Relative and absolute poverty lines are not the only ways to assess poverty, though. Bourguignon (2004) notes that over the course of the twentieth century, as the measurement of poverty came to be perfected, the adequacy of what he refers to as the “income poverty
paradigm” came to be questioned by the social justice community. The income paradigm assumes that individual choice plays a central role, which Bourguignon points out is challenged by diverse areas of research. As Lister (2004) suggests, the problem is in the approach: assessing poverty as an amount below an income boundary becomes a technical measurement matter, which risks obscuring the nature of the condition and mitigates conceptualizing it clearly.

2.2.1 The Capabilities Approach to Poverty

One of the responses to the problem of poverty assessment has been the capabilities model. Although it is not called a welfare reform approach, the capabilities model adopted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1999 does address need, and is itself a reform of previous approaches to poverty in international work. While some of the tools used by the UNDP, like a quality of life index, have been used in the less developed nation, or “minority world” context, the capabilities approach as a whole has not been adopted or studied as a model of welfare reform in the Global North. The discussion of the human capabilities approach is nuanced and raises interesting questions about what poverty is, what should be attended to and therefore what the focus of policy reform should be. As Sen (1993), credited with co-founding development of the capabilities model, argues:

Development can be seen as the process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy. These freedoms are both the primary end and the principal means.

(Sen, 1999, p. 3)

---

6 The World Bank uses absolute thresholds of $2.00 a day which they term “deep poverty,” and $1.00 per day, which they term “extreme poverty.” Frances Bourguignon was chief economist for the World Bank from 2003-2007.

7 The terms “Global South” and “Global North” are used to indicate the contrast between post-industrial economies and others. However, these terms are geographically confusing. I prefer “minority world” and “majority world”, which remind the reader that the vast majority of the world’s population lives outside the wealthy few countries.
In this section, the capabilities approach to poverty will be reviewed as another possible approach to poverty alleviation.

There are two basic components to the capabilities approach (Sen, 1993). The first concerns the outcome, or end state, which is defined as well-being rather than alleviation of poverty. Well-being is theoretically to be determined by the individual within the context of their society, although specific measures are used by the UNDP. Some argue that there is or could be a hierarchy of wellbeing which constitutes indisputable basic needs (Seabright, 1993), while others argue that attempting to determine such priorities only repeats the processes of attempting to establish absolute poverty lines (Parfit, 1993). Others, such as Nussbaum (2006), also integrally involved in the development of the UNDP approach, argue from an explicitly feminist perspective that a capabilities measure is not complete without consideration of a basic set of human rights, including gender rights, as well as access to clean water and other external minimal conditions.

The capabilities approach reconceptualises poverty alleviation approaches as “access to advantage,” or the ability for individuals to achieve ends which they identify as important (Korsgaard, 1993). Focusing on ability, or what Sen terms “capability” requires the freedom to achieve, a concept which gives some trouble because it requires an argument about unfreedom, or the inability to make choice, and therefore how much positive intervention or negative (opportunity) states are necessary (Gandjou, 2008). The technical details provide a template for a very different policy approach to poverty alleviation, though. Sen (1993) divides capabilities into two components, “functionings”, which are bundles of options out of which a choice will be made, while the freedom to choose is also called “capabilities.” The term “functionings” refers to the sets of options. Cohen (1993) breaks this down further, suggesting that a basic resource or
asset must be available (there must be clean water, or a stable governmental structure, or resources which can be developed, for example). Further, Cohen (ibid) breaks down freedom to achieve into being\(^8\), and doing. Neither of these, though, are wholly within the control of the individual, and therefore, Cohen argues, they are not capabilities in the sense that they are properties of the individual, but instead externally accrue from public, environmental or other collective sources. In summary, the capabilities approach is comprised of a relationship between assets or resources, which generate options, which individuals choose amongst in order to achieve well-being in their own terms.

The capabilities model provides a strong contrast to the income poverty paradigm, bypassing some of the “black box\(^9\)” thinking about human agency inherent to welfare reform models. The capabilities model also shifts the focus of poverty alleviation from income to the capacity resident in the individual, and implies that inequality is an inequality of ability, including both being in a position of inequality as well as of the ability to make a choice (Korsgaard, 1993). The issue of how one moves from resource to outcome is critical to understanding the role context plays, and conversely, the role that agency plays. To take one example, in looking at infant mortality, the outcome that is counted is the survival of the child, not the care it received, per se. This is consistent with an income measure which looks at achieved income as the relevant outcome. However, in the case of infant mortality rates, the social determinants of health are widely acknowledged to play a role in determining outcome.

What the capabilities model focusses on are the intermediate processes, such as nutrition,

\[\text{\textsuperscript{8} Being might be an instance of a negative state, such as freedom from malaria, which indicates good health, or it might be a positive state, such as the state of belonging (Cohen, 1993).} \]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{9} In psychology, those models that study motivation by focussing on the inputs and outputs but ignoring cognition or psychological processes are said to treat thinking as a “black box.”} \]
economic access, and infant care. While Cohen (1993) would separate these into resources and choices, Sen (1993) argues choices are dependent on the available set, so the outcome, or the result of the choice, can indicate the set. As Lister (1997) points out, though, discussing choice introduces interaction, which leads to consideration of independence, dependence and interdependence. This is a critical issue for gender equity.

While the capabilities approach to poverty is sensitive to context, Nussbaum (1995) argues that in order to achieve gender equity the capabilities approach still needs to be supplemented by a basic needs list. Rights, Nussbaum argues (2006) should be combined with an understanding of achievement as expressed through the capabilities measure. Sen (2006) counters that doing so minimizes the focus on agency which the capabilities approach introduces, and argues that moving towards universalizing measures mitigates the struggle to add “voice” to the understanding of what constitutes inequality and poverty. Fukada-Parr (2003) similarly argues that the Human Development Index (HDI) is an instrument capable of capturing inequality, including gender inequality, and points out that since its inception it has moved closer toward focussing on the conditions which lead to and support empowerment, from having contaminant-free water and a healthy environment, to women’s empowerment and freedom from terror. In spite of both the pragmatic proof Fukada-Parr points to, and Sen’s focus on retaining agency, the question that Cohen raised, over what happens after a resource has been provided and prior to making a choice, still needs to be addressed. As in the case of the infant who achieves well-being due to processes of care, there is a context of interaction, as Lister (2002) pointed to, that matters for the outcome, and which may matter in particular to women.
2.3 Neoliberal Reforms of Third Sector Supports

The capabilities model highlights the importance of resources for individual agency. However, in addition to shifting individual benefits and eligibility, what is known as the third sector has been the target of neoliberal reforms. While in North America the third sector is equated with a particular type of organization, in Europe the third sector, or system, includes organizations that may generate a profit which is reinvested for a social objective, such as co-operatives or mutual aid societies (Laville et al., 1999). The third sector, in North America may be focussed on government transfer programs, such as seniors’ benefits, child care, public health programs, employment supports, education, and social assistance. However, focussing on the sector by its output activities, rather than the source of funding enables interpretation of the vigour of civic society as well as the links between civic society and economic functioning (Laville, op cit).

The third sector, or “system,” was originally overlooked as a significant or independent sector, as the early form of the welfare diamond, discussed above, attests (Evers & Laville, 2004). However, even though organizations in the third sector are sometimes treated analytically as extensions of government, Small (2006) suggests that informal community organizations, especially neighbourhood organizations like churches and child care centres, may act as brokers, facilitating access to government services and funding for marginalized community residents. Formal agencies may also facilitate access to other sectors, operate as social support networks, as well as providing services to citizens, making them important buffers for those in need, as well as important players in welfare reform (Evers & Laville, 2004). Dolfsma and Dannreuther (2003) confirm that the third sector operates as the nexus between formal and informal organizations, the monetary economy and the non-monetary economy, the state and the individual in family,
and the formal non-profit and the market system. Small (2006) argues that the power of these organizations to exert pressure on government or to independently influence civil society should not be underestimated.

Third Way restructuring of public sector contracts for social supports has included shifts to private-public partnerships, ensuring global competitiveness by lowering costs and reducing government size (Aimers, 2011; C. Fuller, 1999). Identifying these funding shifts, reveals the blurring of boundaries of function between market and state (Elson, 2002), and the transfer of what is called the “mix” of responsibilities from the public to the private sector. For example, the reduction of third sector funding anticipates a transition of support function from the financial economy to the non-monetary economy, as well as an increased economic reward accruing from non-monetary supports (Elson, 2002). Anticipating economic return from the non-monetary economy utilizes a Bourdiesian (1980) concept of social capital in which nonmonetary assets are converted to financially measured assets. However, Portes (1998) cautions against blurring or compacting distinct functions of social capital by assuming that networks have a directional and quantitative benefit. In addition, Bourdieu’s concept of social capital does not necessarily incorporate adequate attention to gendered divisions of labour or other causes of marginalization, and risks building on a nostalgic view of a past that may only have existed for some middle class women (Bezanson, 2006; Fowler, 2003).

The way the publicly funded third sector has been subject to changing expectations and demands is similar to welfare reform, and prompts several questions related to the focus of this dissertation. Following the capabilities model, the context of support is theorized to be critical to the functionings, or choices, available to achieve well-being. However, neoliberal welfare reform is changing the responsibility mix by both reducing supports to recipients as well as funding to
the third sector. Brodie (2002b) suggests that the erosion of services is thus not only an issue of need; it is also an issue of inclusion and equity. The shifting nature of supports raises questions about the interaction between individuals and contexts, including whether or how the demand from individuals is affecting third sector agencies, and whether expectations of return from social capital are being realized. Overall, as well, a question prompted by this review is whether or how women are being affected differently than men.

The discussion of third sector supports concludes the discussion of models of reform. In the last half of the chapter studies of the experiences of women with neoliberal reform are reviewed.

**2.4 Studying the Impacts of Welfare Reform on Women**

Welfare reforms have largely ignored gender, focussing instead on class as the primary driver of social difference (Lewis, 1997). The focus on class, or income, has resulted in a narrowing of spaces for discussion for gendered work (Gartside, 2007; Morgen & Maskovsky, 2003; Neysmith & Reitsma-Street, 2005). Critical reviews that do examine gender effects focus on the implications for social citizenship (Armstrong, 2003; Skevik, 2005), on social inclusion and exclusion (Dobrowolsky & Lister, 2005; Good-Gingrich, 2008; Jenson, 2008), on the potential for retrenchment of racialized dichotomies of opportunity (Yuval-Davis, Anthias, & Kofman, 2005), on classist assumptions about marriage and employment options (Edin & Kefalas, 2005), and on the dichotomization and resubjectification of women as either consumers or workers rather than as both (Patterson, 2008; Weight, 2006). Patterson and Briar (2005) suggest that although neoliberalism has a superficial parallel to a politics of recognition where the contribution of diverse groups is recognized, the focus on opportunity can also decentre gender as a structural determinant of inequality. Fraser (2000) argues that in the late twentieth
century the politics of recognizing difference, which was meant to include diverse groups and create opportunities for equitable wealth distribution, has evolved into politics of separation based on identity and chauvinism, which obscures inequality.

Jenson argues that marketizing responsibility for meeting needs delegitimizes the relevance of gender equity as an appropriate focus. As reviewed above, the emphasis on equality of opportunity in contemporary welfare reform ignores the gendered division of labour, including unpaid labour in the home, where women still conduct the majority of child care and domestic labour (Breitkreuz, 2005). The rise in concern about investment in children, for example, ignores the need for adults, particularly lone parents, to be involved in both work and care (Kershaw & Long, 2003). In public rhetoric, the frame around gender inequity shifts from labour participation rates to work-family balance, which is recast as a family issue, not a gender issue (Jenson, 2008).

Part of the challenge is that there has been an ideological shift from the male breadwinner model to a degendered adult worker which may have reconstructed the way the lone-parent family is perceived (Hudson, Hwang, & Kuhner, 2008; Lewis & Giullari, 2005). In the UK, France, and the Netherlands, concepts about lone parents shifted from the idea that they represented an exception to the husband-wife norm which needed to be supported, such as widows, to a new view which frames lone parenthood as a chosen alternative to the husband-wife norm (Knijn, Martin, & Millar, 2007). This perspective is so strong that young women who believe in gender equity blame and resent lone mothers on welfare because, in their view, dependency on welfare is an individual choice or fault, rather than a reflection of systemic disadvantage (Knijn, Martin, & Millar, 2007). The shift in conceptualization has justified removing supports that had previously been available because of perceived disadvantage.
Everingham, Stevenson, and Warner-Smith (2007) suggest that in the past, a ‘progress’ narrative existed that rationalized interventions because lone parenthood was seen as a state of inequality that could, with time and advocacy, lead to a future where gender parity would be present.

In the next three sections of this chapter, approaches to studying the effects of welfare reform on women will be explored; first in the area of social reproduction, second on the experiences of reform, and third in the intersection of poverty and sex trade work in which impoverished and marginalized women are particularly vulnerable.

2.4.1 Citizens Who Care: Resubjectification through Social Reproduction

The family is still the most significant purveyor of human welfare, and so the balance of paid work, unpaid work and welfare is a critical indicator of the evolution of welfare reform (Eivind Kolberg, 1991; Lewis, 1997; Taylor-Gooby, Larsen, & Kananen, 2004). Two avenues of investigation, time-work and caring studies, are particularly informative for the way the gendered nature of work within the private (family) sector is affected by neoliberal restructuring, particularly of the third sector. Time-work studies, such as those Luxton (1980) conducted of domestic work, highlight the public-private divide and the quantity, complexity and breadth of work conducted in the private setting. Yantzi and Rosenberg (2008) note that the home becomes a contested ground as women move inside to perform complex caring duties, reconfiguring the meaning of home and displacing the ideal of individual leisure coincident with a romantic view of home. Elson (2005) argues that ignoring the value of domestic work may be significant enough to threaten achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) set by the United Nations.

In addition to the burden of social reproduction duties, one of the central issues for examining the impacts of shifting the market-state mix, is how social reproduction duties cross
the public-private divide. In this case, it should be noted that private does not necessarily indicate the market as opposed to the state, as it does in discussions of state responsibility and the welfare diamond (Evers, Pilj, & Ungerson, 1994; Jenson & Saint-Martin, 2003). In discussing social reproduction, private means those aspects of life that are conducted within the so-called domestic and personal realm, as opposed to those conducted at the social level, whether they be community service, economic, or state oriented or inspired (Breitkreuz, 2005; Luxton, 1997; Neysmith & Reitsma-Street, 2005). The shift to a social investment model re-entrenches women’s noneconomic work as a private matter by decontextualizing social reproductive work, which is needed to serve state goals of investment in the future of children and, at the same time, disregarding care work as relevant to state citizen activation targets (Elson, 2005; Jenson, 2008). Gender equity is reframed as labour participation targets and work-family balance, with work-family balance being recast as a family issue, not a gender issue (Jenson, 2008).

2.4.2 Empirical Themes in Studies of Lone Mothers

As Kershaw (2005a) points out, the penalty of stepping out of the labour force is senior years of poverty. Women who take time out to raise children, whether married or single, forfeit the accumulation of pension contributions as well as current-day income and career progression. For working class women, as Edin and Kefalus (2005) point out in the U.S., there is also no ‘future’ in work; inner city poverty and globalization present opportunities for serial minimum wage jobs, not career advancement. Employment also presents real dilemmas, though:

Unemployment may be a single mother’s response to the tension between the growing pressure for economic self-sufficiency that is part of the current policy shifts due to welfare reform and the primary mission in her life – to be a good mother.

(Lein, Benjamin, McManus, & Roy, 2006, p. 23)
While much welfare literature is focussed on the success or lack thereof of transitions to work, critical studies deconstruct assumptions about linear transitions which are unidirectional and lead progressively to increasing benefits (Fuller, Pulkingham, & Kershaw, 2008; Millar & Ridge, 2006; Patterson, 2008). In the pre-reform era in the US, half of lone mothers surveyed by Gault, Hartmann and Yi (1999) worked 300 hours in a two-year period, with 26.6% looking for work, while 6.6% were classified as disabled.\(^{10}\) More importantly, though, Gault and her colleagues found patterns which they called “cycling” in and out of work, “combining” work and welfare, “limited hours,” referring to a choice to work a limited amount of time, and “job seeking,” in which 23% were engaged in job searches without finding a job (Gault, p. 214). Bok (2004) casts doubt on the purported ease of transitions, noting reforms tend to decrease quality training opportunities, especially training that provides certifications which enable individuals to move up the job ladder. Fuller, Pulkingham and Kershaw (op cit) who also looked more closely at the logics of voluntarism, noted that the BC reforms included expectations of mandatory community work as part of a demonstration of “active” citizenship, which impacted job search capacity and the ability to execute family responsibilities.

Studies of the passage from unemployment to employment indicate that the transition is neither linear nor final (Edin & Kefalas, 2005; Fuller, Pulkingham, & Kershaw, 2008). Weigt (2008) looked at the interaction of U.S. policies which promote marriage as an option and notes that the choices are complex and the outcomes uncertain. Some women refuse such options on the grounds they cannot manage another potential drain on their resources (Edin & Kefalas, 2005), or they are afraid to risk violence, and therefore choose safety over the risk of marriage.

\(^{10}\) This 1991 study surveyed 1,181 lone mothers who collected welfare at least 2 months in the 24 month study period.
Millar and Ridge (2009) note that women in the U.K. who choose not to marry or partner because of the risk of losing their assets, engage their children as support while they inch towards financial independence. Patterson (2008), in New Zealand, found that women make complex calculations as to how far they can extend the various benefits packages before falling or jumping onto the next layer of income supports such as tax credits. In New Zealand, as elsewhere, each income support platform is configured differently, so benefits, resources, taxes and potential risks occur in new patterns. Patterson speculates that some level of resource cushion is necessary before women can take the risk to let go of a support and reach for a new income resource. Further, she finds that maintenance payments, mandated not only in New Zealand but in Norway, Canada, and the U.S., are a very problematic and unstable source of income which increase, rather than decrease, the risk of cash flow crisis.

Implicit and explicit theories about the nature of lone parents and the indigent lie behind the transition to work models. Corcoran (1995) examines four explanatory models of transitions to work, (a) a “risk factors” model, which looks for explanation or prediction in such issues as lower education, lower ability or female head-of-household arrangements, (b) a lack of resources model, which causes poverty by subsuming families into survival and criminal activities, (c) an intergenerational transmission model which suggests poor parental mores lead to lack of motivation for or skill in obtaining work and, (d) a deviance model, suggesting that the poor are “different” and require socialization. Countering these mainstream perspectives, Patterson (2008) focusses on the remaking of women into consumers, who are implied to choose amongst options for work, family care and various futures, much as they would “shop” for home necessities. Patterson’s explorations highlight the way that the frames of poverty research shape not only policy approaches but the conceptualization of identity and the nature of the citizen and what
citizenship means. The making of the poor into consumers is a trick, Hill Collins (2006) argues, which is premised on the idea that those who can purchase are “advantaged” and those who cannot are “disadvantaged”. This tautological argument nevertheless sets up opportunities for impoverished black youth to enter the marketplace and “sell” their blackness and resistance in contemporary hip-hop culture. Impoverished women are not so lucky; they have the opportunity to sell their bodies literally rather than figuratively (Mansvelt, 2008).

Some policies have focused on the potential of poor neighbourhoods to contribute to employment stagnation, and so moving individuals out of low-income neighbourhoods. These appear to have inconsistent results, depending more on the aspirations of the individual, their ability to integrate with neighbours who may be quite different, and how much they need supports they leave behind (McClure, 2004). Sandlin (2004) argues that the effect of new work expectations is to “teach” or discipline women about what gender means, although Solomon (2003) provides an example of the ways in which women may “fight back” by disciplining training program instructors about their assumptions about women on welfare, in particular, racialized women on welfare. Syltevik (2008) also argues that even when women do successfully move from dependence on state benefits, the incomes they achieve in the market may be just as problematic from the point of view of family responsibilities, and may increase financial insecurity.

Fewer studies focus on the impacts of welfare reform for other aspects of life and well-being. The IAP, which provided data for this dissertation, looked at the impacts of BC welfare reform on mothers with young children and noted that the reforms increased the risk of surveillance while simultaneously putting them at risk of not having enough to care properly for their children (Pulkingham, Fuller & Kershaw, 2010). The potential for increased risk focuses
on the intersection of government and other systems and the way the poor are exposed by their vulnerability and forced dependency. However, in the face of surveillance and need, when there is not enough for food or shelter, women must balance the needs of everyone, which is often accomplished by going without (McIntyre et al., 2003; Tarasuk, 2003). The inability to provide, and more importantly, the need to explain, has consequences for parenting:

‘You’ve got your health, you have a place to sleep, and something to eat.’ It's an awful thing to preach to kids but you have to. You have to make them understand. You can't keep brushing them off, like ‘Oh yeah, one day you [will] get this and that,’ because that day might not come. So you have to tell them like it is. We'll do what we can do. If we can afford it we'll get it, and they'll learn to appreciate it better, anyway, compared to someone who gets it all the time. (Power, 2005, pp. 16-17)

In the context of the turn to rhetoric on the importance of early childhood, parents who cannot provide for their children are both framed as “damaging” their children, and by the children as they age, as “deserving” more (Kershaw & Long, 2003).

As Williams, Popay and Oakley (1999) point out, studies are structured to look at impacts, which results in a focus on coping rather than structural critiques. Studies which look more closely at how women fare focus on well-being, risk of violence, and the intersection with other forms of marginalization. Neoliberal restructuring raises particularly acute issues for women with disabilities who are additionally challenged to meet demands for citizen activation, or to join the “consumer culture” without additional supports (Cassiman, 2008; Chouinard & Crook, 2005; Parish, Magaña, & Cassiman, 2008). Cassiman (2008) documents the same balancing acts other parents use such as going without so that children have food, but he points out that battling stigma becomes particularly problematic, especially for women whose
disabilities are either not officially diagnosed, or who have invisible disabilities. Dubray and Sanders (1999) suggest that the push for official diagnosis is problematic for Native Americans, who have tended to be reluctant to be labelled through the medical system and who find support in the context of community and family, valuing cooperation over labelling and categorization. Disability advocates argue that disability is not supported and that inclusion of people with disability in the vision of the working population (the “active” citizen) is also missing (Wehbi, 2009). The lack of identity makes it more difficult to argue for supports, and obscures the extra burden carried by parents with disabilities, making stigma and invisibility the first barriers that must be addressed.

Studies of the experiences of women on welfare confirm the material effects of disadvantage described in macro political analysis, but add everyday impacts as analytical lenses, like going without, battling stigma, and the impacts of intersectional issues like disability. Studies of everyday experience provide evidence of the ways in which scientific frameworks of female-headed lone parents on welfare may be problematic. Critical qualitative studies also point to other explanatory frames, exploring the way concepts of consumption are embedded in neoliberal assumptions. To explore this theme further, the connections between women who are sex trade workers and neoliberal welfare reform will be explored in the next section.

2.4.3 Sex Trade Work and Neoliberal Reform

Various analytic frames used to analyze sex trade work offer some insight into perspectives and methods which are productive for this study, intersecting with the potential for women on welfare to seek sex trade work in order to survive. For example, a Foucauldian frame, which emphasizes the constitutive nature of gaze, draws attention to the role consumerism plays in objectifying persons who work in the sex trade (Foucault, 1977; Said, 1979). The gaze may be
materially shaped by the arenas of sex work, such as the practice of striptease which orients and encourages the consumptive gaze (Pilcher, 2011), or the growth of street sex work, which also physically presents an “Other.”\textsuperscript{11} Construction of the Other interacts with the structural origins of marginalization, empowering the gazer through bourgeois consumerism and reinforcing marginalization (Mansvelt, 2008). While the consumptive gaze constitutes the Other, the presence of the Other also challenges social assumptions of culturally homogeneous sexual identity (Tani, 2002). Othering may serve to heighten a sense of a fractured national identity and, lead to policies which further reinforce marginalization (Yuval-Davis, Anthias, & Kofman, 2005). Brent’s and Sanders (2010) argue that the mainstreaming of consumerism, especially through neoliberal approaches, has enabled the growth of the sex trade industry and its normalization which has fuelled or been coincident with a global rise in the sex trade.

A Foucauldian perspective is useful in that it challenges simplistic binary constructions of the sex trade worker as an Other, drawing attention to morally juxtaposed identities, such as mother and sex trade worker, and questioning why these are opposed. Another implication of sexual identity which is interrogated by a Foucauldian analytic approach is the creation of deviant genders. This construction is especially apparent in the invisibilization of male identities such as the male prostitute, and in particular, youth, men of colour, and men of Indigenous ancestry (Kong, 2009; Ross, 2010; Whowell, 2010), but it also focusses attention on how some identities are sexualized and others are not. While Foucauldian analysis draws attention to invisible presence and offers the opportunity to understand how objectification occurs and

\textsuperscript{11} The concept of the “Other” was used by Simone de Beauvoir (1972) to describe the way that one position, maleness and heteronormative, is taken as standard or normative, and variations are rendered as problematic, marginal, or as Sandercock (1998) writes, “invisible.” In this dissertation, the word “other” is capitalized when referring to this specific meaning.
complexity is obscured, it also de-emphasizes agency by focussing on the self-perpetuating and objectifying nature of the flows of power.

Other analytic frames also offer productive avenues for understanding; for example, Johnson (2010) used a Bourdiesian frame to focus on the moral habitus of policing, which contributes to the Othering of sex trade workers. This type of analytic perspective focuses on meso-level interactions that reproduce practices which maintain the status quo, and it is useful for studying the institutional effects of neoliberal reforms on sex trade workers. Brown and Bloom (2009) describe, for example, the way that neoliberal welfare reforms in Hawai’i shift responsibility for care and resources to family, drawing extended family and kin relations into surveillance for their performance. They argue that the distribution of responsibility reproduces colonialist practices, subjecting Indigenous Hawaiians to structural disadvantage as their whole network depleted. These dynamics criminalize individuals who lack supports and seek to escape or survive through sex work. Heath et al. (1999) link impoverishment, the fragility of supports, and the invisibility of young Indigenous male sex workers in Vancouver to increased risk-taking behaviour, suggesting that criminalization and marginalization operate hand in hand to decrease health and safety.

Studies of criminalization also explore the changing context of the sex trade as it becomes an increasingly fluid global commerce (Pajnik, 2010) and a commerce that has been spatially dispersed by the advent of new communication media (Jeffreys, 2010). These two challenges to police work point to the interconnectedness of local conditions with global economies and highlight the necessity of exploring issues at various scales to understand how local regulatory regimes fit into global trends. As a close study of sex trade workers in Spain documents, women from various South American countries may travel to Spain to work in the
sex trade, utilizing distance for anonymity but also choosing cultural familiarity to enable work in a stigmatized industry (Casas, 2010). The effort women employ to avoid stigma, as well as to avoid violence at home or the challenges of lack of employment opportunities for women, points to the interconnectedness of domestic policies and global opportunities. This connection brings trafficking and sex tourism into relevance as they relate to the question of how local policies affect women as they make a future for themselves and their children. In addition, it highlights the way women may utilize international irregularities in regulation to navigate the boundary between legal and illegal in order to survive.

Studies of identity reveal the way the sex trade marks the urban landscape, occupying sanctioned or unsanctioned red light districts and dividing the city into zones of sexualisation versus family or commerce zones (Jeffreys, 2010). At the same time, the city has been made more permeable by the introduction of virtual networking, and Aalbers (2005) notes that even Amsterdam’s official red light district, which is clearly marked, offers nonsexualized family tourism opportunities along with sexual commerce. The marking and permeability indicate ways in which the geography can mark those who pass through it, yet also allow others to pass through it. At the same time, the focus on sexuality, including the making of hyper-masculinity or femininity, can render other expressions of sexual identity invisible or deviant (Boyd, 2010; Hubbard, Matthews, Scoular, & Agustin, 2008; Koskela & Sirpa, 2005; Tani, 2002). In spite of the permeability of spaces focussed on sexual normativity, such as night club zones, and family zones, zones of sex trade work tend to be marginal spaces, coincident with low-wage districts and marginal spaces (Hubbard, Matthews, Scoular, & Agustin, 2008; Rosen & Venkatesh, 2008). As Wolsink (2006) notes, zones of sex work tend to mark spaces of exclusion. The geographic
organization of sexualized space offers a context for thinking about how lone mothers may also occupy or be rendered invisible in some kinds of urban spaces.

The variety of frames employed in studies of sex trade and sex trade workers pose interesting questions to consider in the study of lone mothers. First, as the studies reviewed above make clear, while sex trade work occurs within localized regulatory regimes, it is fully connected to international global commerce. Second, observations of gender norming around sexual identity point to a need to examine the way polarized and simplified identities are interacting with broader neoliberal trends which focus on consumerism (Brents & Sanders, 2010; Scoular & Sanders, 2010). Given that the object of consumption is a human being, the vulnerability of the poor and women to entering the sex trade suggests a pull for women toward being re-objectified through consumption. The maintenance of a simplified identity coincident with public displays of sexual identities in urban zones raises questions about how other gendered identities, like motherhood, may contrast or coincide with, fuel or act as a foil to sexualized urban landscapes.

2.5 Implications of Welfare Reform

The focus of the material reviewed in this chapter was to trace the genealogy of lone parents as policy objects and to examine how poverty alleviation policies shape the definition of women as recipients. Analysis of the changes in welfare provisioning indicate that the nature of state-citizen relations is changing, and redefining the scope of government and the role it plays in citizens’ lives. Neoliberal, Third Way, and social investment modes of reform are increasing hardship for those on welfare. These approaches to poverty alleviation are challenged by the capabilities model, which focusses on functionings and resources instead of income as a primary
indicator of and opportunity for poverty alleviation, but this approach is virtually untried in the Global North, or “minority world” context.

The nature of the reforms appears to risk re-entrenchment of gender divides due to the way it relies on social capital, including “free” social reproduction, to meet what were formerly public responsibilities. It may be that the lone parent family embodies the tensions of these reforms most intensely, and therefore forms the ideal study subject (Skevik, 2005). However, one of the challenges in focussing on lone parenthood is that both poverty and lone parenthood are slippery concepts and the subject of various theoretical attempts at modelling. The current way of identifying poverty as an income deficit, combined with the demand that lone parents assume the same responsibilities as two parent families to generate finances are culture specific and carry certain assumptions. In the next chapter, these international findings are applied to the BC case, beginning with an overview of the changes in welfare provisioning and then applying the feminist critiques reviewed in this chapter. The examples reviewed here highlight the way it is important to be specific in identifying exactly what form the reforms have taken, and what vulnerabilities they intersect with. The focus of the next chapter is a concern with the shifting meaning of these changes, not only for the very poor, but also for the definitions of poverty and lone parenthood.
CHAPTER 3 – CRITICALLY EXAMINING THE CASE OF BC WELFARE REFORM

As noted in the previous chapter, neoliberalism is a broad term and research findings should relate to specific reforms (Mayer, 2008; Skevik, 2005). Although the research questions focus on women’s agency, it is important to understand the confluence of history and dominant ideology, which is represented in the benefit packages, taxation structures, and institutional structures that constitute neoliberal and social investment trends (Tretjak & Abrell, 2011). It is also important to understand neoliberalism as a process, not an end-state (Maskovsky & Kingfisher, 2001; Morgen & Maskovsky, 2003). The markers of the neoliberal ‘narrative’ are increasing privatization of state assets and services and a deliberate shrinking of the size, expenditures, and reach of government, but these should be seen as ideologically inspired agendas, or part of institutional trajectories, rather than sudden epochal changes (Hudson, Hwang, & Kuhner, 2008; Mayer, 2008). In the BC case, these trends led to two parallel trajectories; the first is a narrative timeline, which asserts itself as a hegemonic story, and the second consists of the evolving set of interactions which punctuate the story with explanatory events. The discursive and material storylines interact and, as Mayer suggests, create particularities in the shape and form of neoliberal changes in different jurisdictions. These two trajectories will be described here in the context of the theory presented in the previous chapter.

The details of the BC welfare reform set the context for understanding what the struggles of women on welfare mean, and how this moment in history may not only affect the futures of individual women, but may also alter the course of social citizenship in the province and perhaps in Canada. I start by detailing the material policy changes and then I examine the relationship to various models of welfare reform.
3.1 Implementing Neoliberalism

The round of changes to welfare in BC began in 2001, when a provincial election brought the new slightly right-of-centre BC Liberal Party\textsuperscript{12} to power. In keeping with a neoliberal narrative, the Liberal campaign platform promised a leaner government, reduction in government deficits, reduction in overall government size, increased efficiency (such as removing bureaucratic hurdles to business, or “red tape”), and increasing accountability. To implement these changes, all the provincial ministries were required to prepare business plans with service objectives. These plans were then reviewed and budgets were reduced across all ministries in 2002, with some exceptions such as for health care and child protection services.

The welfare reforms included cuts to benefits, staffing, and infrastructure, as well as a reduction in number and amount of contracts for third-sector services. The operating budget of the Ministry of Human Resources (responsible for social assistance) was reduced by $581 million (30\% of the overall budget) over three years. Staff positions were cut by 459 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions, and 36 welfare offices across the province were closed (Gurstein & Vilches, 2009). The remaining budget reduction targets were achieved through a combination of cuts to welfare benefits and a tightening of eligibility rules (Gurstein et al., 2008). Thus all three aspects of the neoliberal agenda were enacted: smaller government, reduced provision, and reduced expenditures.

\textsuperscript{12} The provincial BC Liberal Party is independent of the centrist national Liberal Party, which is to the left of the conservative party or parties. At the provincial level, the BC Liberals are more to the political right than the left-of-centre New Democratic Party.
3.1.2 Benefit Changes

In Canada, welfare falls under provincial jurisdiction. Officially termed income assistance, benefits are provided in a single monthly payment from the provincial government to eligible heads of household. As Moore (2002) points out, each “welfare case” may include a number of recipients such as children, other dependents, and spouses or partners. Payment is made to the head of household in a single disbursement, so when the participants in the study discussed changes to their cheque they were referring to what has been intended to be the sole source of support. Lately, federal child tax benefits have become an important supplement, as shall be discussed below.

(Q) How much have you lost in total since Campbell came in?

(A) Well, the cutbacks on the rent, the $100 a month, okay . . . I couldn’t believe it when, because you were allowed $650, or $620 or $630 for rent, and then all of a sudden it dropped down to $555, you know?

(Q) And then you lost the diet allowance?

(A) Diet allowance was over a year ago, just after August. (Jeanie, Rnd 1, 680-698)

The welfare benefit amount is calculated in two portions, with some adjustments for the size of household: a “shelter” portion that is intended to cover housing or rental costs, including utilities like heat and light, and a portion termed “support” that is intended to provide food and the necessities of life for all the persons in the household. In 2002, the support portion for a lone parent with one child was reduced by $50 to $325.58, a reduction of 15%. The shelter portion

---

13 See the Glossary for listings of terms used to refer to income assistance, also known as social assistance or “welfare” in BC.
14 Welfare reform was introduced in 2002, after the election of the BC Liberal Party in 2001. Gordon Campbell served as premier.
15 Interviews for round one were conducted between May and June of 2004.
was reduced by $55 for families with more than three people (including the parent) and by up to $75 per month for larger families. In addition, support portions for larger families were capped, so that the maximum payment occurred for a three-person family (Kienzel, 2010). The shelter portion for a lone parent with one child (two-person family) was retained at $520, while after the changes, a three-person household was eligible for $555 (Long & Goldberg, 2002). The amount is adjusted for rural and urban locations, family size, family composition (married or lone parent or single adult), and eligibility classification (disability, employable, or “person with persistent multiple barriers” (PPMB). The shelter allowance may be adjusted downward if costs are lower than the designated amount, and some other issues may cause minor variations.

The welfare cheque is the main source of income transfer from government sources: in addition, three tax credits (payments) go to parents on a per-child calculation from the federal government. The only provincial support payments (income transfers) other than the social assistance are child care subsidies for parents with children in child care (a reimbursement) and any federal pensions, typically for seniors, but also sometimes worker post-injury payments (Workers’ Compensation Board Benefits, or WCB). The amounts of these payments are, as of the 2002 changes, deducted from the welfare cheque amount as what were called “earnings exemptions” was eliminated.

Any needs that exceed what is provided for by the welfare payment are primarily delivered through charitable services such as clothing redistribution charities, food banks, Christmas gift registries run by social agencies, or social housing, but these do not provide a cash flow to the recipient. Charity and social support are provided through third-sector agencies including non-profit charities, faith-based institutions, or social service agencies, like immigrant services or shelters for battered women, which are funded by the provincial government.
Services like food banks may receive local municipal-level funding, and shelters for the homeless tend to be operated locally. The third sector, as this may be termed, is not designed to deliver core support except under unusual and temporary circumstances. Unlike in the US, every indigent person is eligible for support, though the 2002 changes introduced stringent requirements that advocates argue effectively disenfranchised the mentally ill, those with health struggles like substance use disorders or post-traumatic stress disorder, and individuals who could not meet the minimum employability conditions introduced at that time.

Three federal tax credits are available to low-income families, in addition to provincial benefits. The Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB) was introduced in 1993 by the federal government as a tax credit for all families with children. An amount of $102.33 was paid for each child under the age of 7 per month (Canada Revenue Agency, 2008). An additional supplement for low-income families called the National Child Benefit (NCB) was introduced in 1998. The NCB is income dependent and taxable. The family income threshold for full payment of the NCB in 2008 was $20,435. An example of the scale of rate changes for additional children is shown in table 1 for the year 2011.

Table 1 Annual Maximum Child Benefits (July 2011 to June 2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Children*</th>
<th>Basic CCTB</th>
<th>NCB</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Monthly Benefit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st child</td>
<td>$1367</td>
<td>$2118</td>
<td>$3485</td>
<td>$290.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd child</td>
<td>$1367</td>
<td>$1873</td>
<td>$3240</td>
<td>$270.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd &amp; each additional child</td>
<td>$1462</td>
<td>$1782</td>
<td>$3244</td>
<td>$270.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* For families with net incomes below declared incomes of $24,183 in 2011

Both child tax benefits, which are based on the previous year’s income tax declaration, are issued together in a single cheque which arrives by mail in about the third week of the month.

---

These two benefits are supplemented with a Universal Child Benefit (UCB), which is intended by the federal government to support families with young children to purchase child care but is not dependent on them obtaining child care (it can therefore be used to supplement the income of families where one parent stays home to care for children). This amount is set at $100 per month for each child under the age of 6. The total possible payment of all three benefits is close to the target of $5,000 per year that the Canadian advocacy agency Campaign 2000 recommends for helping to eliminate child poverty (Campaign 2000, 2009). The CCTB (excluding the NCB) and UCB payments are not deducted from the welfare cheque at the individual level, but BC was one of two provinces that dropped their support levels significantly when this benefit was introduced. In comparison to other provinces where benefits to recipients rose with the CCTB, in BC it became a supplement to a much reduced income assistance benefit. Critics have identified the way the province reduced costs by reducing the benefits as a tax transfer made through individuals (Shillington, 2000).

As a result of the dependency of welfare recipients on the single provincial payment, reductions to the basic income assistance amount were highly important. Added together, the monthly welfare cheque for a family with three children, two of whom are under 7 and therefore eligible for the CCTB and the UTB, is approximately $555 in shelter and $325 in support, or $880, plus approximately $680 for all three federal payments. The welfare cheque arrives on the last Wednesday of the month. At a typical rent for a four-person family in Vancouver, the cheque might go almost entirely toward the rent. The family would then use the federal cheque, which arrives in about the third week of the month, for food and other living costs. The intersection of these three sources of funding, plus the welfare cheque, makes a confusing schedule of cash flow.
The low provincial rates make the monthly federal payments essential for covering living costs. The rental cost of a two-bedroom apartment, at the 40th percentile of the market was $810 per month, with heat additional; at the 25th percentile, the cost was $755. This would mean that even for a lone parent with one child seeking a two-bedroom apartment, 75% of accommodations would be at least $235 over the shelter rate. If this amount was taken out of the support portion of $325.58, only $90.42 would be available across four or five weeks of a month for heat, food, transportation, school projects, diapers and formula, first aid medications like aspirin, and all the other small necessities required for sustenance and a job search. Based on the estimate for a four-person family and a low rent of $810 per month, only $70 might be available from the welfare cheque to live on, with an additional $465.75 for the month, or $116.43 per week, coming from the federal child tax credits. (In a five-week month, which occurs four times a year, only $93.15 per week would be available to pay for all necessities.) These amounts cannot cover exceptional circumstances or emergencies. This point is illustrated by one of the participants in the Income Assistance study, which provided the data for this dissertation:

And I had a bunch of stuff going at this time, and then, because of all these cutbacks, single mothers are not allowed to get the support . . . We’re not allowed to get emergency taxi rides like we used to. If our kids had something wrong with them, we’d get a certain amount of emergency money, where you can take your kid to the Children’s Hospital, right? Now you’re only entitled to like, 3 or 4 taxi rides a year, or something like that. And I was quite shocked about that. But I had to do that on my own.

(Carla, Rnd 1, 198)

To balance the constraints of the small welfare amounts, social assistance in BC has long had an emergency supplement system, whereby a client or citizen can apply under exceptional
circumstances for a small additional amount. However, when the basic benefit was cut, there were also changes to a comprehensive range of supplementary benefits, both occasional and emergency (Klein & Long, 2003; Moore, 2002). Many of the small grants were eliminated and emergency grants were capped at $20 per person per year. Conditions for granting monies were also restricted, so, for example, moving expenses were only allowed when the new place was mandated by government staff for safety reasons or when the shelter costs were lower, unlikely in the case of Vancouver rents. The effect on individuals was to cap what might be called “safety valves,” amounts that a family might need for occasional financial needs, like a child’s winter coat, a hair cut needed for a job interview, or back-to-school supplies. The question is, beyond income and straight cash flow, whether or how the loss of these safety valves affects the availability of the type of primary goods described in the capabilities measure, and further, what the effect might be on women of the loss of these functionings (Nussbaum, 2006). The cuts also included a severe curtailing of allowable assets, although a primary place of residence (home) was exempt. A vehicle is allowed, up to a value of $5,000, as are tools or equipment required to operate a business. Any other valuable assets may reduce eligibility. In sum, the reductions in rates and other benefits were small in absolute standards, but highly significant in the context of the overall low starting rate. The elimination of small benefits and emergency grants meant the narrowing of respite or room to manoeuvre. In addition, little notice or explanation of the changes was provided, making recipients’ experiences of the transition stressful, as shall be reported in the chapters on the findings.

3.1.3 Workforce Participation Rates of Lone Mothers

Part of the neoliberal goal was to reduce dependency on state disbursements and encourage workforce participation. However, in Canada, women’s workforce participation rate is
high, averaging 70% for all women with children and 68% for lone parents in 2002 (Statistics Canada, 2006). This is much higher than the rates in other countries (Kjeldstad, 2000; Millar, 2007). The workforce participation rate varies by age of children and family composition, though, suggesting that women’s ability to engage in paid labour varies according to caring duties (Skevik, 2004). Both partnered and lone women were vulnerable to the reduction in supports, though as of 1991, slightly over half of lone mothers with children under 6 were in the workforce, compared to 66% of partnered women (OECD Directorate for Education, 2004). The women who were most vulnerable to interruption, with a workforce participation rate of 47%, were those whose youngest children was under 3 years of age (OECD Directorate for Education, 2004). Contrary to the neoliberal focus on motivating workforce participation the evidence suggests that circumstances, such as lack of formal or family child care, provides a better explanation than motivation alone for workforce participation.

Perhaps as a result of their lower ability to be employed, lone mothers are much more dependent on government transfers. A 1998 Statistics Canada survey of labour and income data (SLID) report found that the gap (or depth) of poverty below the LICO for low-income lone mothers was reduced from 82.5% to 29.7% by government transfer payments (Kapsalis & Tourigny, 2002). Thus although lone mothers had neither the lowest after-tax poverty (reserved for couples) nor the highest rate of before-tax poverty (reserved for the smaller percentage of low income lone fathers), they had the largest reduction in poverty through government transfers because they started with the highest average low-income, or the deepest poverty (Kapsalis & Tourigny, 2002). After government transfers, the after-tax average rate of poverty (below the LICO) for all lone mothers in Canada in 2006 was 32.3% (Rothman & Noble, 2008).
The comparatively high workforce participation rates and government transfer payments in Canada challenge several concepts behind workforce activation rhetoric. First, the empirical variations in workforce engagement indicate that some common structural constraints rather than personal choices physically limit workforce engagement. Urban and rural experiences are different; a small study of women in Oregon, for example, demonstrates that rural women have more difficulty obtaining sustaining work, suitable work training, and work engagement supports like childcare, speaking again to structural constraints rather than individual choice (Anderson & Van Hoy, 2006).

3.1.4 Reducing or Increasing the Welfare Wall?

One of the specific goals of welfare reform and the neoliberal turn in general as it unfolded in BC was to reduce what is called the welfare wall. The welfare wall is composed of direct and indirect taxes which accrue when individuals gain employment (Leonard, Ragan, & St-Hilaire, 2007; Torjman & Battle, 1993). One of the participants in the Income Assistance study described how the welfare wall changed after the 2002 reforms were introduced:

They used to have a really good program, which has been eliminated, called Youth Options, and you used to be able to do volunteer work and get tuition credit paid for your volunteer work. You made $8 an hour tuition money,\(^\text{17}\) and so I did 300 hours of volunteer work as a peer support worker at the pregnant parenting place on the North Shore and I got $2400.00 [in credits] for tuition. (Gemma, Rnd 1, 196)

Direct taxes include federal and provincial income taxes as well as payroll deductions such as compulsory pension deductions and (un)employment insurance, which begin as soon as a

\(^{17}\) Tuition money was earned as “banked credits”, not cash, so at the end, Gemma had $2400 in banked credits which could be used for tuition at any institution.
person has employment. Income tax credits, also part of the direct tax system but in the reverse direction, reduce income tax owing at year end or are paid out in regular instalments throughout the year to those with low incomes. Two examples of the latter in Canada are the Goods and Services Tax (GST) credit and the Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB). However, the welfare wall is also created by benefits and allowances that people are no longer eligible for after they exit welfare. The loss of these benefits can be considered as a kind of tax, in that they reduce income transfers and the utility of income. These benefits may include children’s extended health benefits, which parents are eligible to collect while receiving assistance, as well as emergency grants for food or shelter, supplements for those going back to work or school, transportation allowances, and other benefits which were described above. The sum total of direct and indirect taxes may cause a kind of lurch as people leave welfare and move into a different system of income flows.

The 2002 changes were intended to reduce the cost of transferring out of welfare. However, it appears that the costs were increased and that the institution of mandatory wait times and lifetime limits increased the potential cost of exiting welfare by increasing insecurity (Wallace, Klein, & Reitsma-Street, 2006). In addition to reducing the ancillary benefits, such as health or dietary allowances (reviewed above), that formed an attractive negative tax (i.e. bonus), earning exemptions, which are also a form of negative tax were reduced. For example, for recipients who were classified as employable, earnings exemptions were reduced from $200 to zero, and for lone parents, maintenance payments, which had also been exempt up to $100 per child, were also reduced to zero, so that in both cases any income was deducted on a dollar-for-dollar basis. A mandatory three-week waiting period for reapplication or a new application was instituted, meaning that a person had to have a three-week income cushion in order to survive the
wait time. This means that a person who was contemplating exiting welfare, who would be well aware of this re-entry condition, must anticipate whether their potential earnings would either be more than the level of welfare so that they could save for the potential layoff, or, if not, they must have good job security so that they were assured of not being laid off. If they were not able to build the savings cushion, they might not be able to pay rent, and might become homeless.

The changes were a clear departure from previous policy. Prior to the changes, the earnings were reduced on a ratio basis (i.e. 25% for the first $100, 50% for the next $200, and 100% for the remainder). After the reforms, all earnings were deducted on a dollar-for-dollar basis from the next month’s cheque, as were orphans’ benefits (federal payment), family maintenance payments (spousal), and workers’ compensation payments (provincial). If the loss of benefits is considered a tax, the marginal rate would be 100% or even more if earnings cause ineligibility for other kinds of benefits like back-to-school grants (Duclos, 2008; Leonard, Ragan, & St-Hilaire, 2007). As Patterson (2008) points out, in the New Zealand case where this was also introduced, there can be a time lag between these flows, so that earnings received in one month are matched by an equivalent deduction from the welfare cheque in the following month. This means that one month is a rich month and the next is below welfare rates. The effective implication is also that below the level of benefits, a person would be working but not receiving any more net income and perhaps less, than the amount of welfare benefits. This occurs because of out-of-pocket expenses related to working such as transportation or child care as well as the loss of ancillary benefits such as transition allowances or access to emergency funds.

The potential for having savings to cover cash flow fluctuations among those most at risk of not having sufficient and secure employment is low, though. The minimum wage in BC is $8.00 per hour (at the time of the study), the lowest in Canada. If a standard work week is 40
hours, a four-week month would generate $1,280 per month. This is helpful for a lone person, who received only $537 after the reforms were implemented. However, for a lone parent with one child, who is receiving a combined income of about $1200 from income assistance and the federal child tax benefits, there is almost no incentive to make the transition to a minimum-wage job, and plenty of potential costs. In 2008, 293,000 persons in BC earned less than $10/hr (New Democratic Party of BC, 2009). For these low-wage workers the ability to take a risk is very low, or nil, because they have no cushion. This inability to take a risk actually increases the welfare wall, making it more difficult to leave unsatisfactory or insufficient low-wage employment and to leave welfare for a temporary or potentially insufficient job. It is unclear whether the 2002 restructuring has reduced the welfare wall or not. It may be that instability has increased, driving individuals to reduce their risk-taking behaviour, and thus increasing the rigidity between the sectors, rather than encouraging a flow from state to economic engagement.

3.1.5 Disciplining Recipients through Reclassification

The reorganization of benefits that took place in 2002 was complemented by the comprehensive and mandatory reclassification of all recipients. Recategorization disciplined recipients by reconstructing them into able and not-able citizens, creating what Powers (2005) calls “cages” of discourses. Although there had been categories with differing levels of benefit before, the reduction of training supports and increase of stringency for qualifying for disability created a deeper rift between the two types of recipients. All recipients who were deemed employable were assigned to work or résumé preparation workshops. However, education and longer term training, such as adult basic education towards high school diploma equivalencies or trades training, were disallowed. Welfare recipients were encouraged to take student loans if they wanted to retrain, although being in receipt of a student loan would automatically disqualify
them from receiving welfare support. Recipients were excused from employment searches if they qualified in one of several categories. For example, lone parents with children under 3 years of age were, in official terms, ‘temporarily excused,’ although this was more restrictive than previously when lone parents were exempted from work requirements until their youngest child turned seven. This change automatically created a need for child care for 8,950 parents who were reclassified as employable who had children between 4 and 7 (Moore, 2002).

All recipients who had had disability status were declassified and made to reapply on new forms. Individuals with prior disability status received notice either through a call assigning them to a new status or via letters instructing them to reapply or if they were reclassified, to attend a mandatory work preparation seminar. The penalty for non-compliance was loss of benefits. Two categories were created out of the former disability categories. The new disability category (persons with disabilities, or PWD) was for those who could get professional medical verification that their condition was serious, would last longer than two years, and significantly impaired their ability to conduct daily living tasks (Kienzel, 2010). All other clients were reclassified as persons with persistent multiple barriers (PPMB). Recipients who were illiterate, had serious mental health issues, or were without fixed addresses had difficulty organizing themselves or complying with the need to reapply, especially as new documentation was needed.

The bifurcation of welfare recipients into able (employable) and unable (unemployable) only recognizes one type of agency, a policy-induced narrowness which Hoggett (2001) and Ferguson (2003) separately contest in discussing the similar restrictiveness of child protection orders. Parents as seen as “good” if they comply with the specific instructions of orders, but both Hoggett and Ferguson note that agency is broader and includes anger, passivity, non-compliance, and questioning are consistent with valid expressions of free citizenship in a democracy. As with
the panopticon described by Foucault (1977) the policy gaze is shaped by the discipline of the regulations, in this case the categorization along employability lines. The policy only allows for activity which is directed towards employment to be admitted into the rhetorical construction of progress. The bifurcation had the effect of more clearly separating welfare recipients into those who were able to work and those who were not, and removed the connective tissue of meaningful retraining.

Welfare recipients do not see the line so starkly (Edin & Kefalas, 2005). In an Oregon study, women clearly identified with wanting to work, and were concerned with cycling out of low-income jobs as expressed by this woman from a mid-size town in Oregon where there are not many jobs:

So I can survive until I get a better job, because it is like I was being paid minimum wage with this [level of education] until I have an education. . . . I want to get off [public assistance], but I can’t. (Anderson & Van Hoy, 2006, p. 81)

Based on program evaluations conducted in the 1980s that showed that education was a less successful and more costly way to move people off welfare, long-term education options were discontinued in Oregon, although limited skills training was supported (Anderson & Van Hoy, 2006). In BC, both short and long-term education options were discontinued and only résumé preparation and job search activities were supported, plus some very short training programs that focussed on immediate skills familiarization. The penalty for enrolling in an unapproved educational program without declaring it to the regulatory authorities was lifetime ineligibility for income assistance.

In addition to reclassification, a time limit for collecting benefits was introduced (two years collection every five years), as well as a stipulation that to regain benefits a dependent
would have to prove employment for a certain number of hours in the previous five years. The introduction of time limits changed welfare from “. . . the final economic backstop for the people of the province – the payer of last resort” (Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security, 2000) to being a supplement conditional on individuals’ engagement in the labour force (exempting those with medically ascertained disabilities). This rhetoric was already present prior to 2000; it was present in the 1996/97 annual report which stated that “the Government of British Columbia provides assistance for basic food and shelter to all eligible residents in the province” (Ministry of Human Resources, 1997). The word “eligible” is not emphasized, but at that time eligibility was further restricted to those who waited a mandatory three weeks. The rhetoric of responsibility for work had been introduced, even if benefits were not actually contingent on workforce participation.

Two interactions occurred that rendered systemic difference invisible. First, the reclassifications discipline recipients along other marginalizations which structure exclusive definitions of citizenship. Discourses which recast entitlement to state benefits hearken to a long historical trend of defining citizenship through entitlement to benefits, a trend which, in the US at least, has had racial and class dimensions (Morgen & Maskovsky, 2003). Colour and race are not the only fracture lines though; the re-classification erases other forms of agency such as social care, a particularly gendered effect. Those who cannot meet the criteria for work engagement, including those with health problems, are reclassified as unable. The classifications make the distinctions between these groups stronger, while at the same time erasing the policy which causes the effect, much as the structure of the gaze disappears in viewing from within the panopticon. The disabled, the unwell, and those nearing death are shifted away from the boundary between able and not able, making the demarcation sharper so that arguments about
not being able to cope with the boundary are made more black and white. Rather than granting and recognizing agency, the policy shifts diminish recognition of agency and discipline the range of allowable behaviours and identities.

3.2 Restructuring the Responsibility Mix

Notwithstanding the rather high rates of workforce participation among female lone parents and mothers in general in Canada, one of the explicit goals of the neoliberal turn is to transform citizens into active workers. As Jenson and Saint-Martin (2003) and others point out, the welfare state relies on a distribution of responsibilities between the market, the family, the state, and the third (voluntary or community) sector\(^\text{18}\) in order to provide for well-being. (See Figure 1, p. 23). Social assistance support, supplied by the state and introduced after World War II, was designed to temporarily enable families to purchase what they would ordinarily be able to purchase from the market if they had income. Viewing poverty as an income problem established the income paradigm approach to poverty as the basis of poverty amelioration. The effect was to confirm the state as a passive third-party alternative to the market. This can be seen in a Keynesian manner, regulating labour-market irregularities, or from a welfare state orientation as a temporary bridge to market engagement.

If the underlying assumption is that the state will provide if the market is temporarily unable to, the second condition of the income paradigm is that the state does not intervene beyond the provision of income. The tightening of supply of income to recipients changed the former humanist characteristic that the income paradigm had been tempered with. Formerly, even though the state did not provide sufficient income to meet all needs, virtually no one was allowed to drop out of the social safety net. This model was supplanted by one in which, not only

\(^{18}\) See the Glossary.
were people permitted to be completely without state support (if they exceeded the two-in-five collective limit or were waiting the mandatory three-week waiting period), but the amounts were reduced from what was already publicly known to be insufficient levels of support. There is an assumption embedded in this model that someone or somehow help will be obtained or given, or that a job will be obtained. This assumption has the potential to recreate feminine subordination in economic, political and social spheres because existing social stratifications and inequalities are ready conduits for the organization of this care; the dynamic utilizes existing stratifications rather than re-organizing them (Bezanson, 2006).

The BC reforms shifted what is called the responsibility mix from government to the private sector, family, or the third sector (including the voluntary sector, social housing, and government funded for and non-profit agencies). However, this was accomplished without a net increase of funds to either sector. In contrast, in the US supports to third sector organizations were increased when welfare reforms were introduced (Mead, 2004). The lack of expenditure suggests that the shifts had the neoliberal orientation toward enhancing global competitiveness by reducing government expenditures and arranging for the workforce to be more insecure and less well-paid. As Morgen and Maskovsky (2003) put it, this exemplifies the theorized battle between a Keynesian orientation to tightening the labour market and a neoliberal orientation towards loosening the labour supply. What is interesting is that whichever side is chosen, the income paradigm itself is not changed, just the mix of responsibilities loaded into each sector.

3.2.1 Third Sector Reform

The restructuring of the responsibility mix through welfare reform was augmented by widespread adjustment in third sector supports, including community services and state-sponsored direct support delivery. These latter are two of the four sources of well-being that
Jenson and Saint-Martin identified (2003). The financial flow to social service agencies like neighbourhood houses, women’s shelters, and family support services was reduced and consolidated and new program objectives were set. Core operating funds, which had been guaranteed by contract, were reduced or eliminated for some sectors, destabilizing and ending some sectors of activity. Legal aid was further curtailed, after a long period of declining funding, and child care resource and referral (CCRR) centres were closed (though some were re-opened after much protest). Social services agencies were required to shift to project-by-project fundraising in order to maintain programs. In addition, some responsibilities were resignified as the responsibility of the charitable sector.

Although the changes in funding to third-party organizations were extensive, another way the shift in the responsibility mix was made was through the closure and consolidation of government welfare offices and other direct government services. Funding to communities for support programs was also reduced. Supports which had been grouped with income-support programs were separated and put into other departments, signalling a new policy direction. These included funding for the temporary child protection support such as ‘children in home of a relative’ (CIHR), health supports for children, such as the Healthy Kids extended health benefits plan, supports for people with special needs, home support services, and child care (Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security, 2000). To help emphasize the doctrinal change, client offices were reorganized and staff decision-making latitude was constricted. This continued changes which had been instituted in 1996 under the left-of-centre NDP party, when the appeal system had been dismantled and the BC Benefits Act introduced.

Another way that the responsibility mix was shifted was through privatization of formerly publicly funded services. As service delivery was shifted, social or health services became the
responsibility of for-profit, or market-based, organizations. This continued a trend that had been established a decade earlier when the family maintenance enforcement program (FMEP) was contracted out. The FMEP was established in 1989 to provide enforcement support for court-ordered child maintenance payment agreements and to pursue these payments on behalf of women on welfare (Morrow, 1999). In 2004, the FMEP program, which had been run by three individuals formerly connected to the BC government, was sold to a U.S. publicly traded company that sells data management services to governments in Australia, Canada, the UK and the US. At the same time, the BC government extended the contract for ten years of service delivery, to 2014 (MAXIMUS Wins, 2005; Ministry of Health Services, 2004; Tromp, 2010). The contract extension confirmed the trend of transferring services to the private sector, beyond the gaze of public scrutiny even though funded entirely with public funds (Gurstein, Murray, Datta, & Albert, 2007; Tromp, 2010). Although the FMEP had been established as a voluntary program to assist parents seeking child support, in 1997 social assistance benefits had been made conditional on participation with a penalty for noncompliance of ineligibility (Morrow, 1999). The 2004 sale of the program confirmed the entry of social service delivery as a globally competitive industry and finalized the reshaping of citizen benefits as a traded commodity.

This brief overview of restructuring indicates four ways in which reforms were implemented: actual funding streams were constricted and reorganized for the social services sector, government direct service offices were reduced and consolidated, some services were contracted to private for-profit firms, and appeals processes and supports were reduced or eliminated. The policy changes enhanced the separation of the world of support from the world

---

Note that according to Morrow (1999) the FMEP program began in 1989, but government sources indicate that the year service delivery management was contracted out was 1988 (Ministry of Health Services, 2004).
of work, shifting responsibility for social support from direct government service to the third sector but removing the funding for that support. One consequence of this shift is that the government robbed itself of indicators of service need, while it removed the opportunity for social service agencies to document need by reporting on client use.

Although the BC changes were ostensibly modelled on the US Personal Work Opportunity and Responsibility Act (PWORA), especially as implemented by the state of Wisconsin (Klein & Long, 2003), the changes in third-sector support were different in ways that challenge attempts to compare the impacts of the changes. Funding for the third sector increased in the US, including for training and child care, as well as for social support agencies, even, or in some cases especially, if these agencies explicitly rewarded traditional family norms like two-parent families. Changes in BC occurred in the context of Canada’s more extensive social support system, but there was a marked decrease in third sector funding in BC, stressing this sector at the same time as duress for clients increased. The context meant that the direction of changes was different, so although reforms were as broad as in the US, third sector supports were decreased and withdrawn rather than expanded. Although radical restructuring had already occurred in the provinces of Alberta and Ontario, detailed reviews suggest that the BC reforms were the most extensive acts of welfare and social services restructuring that had been attempted in Canada to that time (Goldberg & Wolanksi, 2005).

### 3.3 Characterizing the Consequences of BC Reform

If the BC welfare reform is compared to other regime changes, it has less in common with the European movement to social investment and more with the US move toward disenfranchisement. In this sense, the reforms confirm Esping-Anderson’s typecasting of the former British colonies as being of a market-oriented type of social provision, even though
Canada is often cited as having a much stronger social support system than the US. In this case, the BC reforms seem to be more punitive than the American reforms, since third sector supports and government restructuring disinvested state supports. Unlike in the US, Great Britain, Australia, and other countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), adult education and postsecondary education were discontinued as options for self-improvement, suggesting that labour supports were undermined. The move to contract some social services to for-profit corporations confirms what has been reported elsewhere, which is a trend towards moving citizen supports into the globally competitive marketplace. The net result was to significantly and symbolically reduce the state’s role as a supplier of last resort.

If Third Way reform is understood as encompassing social investment and capacity development, then the BC changes may be said to trend more towards a neoliberal agenda. Given the history of reforms which predate the 2002 changes, a rather distinct political pattern emerges which may follow a tighter association between a traditional-economy full-employment model, rather than the flexible workforce model centred on the knowledge and service economies. If employment is more precarious for those without traditional wage-labour employment, the question arises of whether the aim of increasing global competitiveness, which is central to Third Way reform, was achieved or whether, as a workforce and economic strategy, welfare reform in BC was made to enhance traditional-economy competitiveness, building on past economic success in resource extraction industries.

Third Way reform suggests that income security for the population may be achieved more successfully through attachment to the labour market, which implies a focus on reducing the benefits so as to discourage workforce disengagement or increasing the relative reward of working by reducing the welfare wall. The CCTB and NCB are good examples of the types of
policies that reduce exit barriers and support low-income working families. The basic income position of non-working and working parents was made more insecure because of the extent of the unavailability of affordable housing, lack of transportation support, lack of availability of child care spaces, and elimination of education supports, among other high living costs, especially for people living in the city of Vancouver and a few other prosperous towns in BC (Kershaw, P., Forer, B., & Goelman, H., 2005; Shillington, 2000).

If the changes are viewed from the perspective of the capabilities approach described by Sen and others (Fukuda-Parr, 2003; Sen, 1993), the bundle of functionings which individuals may choose from has likely been constricted, although there is likely not enough comprehensive information available to determine exactly how choice may have been constrained (or how it may have expanded, if that is the case). The range of reductions in supports suggests that there are intersections of functionings, such as choices around managing child care, plus choice bundles for types of workforce engagement, to give two examples, which may further constrict choice because the intersection of choice bundles is required to support better freedoms. In an abstract sense, reduction in arrays of options, such as in biological ecosystems, leads to greater fragility and rigidity of the whole system. This model suggests that there may be some increasing vulnerability to economic events if the choice bundles are indeed reduced. In 2001, the national government issued a report noting that Third Way reform had not yet been proven to be effective in workforce engagement, in spite of reductions in caseloads (Human Resources Development Canada, 2001).
CHAPTER 4 – APPLYING A CRITICAL LENS

A critical feminist lens was used to frame the research questions posed in this dissertation, to shape the analytic approach, and to develop the findings. In this chapter, some of the theoretical underpinnings of critical perspectives on resistance and agency are explored, beginning with definitions of resistance and an exploration of works which follow James Scott’s (1985) work, *Weapons of the Weak*. Applications of the concept of constrained or underground resistance to poverty is then explored, with reflections on notions of how resistance works in comparison to neoliberal policy claims on agency. This is followed by two sections, one which focusses on intersectionality and another that focusses on the potential for collective cultural resistance, or what is known as survivance. Both of these concepts are relevant to the experience of Aboriginal women who along with Aboriginal men, experience deeper poverty and more inequality in Canada. However, critical perspectives on inequality also include analysis of class, income and gender inequality, and inequalities arising from racialization, colonialism/post-colonialism, and global imperialism. Awareness of the way disadvantages intersect is important for exploring the potential for agency to effect social change, as well as for exploring the impacts of neoliberal reforms on particular marginalized populations.

4.1 Recognizing Resistance

If poverty is viewed as the outcome of structural constraints in society, rather than an individually based accidental condition, then resistance becomes part of the ethic of poverty. However, the concept of resistance has its roots in political economy studies, where it is associated with political revolution (Bayat, 2000), and although social and political change may be a hoped-for goal of resistance, Hollander and Einwohner (2004) note that there is little apparent consensus on the definition of resistance and when and where it is deployed.
Hollander and Einwohner (ibid) suggest that two key dimensions are common among studies which refer to resistance: intentionality and effectiveness. Separating motivation from effect is important, because change may be initiated by non-intentional acts, which Hollander and Einwohner suggest would not fit the criteria for resistance. They argue that self-awareness and the ability to articulate opposition to power are important characteristics of intentionality. However, investigating awareness and the ability to articulate opposition raises problems of interpretation because resistance may be intentionally concealed or hard to discern. The second criterion, effectiveness, indicates that actions which are intentional may not have impact, and this raises the possibility of futile actions, or weak actions, which also may be hard to discern, or which raise questions about whether or when acts should be classified as resistance if they have poor or no outcomes.

The work of James Scott (1985, 1998) who studied the resistance of Malay peasants may be particularly useful for considering the scope and scale of possible agency of lone mothers. Scott defines resistance as “any act(s) by member(s) of a subordinate class that is or are intended either to mitigate or deny claims . . . made on that class by superordinate classes” (Scott, 1985, p. 290). Scott (ibid) focusses on resistance as “small acts,” conducted with subterfuge towards an end of pricking the conscience of their landlords, but perhaps without aiming for revolution. By arguing that nipping at the heels of those in power is a legitimate form of resistance, Scott shifts attention from outcome to the nature of acts of resistance, away from uprisings and sabotage and passive blocking. The outcomes shift from the overtly political to personal satisfaction and economic well-being. In the process of making this scale shift from the macro to the micro, he also re-aligns the locus of resistance, from the organized political to the culturally collective or individual.
While Scott’s work provides an analytical framework for approaching the study of resistance in very constrained contexts, some of the dimensions of what constitute resistance need to be defined, as Hollander and Einwohner pointed out (2004). More recent studies have expanded the binary depiction of power that Scott explored to include contests with colonial legacies (Ewick & Silbey, 2003) and struggles between rural and urban economies (Gupta, 2001; Moore, 1998). These studies draw attention to the way expansion into global economies affects local relations with authority (Gupta, 2001; Haney, 1994; Rudd, 2006). Expanding the contexts of power also makes them more complex; Brody (2006) observed that the resistance of mall workers in Bangkok was directed at supervisors who were imposing modernity on the supposedly rural and ‘backwards’ custodial staff. These systems of power distribution move far beyond feudal relations such as Scott (op cit) described to engage with the distribution of power through the global economy and the multiple positioning of players within that network. In addition, Bayat (2000) suggests that studies of resistance need to attend to sites of “thicker” power, such as bureaucratic institutions which parlay political power into structure power.

Exploring and expanding the contexts of power leads to a more complex view of actors. One of the actors which may be considered include a public audience who give power to acts of resistance by witnessing and parlaying them or that uses them to cohere a collective sense of resistance (Seijo, 2005; Wilson & Stapleton, 2007). Having an audience implies that rhetoric is a weapon of “small acts,” similar to those that Scott named. However, the object of rhetoric may take the form of an ideological stance, and this can be used by either party in a power struggle (Gupta, 2001; Haney, 1994). Acknowledging rhetoric as a weapon thus introduces resistance to two-way power struggles and situates it in an arena of struggle, not just a binary relationship.
The public becomes an actant in this arena, occupying a valuable role as party to the resistance; and therefore become a prize to be won over.

The creation of collective consciousness appears to be interdependent with the development of a subaltern identity, both appearing out of and requiring the performance of resistance narratives (Wilson & Stapleton, 2007). Narratives of resistance require back stories and these may achieve an explanatory purpose (Rossi, 2004), lend authority to historical events (Arbona, 2007; Seijo, 2005), help to create cultures of resistance (Haenfler, 2004; Oslender, 2007; Wilson & Stapleton, 2007), or create a historicized space that legitimates resistance (Moore, 1998; Wilson & Stapleton, 2007). Language and “talk” thus serve a double purpose, not only in being a moment of resistance, but also in staging future moments of resistance (Wilson & Stapleton, 2007). In these performances, identity operates in a fluid, malleable, manner under the control, to some extent, of the individual, but tied to the collective narrative (Ewick & Silbey, 2003; Seijo, 2005). However, if resistance is understood as a socially transformative act, then this also raises the question of how and when individual acts of identity or other actions become resistance, which returns us to the dilemma of interpretation (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004).

While Scott’s (1985) notion of small acts draws attention to the possibility of multiple tools of resistance which may occur as ‘micro-politics’ of resistance (Brody, 2006; Fleming & Spicer, 2003; Kong, 2006), engagement with rhetoric expands the tools or “weapons” of resistance to include identity, and this is particularly relevant to studies of gender. Women use traditional gender identities to shield themselves from public judgement (Kong, 2006) or to resist the colonization of their time (Haney, 1994), while gay men have been observed to use social institutions to gain the advantage of heteronormative legitimacy (Yeung, Stombler, & Wharton, 2006). Women may also deploy traditional identity to protect family time, which is a kind of
resistance against globalization and national policy emphasis on paid labour (Rudd, 2006). In addition to the assumption of given gender identities, oppositional identities may be developed to cultivate spaces for future resistance (Gupta, 2001; Seijo, 2005; Wilson & Stapleton, 2007). Haenfler (2004) highlighted more overtly ironic uses of identity as resistance, in which members of a resistance may enact an ironic identity which operates as a super-resistance cell while simultaneously rejecting dominant culture. The discursive play around resistance illustrates how the formation and maintenance of identity becomes an act of resistance (Houston & Pulido, 2002).

Applying the criteria of effectiveness to the question of lone mothers’ resistance entails some dilemmas. For example, if women assume identity as a protection, it may be difficult to “read” or distinguish resistance from being subsumed in normative or constraining gender frames (Haney, 1994). The difficulty in ascertaining a performance of identity, though, does not negate the question of whether acts of resistances are socially transformative (Einwohner, Hollander, & Olson, 2000). The use of events as a common reference point or tool by the public may indicate the presence of resistance, including the development of subaltern identities (Ewick & Silbey, 2003; Seijo, 2005). Talk may also constitute resistance by working through the public, the powerful and those who are the observers, such as media, researchers, or other types of commentators. However, the studies reviewed here suggest that some degree of political organization is also important for achieving change (Arbona, 2007; Moore, 1998). In the case of gender-based change, though, one has to ask how much change is actually being enacted, what the possible scope of change is given the frame of gender relations, and who is actually engaged in performances. The question of whether collective resistance can develop, though, is still a question, even if Scott’s (1985) notion of “small tools” is expanded.
4.2 Critical Approaches to Poverty

To recognize resistance is to recognize agency, though agency is a broader term and may extend beyond power struggles. However, agency is additionally germane to this inquiry because debates on Third Way and neoliberal welfare reform colonize the notion of agency through expectations that individuals will act of their own accord to fulfil policy objectives, such as financial independence (Kershaw, 2005). Agency, framed as the failure to achieve policy aims, is implicitly defined by these policies as a moral failure to contribute to society and to maintain financial independence because of the failure to avoid some types of government pensions, such as welfare (see discussion in Kershaw, 2005a). Thus agency becomes a notion of interest to those who are pursuing critical inquiries into poverty and to those who are critiquing the social implications of welfare reform.

Individualizing poverty by assigning fault does not take into account the intersection of systemic disadvantages, or the intersection of marginalizations such as poverty and gender. The agency of women in receipt of welfare occurs in the context of gender relations, both at a societal level and as expressed in individual familial situations and relationships (Fraser & Gordon, 1997; Pearce, 1990). Critical feminist perspectives begin with a view from women’s everyday experience, and use this experience and “voice” to challenge dominant ways of framing problems (D. Smith, 1987). Even when everyday experience is the focus, though, if the inquiry is not critical it may result in a focus on “coping” or other activities which do not challenge inequality (Williams, Popay, & Oakley, 1999).

4.2.1 Focusing on Lone Mothers’ Agency

Agency is a central concern of critical feminist welfare research (Christopher, 2004; Lister, 2004; F. Williams, Popay, & Oakley, 1999), where the focus on challenging gendered
policy and research priorities has led to an interest in women’s everyday experience. Focusing attention on women’s everyday experience shifts attention from caseload reduction, or, whether women have exited income assistance and are therefore no longer “dependent”, to questions about the adequacy of supports and how women are surviving (Christopher, 2004). Starting from this point of view, other sets of questions arise such as how unpaid care work, long a thread of interest in feminist research, is being managed by women with very low incomes (Bezanson, 2006; Luxton, 2006). For example, networks of support, including friendships which provide an important component of support towards coping, are themselves thinned by poverty that is extended throughout networks and family systems (Baker Collins, Neysmith, Porter, & Reitsma-Street, 2009; Gurstein & Vilches, 2009; Side, 2005). This type of focus recontextualizes the question of agency within multiple fields, moving beyond the income paradigm to questions about the interaction of family and community with the economy and the burdens women face within it (Lewis & Giullari, 2005). A critical feminist approach thus moves beyond a focus on the conditions of poverty, or individual struggle to survive, and on to questions of contextual supports and gender disparity (Bashevkin, 2002; Luxton, 2006).

4.2.1.1 Defining Agency

In spite of the interest and attention paid to agency in critical feminist welfare research, the definition of agency is seldom explicitly the focus. However, Lister (2004) suggests four types of agency exercised by women in poverty; (a) getting by (surviving); (b) getting on (strategizing); (c) getting back at (resistance); and (d) getting out (exiting poverty). The first two types of agency, “getting by” and “getting on”, indicate a material struggle within a contradictory field of constraint and resources, whereas “getting back” implies a politicized field of action. The last type of agency, “getting out,” concerns exiting welfare and suggests a transformational
moment, or, in shifting from the role or status of being a recipient of government aid to one who is supported through market engagement. These four concepts counter the construction of the poor as passive beneficiaries, and the construction of women as dependents or subjects of welfare distribution. As analytic concepts they have a dimension of activity and inactivity and relate in particular ways to the contexts of constraint and to each other, thus potentially providing an analytic framework for a study of constraints and possibilities.

In spite of the opportunity to recentre the inquiry on women’s experiences, Lister’s four agencies create a theoretical dilemma because the focus on survival seems to only leave a quantitative option for overcoming poverty by surmounting need with sufficient resources to exit. The instrumental approach seems to diminish agency by only offering the opportunity for success or failure. However, from a pragmatist standpoint, agency could be considered as a context in which structure and agency represent the negotiation of a field of tension.

Action [is] not [to] be perceived as the pursuit of pre-established ends, abstracted from concrete situations, but rather [as] ends and means [that] develop coterminously within contexts that are themselves ever changing and thus always subject to re-evaluation and reconstruction on the part of the reflective intelligence.


If agency and context form a field of tension, agency could be more than instrumental action; agency could indicate activities like strategizing between need, resources and outcomes. Viewing the four agencies as indicative of a field of tension offers a way to move beyond perspectives that reinforce problematic norms. However, the dilemma indicates the necessity for a critical approach to questions of resources and context. As with reviews of the other kinds of agency, “getting out” can be seen to occur in a complex field of interaction, engaging careful
management of resources, and complex risk calculations which offers shades of success rather than certainty.

Critiques of policy outcomes, which closely study the ways in which women actually perform, suggest that the agency which Lister (2004) identifies, of “getting out” is an agency that also engages “getting by” and “getting on.” If the agencies that Lister identifies are interactive, there are two potential ways of structuring the types of agencies. First, there could be a unique, additional, form of agency, which coordinates the others. The scientific preference for parsimonious theory would mitigate pursuing this road unless necessary, though. The second option would be to understand agency as composed of constituent elements including a conscious oversight, which balances self-preservation with a more central need, such as for perhaps, hope, or respite. If the agencies Lister presents are coordinated by a constituent element like hope, though, it implies that the agencies have a reflective characteristic, including a consciousness of other forms of agency. Including space for a reflective conceptualization of options may offer opportunities to move away from the tight fit between survival and response implied by Lister’s four agencies, which also allows exploration of other models of poverty amelioration such as the capabilities model outlined in chapter 2. Without a reflective capacity, space for imagining options is a chance occurrence rather than part of a field of operation. Thus, if agencies are understood as interactive along dimensions of their scope, accomplishment, and awareness, then interactions may offer the opportunity to see choice as both uniquely individual and uniquely constrained.

4.2.1.2 Agency as a Contested Subject: Passivity

Agency does not always or only indicate action. Ferguson (2003) and Hoggett (2001) explored a range of responses to policy directives including passivity, non-response and angry
non-compliance. In contrast with the desired compliance of parents being surveilled under child protection orders, passivity, or the other reactions may be seen as agentic and perhaps resistant responses in relation to the child protection mandate. By focussing on the way that the types of agency and resistance documented by Ferguson and Hoggett interact with context, agency can also be seen as something that helps define what context is. Viewed in reverse, context, through interaction, helps create the opportunity to act and, in this sense, may also be seen to play a role in creating the meaning of agency. Thus, in contrast to the co-option of agency within policy directives, agency may be a refusal to interact and may look like silence or withdrawal, even if it is self-destructive.

Redefining agency as context shifts the meaning, magnitude and importance of agency from an interest in survival, such as is central to the income paradigm of poverty, to an interest in range of opportunity, an approach which is central to the capabilities paradigm. A feminist critical perspective looks through agency to examine the difference that gender makes to the constraining conditions of context. If agency is understood as a field of tension, agency can also be understood as co-created through individual performance, lending agency a reflexive element. An attempt to enumerate agency highlights the constraints of the income paradigm as a theoretical platform, while also opening the door to understanding the power of agency to shape context. Agency and resistance thus form important starting points for deconstructing normative approaches to poverty. By focussing on agency, the experience of the women is established as the point of entry for framing the problem.

4.3 Everyday Experience as a Foundation of Inquiry

As Lister (2004) points out, too much welfare discourse objectifies recipients and erases their agency, rendering them as passive individuals who are framed as victims of poverty or
individualizing their problems by making them responsible for their own demise. The problem is compounded by scientific approaches which alienate experience with words that reify social structures (D. Smith, 2008). Research on welfare subjects tends to either follow a population research methodology, based on census or other statistics, or, if focused on the experiences of individuals, on how women cope or struggle (Williams, Popay, & Oakley, 1999). Grounding investigation in everyday experiences can form the basis of radical critique (Lefebvre, 1985; Scott, 1985; D. Smith, 1987).

Everyday experience is used in feminist research to ground structural critique (Naples, 2003; D. Smith, 1987). Smith argues that gender interests are systematically excluded, and she challenges sociologists to accept a positional standpoint based on women’s experiences in life, advocating what she calls “a sociology for women” (D. Smith, 1987). Standpoint epistemology, as it is known (Hartsock, 1983; D. Smith, 2005), was and is used in critical feminist studies to re-establish inquiry using the perspectives of participants such as women to inform the development of categories and knowledge. Rather than focusing on women as a category, though, Smith developed a particular methodology of tracing institutional pressures through the observation of everyday experiences (D. Smith, 1986, 1990). Such approaches have been used to challenge assumptions embedded in policy reform (Edin & Kefalas, 2005; Naples, 1997; Weigt, 2006).

The use of everyday experience to challenge hegemonic systems of knowledge and scientific production, though, has not only been present in critical feminist perspectives. Both Lefebvre (1985) and Scott (1985, 1998) have purposefully used everyday experience to ground radical critique. Lefebvre suggested that everyday life had the potential to create disjunctions in meaning systems (Lefebvre, 2003). These disjunctions, which he referred to as ‘moments,’ offered an interstice where what he called ‘representation’ could materialize the potential for
change. He enumerated particular physical and embodied spaces of change: (a) an empirical space, (b) a conceptual space, and (c) a dynamic space of interaction which was lived in the social moment (Lefebvre, 1991). He termed the underlying dynamic “urban” or “urbanism,” and suggested that this, rather than historical materialism with its attendant class dynamic, is actually the root of change for future civilization. This theorization later led Lefebvre to examine of the life of cities and the potential for everyday life to make and remake the city (Lefebvre, 1991). However, his approach deliberately places the art of dissonance, or urbanism as he calls it, in everyday life as the centre for change, suggesting that a study of everyday life has the potential to uncover radical dynamics of change.

Whether Lefebvre’s entire approach is taken as a whole or not, his approach focusses inquiry somewhat differently from that presented by Dorothy Smith. The researcher becomes a student of the dynamics of change, rather than an archaeologist of power structures. Taking Lefebvre’s starting position means looking between actions at a shifting dynamic that is constantly recreated. Smith’s approach looks to the structure that, although recreated by the participation of the subject in a Bourdieusian way, imposes itself on the subject. In Smith’s approach, the focus of inquiry becomes the edifice, and everyday life is the lens. While these have different methodological implications, both have in common an examination of power through the radical interpretation of everyday life. What is missing in Lefebvre’s work is a particular attention to gender and structural differences which lead to systemic marginalization of specific populations.

Another approach to the study of everyday life, specifically relevant to poverty, is James Scott’s investigation of resistance among Malaysian peasants (Scott, 1985). Scott, like Smith, seeks to overturn accepted scientific theoretical frameworks, but he specifically contests the
Marxian notion of revolution as the final end of political action or the only legitimate means of change. To this end, Scott bypasses the need to arrive at a grand meta-narrative of transformation, which is central to traditional Marxist theory, and offers instead a way to investigate the potential of everyday life itself as transformative through many acts of minute resistance. The focus on the everyday action presses attention onto questions about audience, interpretation of context, intention and efficacy because if the moment and actions of everyday life are understood to be transformative, then questions arise of whose transformation, how much change is needed to be understood as transformation, and at what structural threshold effects may be understood as transformation. These questions have been further explored by those working on resistance theory, as discussed earlier. Here, though, it is important to note that Scott adds everyday experience to the subject of study by focusing on its interpretation as resistance.

The three views of the uses of everyday life as a lens represented by Smith, Lefebvre and Scott raise questions about the researcher’s gaze, the ontological meaning of everyday life, the context and ends of action, audience interpretation, and about the meaning of change. Each of the three perspectives positions the researcher slightly differently in relation to investigation, although all three authors seek a structural critique and transformative outcome. From Smith’s and Scott’s work, we gain a specific focus on a marginalized or oppressed group. In Smith’s case this leads, eventually, to a close examination of the expressions of power as they are imprinted on individuals. The researcher acts as an interpreter. In Scott’s case, we are drawn into the context as an interpretive audience, and as researchers into grappling with degrees of impact and contestations over interpretations. This brings us to a complex and nuanced understanding of power. In Lefebvre’s (2003) approach, everyday experience becomes the central node of change when meaning is disrupted in ‘moments’ of disjuncture. In this approach individual action
generates change through creative materialization. Studying change through the window of
creative disjuncture destabilizes the researcher/researched dichotomy by making interpretation a
participatory action which is only possible through observing the “urban” moment. Intention and
action do not only occur in relation to a binary structure of power, but also become an
interpretive field. Investigating everyday life becomes foundational to a critical inquiry into the
meaning of women’s poverty and the potential for women on welfare to effect change for
themselves, future generations, and society.

4.3.1 Methodological Dilemmas of Incorporating Voice

Hearkening to Dorothy Smith’s foundational assertions about attending to individual
experience, Christopher (2004) highlights the value of including “women’s voices” in poverty
research. The orientation to inclusion of voice in feminist research is meant to balance and
disrupt hegemonic and dominant discourses, as well as to offer interpersonal respect and validity
of expression in the research moment (Fonow & Cook, 1991; Salmon, 2007). However, if the
researcher is literally attending to the spoken word, then the opportunity for critical reflexivity
diminishes (Mantzoukas, 2004). Deciding that the analyst can discern critical perspectives in
women’s voices introduces two competing realities, the researchers’ and the woman’s, without
giving any logical reason why the analyst’s point of view should trump the participants’.
However, to abandon the call to attend to voice threatens the intention to respect the unmediated
perspectives of participants, an important issue in research which intends to move away from
hegemonizing discourse.

One way of re-approaching voice is espoused in a social construction perspective on the
interview dialogue (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003; Tanggaard, 2009). This perspective views
expression as a construction enacted by the speaker, dependent on meaning as the participant
understands the phenomena, but also as a performance enacted for the audience of the researcher (Beaunae, Wu, & Koro-Ljungberg, 2011; Cotterill, 1992). By taking a social constructionist perspective of the moment, there is potential for interaction that is unique to both the context of the researcher/participant interaction and the larger socio-political context. Research interaction also becomes open, or permeable to a negotiation of power and position and, as Varcoe notes (2006), both the researcher and the participant may be changed through the interaction. In order to participate, though, researchers need to be prepared and self-aware (reflexive) of the way they use knowledge systems, how they communicate, and what political reality they are contributing to as they issue research results. In order to be free of imperialism, colonialism, racism, and so on, researchers must listen to the work of marginalized individuals, both in the scholarly community and beyond, so as to be able to challenge their own views and understand the way that power is replicated. Researchers must understand their own power, and as this is difficult to do on one’s own, one of the preferred research methods is through partnership research (Ristock & Pennell, 1996; Salmon, 2007). In order to understand the political reality they contribute to, researchers must attend to the impact of their findings, and not only be aware of but develop research skills for contributing to the amelioration of disadvantage.

Centering a research approach on everyday experience requires an ethical commitment to attend to the presentation of self by the research participant, and brings the participant into the realm of inquiry as a partner as well as an author of her/his own story. The researcher must also articulate and acknowledge her or his role in a self aware way and communicate this to the participant and audience (Hartsock, 1983; Naples, 2003). The dilemmas inherent in this is that as the researcher becomes a party to knowledge construction, they also become vulnerable to the intricacies of the power in the micro politics of the research situation (Mauthner & Doucet,
These issues must be noted in any research design that intends to achieve a critical inquiry.

### 4.4 Intersectionality as Critical Lens

In spite of the intensive and reflexive feminist critiques of the power structures embedded in scientific methods, mainstream feminist approaches to poverty have been critiqued for bypassing the importance of other structural determinants of disadvantage, such as racism, colonialism and global imperialism (Hill Collins, 1994; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Noting that the term has become widespread, Yuval-Davis defines intersectionality as “the interrelationships of gender, class, race and ethnicity and other social divisions” (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 194). The critiques most relevant to research with impoverished women of colour have come from scholarship on African American women in the US. Although the African American experience of racism and the historical context of slavery is distinct from the Canadian indigenous experience of colonialism, an intersectional critique offers an alternative epistemological perspective, as well as important themes which reflect the unique experiences of a population which has similarly faced challenges due to “Othering.”

#### 4.4.1 Shifting the Focus: Themes in Intersectional Women-Centred Research

From an African American standpoint, poverty intersects with other conditions created by racism (Brodsky, 1999; McDonald & Armstrong, 2001; Stevenson Jr., 1994). Themes emerge out of this intersectional analysis such as a concern with ability, discrimination and welfare (Parish, Magaña, & Cassiman, 2008), the historic legacy of slavery and contemporary poverty (Newman, 2001; W. Scott, 2006), the causes and forms of domestic violence for African American women on welfare, and the intersection of poverty, family form and the high rates of
incarceration of African American men (Drucker, 2003; Lanier, 2003). These themes offer alternate ways to understand resilience and resistance.

4.4.2 Racial Uplift: Womanist Interpretations and Collectivist Contributions

One of the ways that resistance is described in African American writings is as racial uplift work. The work of developing a sense of betterment, and of supporting others to envision a better future, has been a documented part of deliberate organizing among African American women’s organizations (Banks, 2006). Aptheker (1989) identifies racial uplift work as resistance, and notes that it is more than organized political action, or even actions which have a collective effect. Instead, looking to the history of survival of African Americans in the deep South and elsewhere in the U.S., she points to the ways that women, as mothers, invested their lives so that their children would be freed from the kinds of conditions they themselves suffered under. Like Hill-Collins (2000), Aptheker takes a deliberate step away from identifying reward as an individual benefit and links women’s individual work of parenting to social betterment, which the women themselves see as part of the task of offering future generations better opportunities. She notes that this work is not necessarily expected to reap reward in one individual’s life, or even this earthly life. In the stories she gathered, women recounted three or four generations of work before seeing fruition of their labour. As subsequent generations began to be able to go to school, to college, and then on to better careers, women counted success in a multi-generational way, built on a lineage of their grandmothers’ and grandfathers’ manual labour and self-sacrifice.

Three themes in the writings on African American issues illustrate the way within-family labours contribute to the collectivity. For example, educating oneself becomes part of a racial uplift duty. African American organizations also explicitly focussed on combating racial discrimination by conceptualizing women’s work and a collective duty as racial uplift work.
(Banks, 2006; Slevin, 2005). Racial uplift work is articulated as a response to the overwhelming feeling and experience of discrimination; important characteristics include the cultural transmission of values, buffering negative messages, and developing a sense of pride in cultural/racial identity (Stevenson Jr., 1994). The National Association of Colored Women (NACW), formed in 1896, promoted and encouraged the growing middle class of African American women to include community work as a duty to their sisters and brethren, as well as promoting the benefits of domestic work as resistance work.

Uplift ideals entailed constructing a positive black identity to counter racist beliefs about blacks. Middle-class African-American women promoted the ideal of individual self-sacrifice in order to serve community needs through self-help projects such as setting up health clinics, kindergartens, and orphanages for the African-American community. (Banks, 2006, p. 604)

Connecting individual betterment to collective well-being and resistance against racism leads to a collective value for the care of children. For example, African American child care workers may see their vocation as a call-to-arms in the fight against racial discrimination (Tuominen, 2008). The scope and scale of racial uplift arguments, and the “other-mothering” that Hill Collins (1994) describes, have implications for understanding the scope and scale of what might be called parenting, and reframes resistance as the work of redefining the gaze and reality. The definitions of what constitutes resistance and the meaning of community work are part of the contrast between the African American second-wave women’s movement and European feminist movements which defined a unique set of priorities for women of colour in the U.S. (Hill Collins, 1994; Lorde, 1983).
4.4.3 Community Work as Resistance

One of the implications of reframing women’s work and parenting as racial uplift work or cultural strengthening and resistance is that focusing on gender issues means working on issues of inequality. Community-level institution building is not the kind of outcome that is focused on in male-centric resistance theory (Aptheker, 1989), nor does uplift work fit the model that Scott (1985) explored of using “weapons of the weak” to thwart a particular landlord or to exercise class noncompliance. Rather, resistance as uplift work is expressed as institution building for a particular identified group, with the eventual goal being emancipation from the effects of racial discrimination. Effort is augmented by a sense of building pride, both in one’s own work and in one’s self and culture. Uplift is a legitimatizing rationale for valuing African American women’s labour for family (Hill Collins, 1994).

Perspectives on racial uplift and family care count self-betterment as social duty and translate into community work as resistance. This action is also documented internationally. For example, Boesten (2003) documents the way indigenous women organized “milk leagues” to distribute food to impoverished families in Lima, Peru. As in African American communities, community-benefitting services were developed in the face of denial and exclusion by a dominant regime. In Lima, as in the African American experience, the interests of women were not seen as distinct from, or in tension with, collective well-being. Instead, the work of women in traditional and non-traditional spheres is affirmed as valuable to the collective betterment. This shift in focus brings service to collective well-being into the definition of women’s agency.

4.5 Constructed Citizenship Boundaries

As intersectional analysis is applied to other populations, unique themes emerge from the particular experiences. Ristock and Pennell (1996), for example, explore the challenges of
including battered lesbians in women’s shelters, exploring the boundaries of gender sensitivity and inclusion. In the UK, Yuval-Davis, Anthias, and Kofman (2005) explore the way immigration policies can reinforce dependency for the female Muslim population by designating women as either a “spouse” or pushing them into unskilled work (2005). They argue that immigration policies construct a situation where women are peripheral, and in which they may easily become isolated in the house. McLaren and Dyck (2004) focus on the way policies imply an “ideal” immigrant by setting exclusionary conditions, which generate tensions around belonging. Yuval-Davis, Anthias and Kofman (op cit) suggest that inquiries which do not attend to difference risk replicating the boundaries of citizenship exclusion.

Social policies may be compared to immigration policies, which shape citizenship through the distribution of benefits to the deserving, and replicate some kinds of racialized fractures (Dobrowolsky & Lister, 2005). Analyses applied to immigration policies could easily be applied to a critical review of welfare policies looking at (a) how difference is made into a marker through some types of policies; and (b) how policies that do not explicitly address disadvantage recreate exclusion based on difference. Individuals who do not “pass” policy gates are positioned outside the host culture as a potential threat to the nation-state. Applying this kind of critique to welfare policy offers the opportunity to see how reform replicates historic structures of exclusion. For example, the domestic violence that Aboriginal women in Canada experience is bound to the colonial structure of administration set out in treaty relationships with the federal government, and to the history of abuse which is a legacy of the genocide and enforced residential schooling of the colonial era (LaRocque, 1993; Nicholson, 2005).

At the same time, exclusionary practices may also fuel or contain seeds of resistance. Immigrants may forge a transnational sense of home, blurring boundaries in ways that contest
the identification of home with geographic location (Staeheli & Nagel, 2006). The contest between place and boundary exerted between policy makers and new immigrants makes immigration an arena, not only of adaptation and survival, but of contested difference and manoeuvring for belonging (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1992). Aptheker (1989), as others do, counts the collective networking that women do, such as sharing child care, trading survival tips, networking to find employment, keeping secrets, helping women escape domestic violence, and working together to create networks of friendship and camaraderie into the definition of resistance. This notion of resistance requires an intentional, reflexive goal: the women Aptheker refers to are consciously building a better future for themselves by evading, circumventing, and surviving. Consistent with Hollander and Einwohner’s (2004) suggested characteristics of resistance, the resistance by women of colour weaves together poverty, inequality, and racism or colonialism, with an intentional, reflexive awareness of disadvantage. Focussing on welfare reform without attending to these intersectional issues is tantamount to missing the problem.

4.6 Welfare Colonialism and Aboriginal Women’s Resistance

Exploring the effects of the intersection of racism and other systemic discrimination means simultaneously critiquing mainstream approaches and reflecting the unique circumstances of the standpoint being explored. Research concerned with the effects of welfare reform on the urban Aboriginal population, as was the Income Assistance project (IAP) which provided the data for this dissertation, must acknowledge and understand the dynamics of colonial history behind contemporary Aboriginal poverty. The concept of welfare colonialism, coined by Robert Paine (1977), captures the loss of self-determination which occurred as lands were being depleted (Adelson, 2000). At the same time, colonial policies authorized the removal of children to residential schools. As Bernardi put it:
Although the postcolonial state has brought about a change in status, welfare together with citizenship operates not to actualise the identity and culture of the indigenous person, but to colonialise [sic] indigenousness with the state's own distinctive norms. (Bernardi, 1997, p. 38)

Disempowered, hungry, decimated by European diseases like small pox and tuberculosis, and legally not citizens, community leaders could not effectively prevent the resettlement of their communities, which alienated the communities from their land (Shewell, 2004). The situation resulted in an oppressive administrative relationship between the federal government and indigenous peoples, who were disadvantaged by being forcibly moved. Discussing the contemporary Australian context, Bernardi (1997) argues that liberal initiatives which “give” communities block grants replicate colonialism by continuing to impose the state’s versions of “success” and “progress.” Palmer (2001) suggests that liberal approaches belie the way these funding structures capitalize on the historic poverty of communities to enforce self-colonization. Part of indigenous resistance has been a concerted effort to reclaim self-government, which in some cases means sovereignty and at other times means ownership of knowledge, means of distribution of power or funds, and ownership of the right to define problems, including in research (BC ACADRE, 2006; B. Smith, 2005).

The importance of functions such as child rearing to the maintenance of health of communities and cultures is affirmed through a politically driven resistance which focuses on assuming responsibility for health and social services, including child care, child protection, and

---

20 The federal government in Canada has treaty responsibility to First Nations, and in the northern territories to the Inuit and Innu (north of the 60th latitude, including the Yukon, Nunavut, and the Northwest Territories), and for official Métis descendents. The provinces have responsibility for all non-status Aboriginal people, who are by default not legally different from any other citizen.

While a coherent focus on the meaning of motherhood or poverty to Aboriginal women may be mitigated by the diverse experiences of the many Aboriginal cultures and histories in Canada, the questions posed here intersect with the meanings of women’s roles historically and today. The historical significance of female roles extends beyond the meanings understood in Euro-western culture and includes the social organization of political and socio-economic activities (Fiske, 1991; Forsyth, 2005), as well as sacred teachings and technical knowledge (Forsyth, 2005). Contemporary approaches to building on strengths focus on redefining well-being as a foundation to moving forward (Hart, 1999; Saskatoon Aboriginal Women's Health Community Committee, 2004). Critical research, meanwhile, is concerned with the high rates of sex trade work and the risks of substance use (Benoit & Carroll, 2001; Harris, 2003; Salmon, 2005), the way women are portrayed and treated in policy structures, such as by child protection systems, and the high rate of child seizures (Bennett & Shangreaux, 2005; Tait, 2003).

In the context of the way knowledge has constructed “the other” in its view of indigenous peoples, indigenous scholars and leaders have led a resistance to the ownership by the scientific community of indigenous knowledge, including elder’s testimony, cultural knowledge, and product or output of indigenous nations (Schnarch, 2004). The principles expressed through this
resistance are now reflected in protocols for research (Aboriginal Women Health and Healing Research Group, 2006; First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey Committee, 2005). Methodological approaches which employ critical lenses have focussed on the dilemmas and rewards of negotiating respectful relationships that are open to change (Hart, 2003; Varcoe, 2006), reflexive of positionality or assumptions brought by the researcher/practitioner (Haig-Brown, 2003; Salmon, 2007), and sensitive to developing knowledge together (Cadwallader, 2004; Hart, 2003; Sinclair, 2003). As with African American reflections on intersectionality, the researcher is required to be reflexive and knowledgeable in order to approach the research subject respectfully.

### 4.7 Epistemological Implications of Considering Difference

The shift in structural analysis accomplished through a focus on difference has implications for understanding how knowledge is created. For example, Aptheker recounts her journey into a new way of relating to the knowledge of women and women’s lives.

This way of knowing requires a different way of reading. It requires that we read and listen to each others’ ideas, to those of our foremothers, without ascribing to them ideological categories and political lines prescribed by men. (Aptheker, 1989, p. 19)

From the perspective of women of colour and scholars, the structure of theorizing, even feminist theorizing, has to be put aside to make way for understanding voices that are silenced (hooks, 1994; Moraga & Anzualda, 1983). When voices are so submerged, Aptheker writes, the knowledge they have is told in stories that stick to the concrete detail without having an explanatory framework. The submersion of story is what Sandercock (1998) calls the invisibility of other ways of planning and making community.
4.8 Survivance as Collective Resistance and Social Transformation

Explorations of resistance in the face of power raise the question of how resistance is transformed into change, particularly societal change. Reflective resistance has been part of the struggles of women of colour and indigenous women, as described above, but in response to systemic deprivation, collective challenges to power based on identity have coalesced into cultural resistance, or what is called survivance. The term “survivance” emerged out of agitation by the francophone (Acadian and Quebecois) population in Canada for cultural survival, sovereignty and justice (Beauvau-Craon, 1914; Bélanger, 2000). The term has also been picked up by the North American indigenous movement for cultural and political self-determination (Isernhagen, 1999; Stromberg, 2006). In the context of lone mothers’ lives, the concept of survivance might offer an opportunity to translate individualized resistance or “weapons of the weak,” in Scott’s (1985) terminology, to change at a collective level, at least when the issues are identity based.

Survivance focusses on three issues: the right to cultural survival as a people, a claim to political parity, and relief from disadvantage, including poverty. These three issues may form a frame through which to explore whether or how women’s resistance may offer the opportunity for similar societal transformations. The first claim is a citizenship claim: to be able to exist in the polity as a culturally distinct people (Beauvau-Craon, 1914; Bélanger, 2000; Bernard, 1945; McKee, 1984). To the extent that women, as lone mothers, experience marginalization through the welfare system (Jenson, 2008; Lewis, 1997; Lewis & Giullari, 2005), or that women of colour experience social exclusion (Yuval-Davis, Anthias & Kofman, 2005), it may be that women could also stake a collective claim similar to survivance.
The last two claims shift from cultural survival to the manner of engagement with dominant society or culture. The second claim focuses on political parity in the sense of having the “right to the city” as Lefebvre (1991) would put it. The claim to original citizenship made in the first foundation, is paired with a second claim for citizen parity on the basis of belonging. Both these claims anticipate a future claim to political inclusion and escape from colonization, and link to the third theme of survivance, which is relief from impoverishment, or a dream of economic parity. This third claim also links to the first, in that if rights to identity were recognized and injustices compensated, then economic parity would follow (Oslender, 2007). The third claim is based on addressing systemic inequity and is an argument for parity.

Survivance indicates economic inequality as well as a notion of urban-rural peripherality or difference along other lines (Geoffroy, 2008; Jones, 2008; McKee, 1984). Williams (1977) identified survivance with resistance to internal colonialism, as:

. . . monopolization of commerce and trade by the core; the increasing dependence of the periphery on single commodity production; loss of labour through out-migration; lack of services in peripheral areas; and . . . being subject to discriminatory practices.

(Williams, 1977, as cited in McKee, 1984, p. 5).

While this definition focuses on the geographic distribution of resources, the notion of internal peripherality could also fit for the rural-urban divide experienced by Aboriginal people as an outcome of colonialism or the kind of inner-city poverty experienced by African Americans in the US. This concept offers the opportunity to think about ways that lone mothers may be operating on the periphery and what kinds of claims they might make for inclusion.

Survivance movements focus on resistance to political pressure by using cultural identity as a foundation for survival of the collective entity. However, the maintenance of collectivity
seems to imply or rely on a reflexive awareness of self within a collective, suggesting that at the individual level, the structure of the survivance movement must exist in individual acts. These acts are not isolated, though. Bizzell (1999) explores what some call a “founding” moment in the indigenous survivance movement in speeches by a charismatic leader. Rhetoric appears to resonate as an explanatory moment (in the way that Lefebvre uses the term “moment”), encapsulating the meaning of resistance. One implication of continuous rhetorical references is that a reflexive awareness of collective belonging develops and keeping the collectivity awake to cultural resistance. For example, Vizenor and Lee’s (1999) deliberately critical and reflexive writing sets the tone for an ironic and playful indigenous literature which is nevertheless intent on asserting and cultivating an indigenous worldview. If the concept of survivance applies to lone mothers’ resistance, then these examples suggest that there is a need for key rhetorical references which orient a sense of solidarity.

Unlike the instrumental “weapons of the weak” that Scott (1985) outlined, rhetoric provides opportunities for a resistance which is more subtle than political revolution, yet which achieves collective political aims like the maintenance of the dream of equity, political identity, and a focus on the goal of social inclusion and citizenship parity. The tools in play, though, and the means of deployment, are through identity and cultural identification through language, reference to pivotal historic leaders, and an explanatory narrative. This is reminiscent of rhetorical devices used in gender-based resistance movements, such as Lorde’s (1983) famous essay which suggested that the master’s tools would never dismantle the master’s house. This rhetoric hinges on a sense of peripherality, even while the overall goal is parity and recognition.

The focus on rhetoric and word play is another characteristic of survivance movements. Rhetoric is used to invoke or build a legitimating past, including a history of resistance, though
Vizenor and other authors writing about survivance deliberately reject a notion of a singular story or an authentic or essentialized “Indian” (Vizenor & Lee, 1999). They note, in the tradition of Said (1979), that the concept and terms by which indigenous peoples are labelled are an Occidental invention, reflecting more the notion of “Othering” than of any lived reality (Bizzell, 1999; Isernhagen, 1999; King, 2003; Vizenor & Lee, 1999). In just such a way, the term “lone mother” may be problematic, and the subject of contestation. However, Baumgarten (2006) notes that survivance requires an autobiographical self-awareness which engages a refusal to be categorized and provokes the audience to question what is going on in and between the “texts.” For this reason, Vizenor and Lee (1999) identify a central trickiness in survivance rhetoric that plays with audience and truth even while it constructs a legitimating past.

The play between self and other is premised by a deliberate rejection of the concept of a unitary self. As Vizenor and Lee (1999) point out, maintaining resistance requires an intersectional perspective that attends to plural points of view, intersectional marginalizations, and the way plural points of view and may be deliberately played against each other. If survivance is to be applied to gender, resistance to gender oppression may be able to occur through making gender a category to “play” with, and by attending to and deploying multiple meanings, especially in the face of intersecting issues such as racialization, Aboriginal ancestry, immigrant identity, or other identities and marginalizations. Applying the concept of survivance to women’s resistance focuses attention on whether there are social or cultural implications emerging out of individual or “small acts” even if they are enacted primarily in the arena of family responsibilities or material survival. One of the keys to answering this question is looking at whether collective-level effects, such as the constitution of identity and the development of pride, arise out of individual efforts.
Similar to the deconstruction of resistance by Hollander and Einwohner (2004), who separated political outcomes from individual resistance, the francophone and indigenous movements draw attention to the potential for a deliberate collective effort that intends cultural development as resistance, not necessarily revolution. This kind of aim offers the opportunity to see gender-based resistance as a collective movement even if political outcomes are not being achieved or attempted. Borrowing survivance as a framework to think about collective resistance and the potential for change may even allow for the deployment of traditional gender norms as an effective resistance if such an approach is meant to affirm collective identity and preserve a dream of parity and inclusion. The key to identifying effective survivance is intentionality, which in turn raises questions about interpretation of acts by observers such as researchers. The double entendre that may exist between viewer, actant, and society must be considered as part of the performance of resistance by women on welfare.

4.9 Conclusion

The definitions of resistance, agency and survivance explored here modify Lister’s (2004) four concepts of agency for women on welfare, raising questions about the focus of change, the engagement of others, and the potential for political “quiet revolutions,” particularly among indigenous Canadians, new Canadians and people of colour. As these concepts become multi-dimensional, they imply that the agency-structure contest which is the focus of this inquiry should be expanded to consider multiple points of contest. The field is not just a binary field; it is a field that is, in some way, indicated or constructed by the resistance to it. If gender is the focus or means of enacting resistance, then gender becomes a battlefield, a point of tension. At the same time, all these reviews indicate that while the potential for radical change is limited, or very constrained, this does not mean that there are not effective outcomes of agency, or that agency is
not present. Looking at agency and resistance as a field of activity which is reflexive and sometimes invisible does raise questions, though, about the potential for societal-level outcomes to emerge out of gender-based resistance.

In the next chapter, the implications of taking a critical feminist stance are taken forward into the research design and methodology.
CHAPTER 5 – METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH FOR THE DISSERTATION

In this chapter, I describe the methodological approach used to answer the research questions. For the dissertation, I reanalysed data from the Income Assistance research project (IAP), a project I was involved with from 2003 to 2007. The IAP was a unique study of the lives of 17 lone mothers who were on welfare in a particular time of welfare policy reform in BC. Longitudinal studies are relatively rare in welfare studies, whether qualitative or quantitative, because of the logistical difficulties of maintaining contact with welfare recipients (Millar, 2007; Thomson & Holland, 2003). The ability to utilize data sets which are relatively difficult to obtain, impossible to repeat because of naturally occurring circumstances, or unethical to recollect are counted among the benefits of doing secondary analysis with extant data sets (Kelder, 2005; Payne & Payne, 2004).

The longitudinal design of the IAP offered unique opportunities. Interacting with participants over three years built deep rapport (Kezar, 2003; Oakley, 1981; Polkinghorne, 2007), while being able to observe change in real time added an empirical observation to the subjective assessment of change made by the participants (Gurstein, Pulkingham, & Vilches, 2011). The iterative interviewing format enhanced the contrast between aspirations and consequences, and between context and experience. In qualitative studies, no less than quantitative, longitudinal design offers the opportunity to utilize time as an analytic device, or tool (Saldaña, 2003). In addition, the IAP data included a sample of urban Aboriginal women, a group that is relatively under-researched, as described in the survey of literature in chapter 2.

My dissertation work began after the five-year longitudinal IAP study had ended and addressed new research questions, so the analysis faces some of the challenges of secondary analysis. Therefore, this chapter begins by looking back at the IAP research design, recruitment,
data development and my involvement. I then describe the way that I applied a fresh analytical approach by pairing narrative and grounded theory analysis together. This approach was able to utilize some of the unique attributes of the IAP data, but it also had limitations, which I review at the end of this chapter.

**5.1 Background to the Income Assistance (IAP) Study**

The IAP was the result of collaboration between six researchers based in the Metro Vancouver area at two academic institutions. The IAP study was one of ten community-university partnerships focussed on various aspects of early childhood (CHILD). (See Appendix A for full list of CHILD projects.) These projects engaged over 50 graduate students in addition to collaborators and leads. The IAP study had two parts, one based in northern BC, and the other which I was attached to, based in Vancouver. The Vancouver IAP (hereafter referred to as the IAP) had two community-based research partners, a national advocacy institute focusses on poverty and inequality (CCPA), and a provincially based agency that advocates for and provides services to people with disabilities as well as addressing poverty, homelessness and

---

21 The six academic team members were Dr. Penny Gurstein, P.I. (UBC), Dr. Jane Pulkingham, second lead (SFU), Dr. Dara Culhane (SFU), Dr. Sylvia Fuller (UBC), Dr. Paul Kershaw (UBC) and Silvia Vilches (UBC).
22 The studies were conducted as part of the Consortium for Health, Intervention, Learning and Development (CHILD) with funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). The Principal Investigator of all the projects within CHILD was Dr. Hillel Goelman. (See the Glossary for a full list of acronyms.)
23 The northern IAP was under the lead of Dr. Jo-Anne Fiske, University of Lethbridge.
food insecurity (SPARC BC).\textsuperscript{24} Over time, four graduate students besides me worked on the Vancouver IAP.\textsuperscript{25}

The project utilized the strengths of an interdisciplinary team, the CHILD projects, and the community-university partnerships.\textsuperscript{26} The IAP study met monthly for the first two years to discuss various aspects of the individual interviewee cases, question development, analysis development and publishing, with the final post-project meeting held in the fall of 2010. Five of the six academic members conducted interviews, and all six plus one community partner\textsuperscript{27} contributed to monthly analysis and project development discussions. The other community partner focussed on disseminating results (see Gurstein et al., 2008). There were also rich opportunities for discussion of findings at quarterly CHILD project meetings and the IAP team members worked in pairs or threesomes to produce papers relevant to their specific analytic interests. The team also participated in four symposiums associated with either CHILD or the IAP itself, so there were many opportunities to develop the findings.

I joined the study just after it received funding, in the spring of 2003. My role developed into that of an equal team member, as I participated fully in all phases of the research. I helped design the interview questions, participated in a pilot, conducted recruitment, was one of five

\textsuperscript{24} The two partners were the BC office of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), represented by the Director Seth Klein, and the Social Planning and Research Council of BC (SPARC BC) represented by Michael Goldberg as Research Director.
\textsuperscript{25} These were Suzy Blown and Tatiana Gadjalova (UBC) and Jennie Haw (SFU). The latter two did the coding while Suzy assisted with the question development and background reviews.
\textsuperscript{26} While there are various definitions of interdisciplinarity, the CHILD project has been characterized as having disciplinary diversity, in that various epistemological, methodological, and processual habits and approaches were brought together. In contrast, transdisciplinarity represents shared problem-solving where disciplinarity is set aside to develop a new approach, and pluri- or multi-diversity is defined as parallel work which is not blended (Goelman & Guhn, 2011).
\textsuperscript{27} Michael Goldberg of SPARC BC.
interviewers, helped to develop a coding framework and supervised some of the coding, managed the data files, organized the follow-up focus groups with our community partners and participated in developing publications, as will be described later in this chapter.

5.1.1 Design of the Income Assistance Study

The Income Assistance (IAP) study was a longitudinal qualitative study, funded from 2003 to 2008, with data collection occurring over three years from 2004 to 2007. Its purpose was to investigate the impact of income assistance reform on lone mothers with young children. The interviews were augmented by three focus groups with local service providers after the last interviews were conducted, in January of 2007. The IAP study was designed as a critical, feminist investigation into the impacts of welfare reform on lone mothers (Gurstein, Pulkingham, & Vilches, 2011). The study team unanimously agreed that the participants should be “authors of their own stories” (Gurstein, Pulkingham, & Vilches, 2011; Kiesinger, 1998; Ortiz, 2001). To this end, the researchers agreed on an open-ended interviewing format. The interviewing questions were informed and guided by knowledge and experience from policy practice and research but allowing the women to prioritize issues they felt were important.

The team chose not to take a participatory approach, even though it is often preferred in critical approaches that work to rebalance power (Ristock & Pennell, 1996; Salmon, 2007). Participatory approaches may constrain freedom of expression when social inequities are replayed within projects, and place extra burdens on those who are already struggling to survive within highly structured bureaucratic situations (Rossi, 2004). The team theorized that lone mothers struggling with poverty and intense pressure from the reforms might be better served by receiving a reimbursement for expenses. Our decision not to use a participatory approach was
affirmed by the women at the end of the study; many of them expressed appreciation for being genuinely listened to without expectations for performance.

I think my life has changed because one thing is I've been talking to you. I feel a lot better when I go out of here, when I tell you my stories, because I can tell you and you can keep it to yourself. I feel very good when I get out the door, you know.

(Olivia, Rnd 6, 224)

### 5.2 IAP Data Used in the Dissertation

The IAP study generated two types of data, focus group and interview transcripts. I also used field notes, field observations and an abbreviated policy review for the dissertation analysis. All the interviewing team members also made case summaries of their interviews after each round of interviewing, which were available, as well as informal contextual observations that influenced discussion and analysis. These sources of information are discussed in this section.

#### 5.2.1 Sampling: Individual Interviews

The IAP study sample was designed to capture key policy thresholds relevant to a diverse set of lone parents representing typical vulnerabilities of this population. The sample was organized to capture three target thresholds. (See table 2 for sampling frame). The first was the impact of lowering the threshold at which recipients would be required to seek employment, from the time when their youngest child was 7 years of age to the time when he or she was 3 years of age. Half of the sample was designed to have a youngest child under 3 and half over.

The second major change for all income assistance recipients was the introduction of collection limits, specifically, a life time eligibility ban for those who did not meet certain conditions, a time limit for collection of benefits, and the stipulation of conditions for reapplication, based on a minimum number of work hours (Vachon, 2000). To see if past work
history might make a difference, half the study sample was intended to have been receiving income assistance for less than two years, and half for more than two years. The third condition of interest was the effect on families of different size, so half the sample was planned to capture families with two or fewer children and the remainder with three or more children. Finally, it was hoped that half the sample would identify as Aboriginal to reflect the complex interaction between colonial history and contemporary poverty.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Threshold 1</th>
<th>Total number of children</th>
<th>Threshold 2</th>
<th>Targeted Number of interviewees</th>
<th>Threshold 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Aboriginal</td>
<td>Half = 1 Half &gt; 2</td>
<td>less than 12 months (continuously)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3-4) Mother is Aboriginal and originates from the Bulkley valley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>more than 12 months (continuously)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Age of youngest child &lt; 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal,</td>
<td></td>
<td>less than 12 months (continuously)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>more than 12 months (continuously)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youngest child 3 &lt; 7</td>
<td>Half = 1 Half &gt; 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal,</td>
<td></td>
<td>less than 12 months (continuously)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>more than 12 months (continuously)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Aboriginal,</td>
<td></td>
<td>less than 12 months (continuously)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youngest child &lt; 3</td>
<td>Half = 1 Half &gt; 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Aboriginal,</td>
<td></td>
<td>less than 12 months (continuously)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>more than 12 months (continuously)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youngest child 3 &lt; 7</td>
<td>Half = 1 Half &gt; 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note to Table 2: By April 2004, the first cohort of IA recipients was due to exhaust their two-year collection time limits, which were introduced as part of the reforms. The sampling frame was designed to track the impact of this on lone mothers whose youngest child was more than 3 when the new legislation took effect and who had continuously received income assistance since the legislation took effect.
For the dissertation, consistent with secondary analysis, the transcripts themselves comprised the main sample and a purposive sampling approach was used to pursue the answers to the dissertation questions. In purposive sampling, the general problem or research focus defines the beginning of the sampling and then emerging concepts and theorization drive further sampling (Payne & Payne, 2004). Thus, in purposive sampling it is important to have access to a diverse array of suitable sources of information, something that was provided by the very large data set and the diversity of the original IAP sample.

5.2.1.1 Development of IAP Questions and Method

The team developed a focussed set of five interview questions in the spring and fall of 2003 that would allow the women to expand on topics as they saw fit. The first interviews began with thematic prompts about housing or transportation, for example, but subsequent interviews consisted of follow-up prompts. (See Appendix D for the interview guides.) Using prompts rather than direct questions is often used in qualitative interviewing, but requires more interviewer skill (Payne & Payne, 2004). The team therefore decided to do pilot interviews to try out the more open-ended questions and interviewing techniques. Ethics approval was applied for and received from three universities at this time, including approval for graduate students to use the data for theses or dissertations.29

One of the team collaborators, who had previously conducted participatory research in the target neighbourhoods, arranged pilot interviews with lone mothers who were similar to our target group. I interviewed an Aboriginal lone mother, as I was intending to take an interview

---

29 The UBC Human Behaviour Review Board approval file number was B03-0240, Simon Fraser University (SFU), and the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC), where a parallel project was based, also independently gave approvals for research conducted by faculty members and research assistants at those institutions.
sample with a higher proportion of Aboriginal women. Going to the pilot interview location was my first visit to East Vancouver in more than fifteen years, and I began the process of keeping field notes at that time. The pilot interviews, which were recorded as a practice, were discarded. Following the pilot interviews the team met to debrief and confirmed our decision to use the open-ended interviewing format. This meeting set a pattern for our analytical debriefings, which then occurred before and after each round of interviewing for the next three years.

In the debriefing, the team decided that I would conduct all the recruiting in order to maintain as much anonymity and confidentiality as possible. We were conscious that the BC welfare reforms had introduced new regulations prohibiting income assistance recipients from retaining any gifts, earnings, or income. The team wanted the women to feel free to talk about any means they used to survive, whether within regulation or not. If one person did the recruiting, each interviewer would only receive contact information for their own interviewee(s), and the team would only discuss the cases after they were anonymized.

5.2.1.2 Recruitment of the IAP Participant Sample

The recruitment occurred in April and May of 2004. The IAP team chose not to use the potentially convenient access to clients through a social service agency. We thought participants might perceive a conflict of interest if we had long term involvement with agencies that they also

---

30 The interviewers negotiated the proportion of participants they felt they could manage and if possible, took participants with characteristics they were interested in. I agreed to interview five women and I also took a larger sample of Aboriginal women. I had previous experience working for and with First Nations people and I was interested to continue to explore themes I had encountered in previous work as a research assistant with First Nations communities (Ball, 2004).

31 The reimbursement was enough to cover babysitting, a snack, and transportation.
had client relationships with.\textsuperscript{32} Instead, the team chose to poster independently in the neighbourhood. As few of these women would have land-line telephone access, as the recruiter, I walked the neighbourhoods putting posters on telephone poles and on bulletin boards at places like community centres, social service agencies (if they granted permission), laundromats, grocery stores, libraries, food banks, mother and baby drop-in centres, and recreation centres. (See Appendix B for recruitment poster and text). I received over 90 calls, representing more than 100 respondents.\textsuperscript{33} All callers were asked identical questions to determine if they were receiving income assistance and were classified as employable (not as a person with a disability), how long they had been receiving income assistance, the number of children they had, whether the youngest was between 2 and 6 years of age, and whether they identified as an Aboriginal person. (See Appendix C for screening questions.) All the women were asked if they would consent to be involved for three years.

As the sample participants were recruited, the women were told that an interviewer would be in contact with them and I passed the first name and contact information on to an interviewer who then arranged to meet the participant. (See table 3 for assignment of cases to interviewers.) Assignments were based on the interests and availability of the interviewers. For example, one interviewer only wanted to interview Aboriginal women, and another did not feel she had the background necessary to do this. One interviewer was not available until June, so participants were assigned to her last. After 16 women were recruited, recruitment was stopped and all further callers were declined. However, we were not able to locate one participant for the second

\textsuperscript{32} For example, if we developed a close working relationships with an agency to access clients, and then asked the study participants to reflect on their experiences, they might fear being too directly critical of agencies they relied on.

\textsuperscript{33} Three calls were from program facilitators, which together represented at least 21-23 clients.
interview (VA12 N’k) and so we accepted a new participant in the fall of 2004 (VA17 Arlita). We conducted two interviews with her in early and late fall of 2004. As we had conducted one interview with the lost participant, we eventually counted 17 participants in the study.

Table 3 IAP Interviewer Assignments to Cases

| Interviewer          | No. cases | Case No.         | Analysand
|----------------------|-----------|------------------|--------------------------
| Dr. Jane Pulkingham  | 2         | VA3, VA14        | Dr. Paul Kershaw          |
| Dr. Sylvia Fuller    | 3         | VA4, VA8, VA9    | VA4                      |
| Dr. Penny Gurstein   | 5         | VA1, VA5, VA6, VA10, VA15 |              |
| Silvia Vílches       | 6         | VA2, VA7, VA11, VA12, VA13, VA17 | VA12, VA13        |
| Dr. Dara Culhane     | 1         | VA16             |                           |

5.2.1.3 Characteristics of the IAP Participant Sample

The recruitment fulfilled the sampling frame very well, though there was some skewing toward larger families. Half of the mothers had been on income assistance for two years or less and half had a youngest child under three, as planned. In addition, half did identify as Aboriginal, though other diversity was also represented, as will be discussed below. (See table 4 for key characteristics, pseudonyms, and interviewers). The sample had more women with large families than is proportionate to the population of lone parents in Canada. Contrary to the US where many lone mothers on welfare are younger lone parents, in Canada there is a bimodal curve to the distribution of never-married lone parents, reflecting the choice by older women to have children alone (Statistics Canada, 2006). However, because the IAP research plan was designed to ensure that half the sample included parents who had been on income assistance longer than two years, it may be that age, family size, and length of time on welfare were confounded. The

---

34 Interviewers also produced case summaries with the exception of three that Dr. Kershaw reviewed. Sharing construction of the case summaries assisted the full participation of Dr. Kershaw in analysis without introducing a cross-gender interviewing situation.
women who were recruited who had been on income assistance for less time and had fewer children tended to have one child rather than two and to be younger.

The IAP sample frame fulfillment was limited by some issues. The team decided to screen out any woman who was not comfortably fluent in English so that the quality of the in-depth interviewing was not compromised. Later, service providers in the focus groups pointed out that this was an important omission as clients who are refugees or illegal immigrants, especially from Asian countries, regularly present at their agencies.

Table 4 Key Characteristics of the IAP Participant Sample Listed by Pseudonyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case No.</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Aboriginal</th>
<th>Interviewer</th>
<th>No. of interviews</th>
<th>No. of Dependent Children at start of study</th>
<th>Years on IA (&gt; 2 yrs) or (&lt; 2 yrs)</th>
<th>Approximate Age of Youngest Child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VA1</td>
<td>Natasha</td>
<td></td>
<td>Penny</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt; 2 yrs</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA2</td>
<td>Molly</td>
<td></td>
<td>Silvia</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt; 2 yrs</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA3</td>
<td>Carla</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt; 2 yrs</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA4</td>
<td>Nancy</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Sylvia</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>&lt; 2 yrs</td>
<td>1 ½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA5</td>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td></td>
<td>Penny</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>&lt; 2 yrs</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA6</td>
<td>Gemma</td>
<td></td>
<td>Penny</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>&gt; 2 yrs</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA7</td>
<td>Cynthia</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Silvia</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>&gt; 2 yrs</td>
<td>2 ½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA8</td>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Sylvia</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>2 ½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA9</td>
<td>Mary Jane</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sylvia</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA10</td>
<td>Marissa</td>
<td></td>
<td>Penny</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&gt; 2 yrs</td>
<td>3 ½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA11</td>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Silvia</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>&gt; 2 yrs</td>
<td>3 / 6 mon*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA12</td>
<td>N’k</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Silvia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>&gt; 2 yrs</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA13</td>
<td>Jeanie</td>
<td></td>
<td>Silvia</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>&gt; 2 yrs</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA14</td>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>&gt; 2 yrs</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA15</td>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Penny</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>&gt; 2 yrs</td>
<td>3 ½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA16</td>
<td>Serena</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Dara</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>&gt; 2 yrs</td>
<td>2**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA17</td>
<td>Arlita</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Silvia</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>&lt; 2 yrs</td>
<td>2 ½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Anne turned out to have one child not in her care who was an infant.

** Serena fit the profile of someone who was Aboriginal and had roots in the Northwest area of the province, so we accepted her into the matrix even though her youngest was less than 3 years of age.
Some theoretically interesting issues emerged regarding the categories themselves (Gurstein, Pulkingham and Vilches, 2011). (See table 5 for total number of children and size of household). First, there was some confusion between the total number of children and the number who were resident with the mothers, those who were being co-parented, and those who were in care of the government ministry or relatives. During the course of the study,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. Dependent Children at start</th>
<th>No. Dependent Children at finish(^{36})</th>
<th>Age Youngest at start</th>
<th>No. of fathers for all children, resident and not</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 3⁄4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2 3⁄4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2 3⁄4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2 1⁄2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Both fathers deceased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1 1⁄2</td>
<td>1 at start; 2 by end of study</td>
<td>Pregnant at end of study; also step-parenting 3 more children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2 3⁄4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Several – 3 at home</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2 for whole set, 1 for those at home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2?</td>
<td>1 child not resident with her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Infant / 3 yrs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1 in her care via shared custody, 3 yrs old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2 3⁄4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Youngest is her grandchild – different father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Totals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{35}\) The case identifiers have been removed to prevent breach of anonymity.

\(^{36}\) All children who were dependents were counted whether they resided with the participant or not.
family or household composition changed, as well. Three women had children taken into custody, and later two of those women had their children returned to them with conditions.

Another mother was grandparenting her daughter’s child and another unofficially took in a girl who had been living on the street. Two mothers had adult children living with them, and women took in friends, shared spaces with family or boyfriends. One woman became a step-parent. The IAP recruitment categories, which echoed policy categories, failed to capture the diversity of family forms.

Table 6 Identification and Status of Aboriginal Women in the IAP Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aboriginal self-identification</th>
<th>Federal Status</th>
<th>Length of time in urban area</th>
<th>Considers reserve “home”</th>
<th>Status of children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Nation (affiliated)³⁷</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Adult life</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Application in process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Nation (affiliated)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Intermittent</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian / Métis / First Nations</td>
<td>Application in process</td>
<td>All her life</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Anticipated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Nation (affiliated)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Rural roots</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>All her life</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Nation (affiliated)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Intermittent / urban reserve</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian / Métis</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Rural roots</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Nation (affiliated)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Intermittent</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal</td>
<td>Application in process</td>
<td>All her life</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Anticipated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Differences in the way Aboriginal women self-identified reflected differences in urban tenure, connection to home cultures or communities, and histories of experiences with colonization. As expected, some women had families who had been living in urban areas for at least

³⁷ Rather than naming a particular First Nation band, which would breach confidentiality, I have identified the person as being affiliated with a First Nation if she described moving back and forth to their home communities.
least two generations. Self-identification changed during the study, starting with the answer to the recruitment question “Do you identify as someone who is Aboriginal?” Initial answers ranged from naming membership in a particular First Nations band, to naming culture (e.g. “I’m Cree”), to identifying as “Indian”, “Métis”, “Yes”, “Native” or “If you want to call me that.” Some of the women’s self-identification evolved during the study, while some women used a variety of terms to refer to themselves. The most typical identifications are shown in table 6.

The combination of migration and the accompanying connection to home reserves or communities is sometimes referred to as the Indigenous diaspora (Franklin, 2001). Three of the women in this study had moved back and forth from reserve to urban areas during their adult lives. These women sometimes identified as members of their home communities or used the cultural names of communities to refer to themselves. In addition, though, one of the urban Aboriginal participants had Native American heritage, and in this sense was more like other Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women in the study who were a long way away from countries of origin or home communities but not emotionally close. Like differences in family size or household composition, it was not necessarily easy to typecast the women’s lives.

The bifurcation of identity into Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal was also not as simple as the categories implied. Two of the Aboriginal-identified women had some non-Caucasian ethnic heritage, Chinese and African respectively. Of the non-Aboriginal women, three were visible minority or immigrant, and one had a First Nations status application under way for her children. Thus, we had three women with some African heritage or ethnicity, three women with national roots elsewhere, three women who were visible minority, three women whose mother tongue

38 Native American is a term more commonly used in the USA by indigenous peoples to refer to themselves. Where appropriate, I have used terms that reflect indigenous participants’ own terminology.
was not English (including at least one of the Aboriginal women), and nine women who identified as Aboriginal. The children, as might be expected, reflected further diversity.

5.2.1.4 Attrition

There was some attrition over the three years of the study, and the reasons were also theoretically informative. However, all but one of the interviewees completed the third interview. (See table 7 for total number of interviews, and attrition.) After the third interview, one participant (VA10 Marissa) declined to continue, we were unable to contact one (VA1 Natasha), one (VA4 Nancy) disappeared, though she reappeared for the fourth interview after she had gotten married, and one woman, (VA16 Serena), was discontinued to protect her from a potential breach of the confidentiality requirements. After the fourth interview, Nancy returned, but VA11 (Anne) did not respond, reportedly after a traumatic event in her life. As a result, after three years, the total sample size was 12, almost exactly 75% of the original. The balance of Aboriginal to non-Aboriginal participants stayed almost equal.

Given that the IAP team framed the sample by using policy thresholds, we speculated that attrition in the IAP study may have replicated failings arising from the way government fails to capture diverse family forms, and this may have lain behind the attrition examples (Gurstein, Pulkingham, & Vilches, 2011). Thomson and Holland (2003) also reflect that longitudinal research on the effects of policy may risk emphasizing to clients how they fail to meet policy targets. The IAP team suggests that further research might productively focus on the connection between categorization, identity and approaches to support.
Table 7 Total Number of Interviews, Showing Attrition*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Aboriginal</th>
<th>T1 May / 04</th>
<th>T2 Nov / 04</th>
<th>T3 May / 05</th>
<th>T4 Nov / 05</th>
<th>T5 May / 06</th>
<th>T6 Nov / 06</th>
<th>Total No. Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VA1 Natasha</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA2 Molly</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA3 Carla</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA4 Nancy</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA5 Andrea</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA6 Gemma</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA7 Cynthia</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA8 Laura</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA9 Mary Jane</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA10 Marissa</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA11 Anne</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA12 N'k</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA13 Jeanie</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA14 Natalie</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA15 Olivia</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA16 Serena</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA17 Arlita</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total          | 17         | 16          | 16          | 12          | 12          | 12          | 85          |

*(X = interview; “-” = missed interview)

5.2.1.5 Transcripts and Case Summaries As Used in the Dissertation

The individual interviews were the principal data used for the dissertation work. Participant interviews were recorded and then transcribed by a professional transcribing service. Most interviews were between 20 to 45 pages long (double spaced with a 2 inch margin), so with a total of 85 interviews, this provided extensive material for the dissertation analysis. (See table 7, above, for total number of interviews for each woman). After the transcripts were generated,
they were anonymized by the interviewers, and then made available to the whole team via a secure electronic storage system.

The IAP team coded the transcripts as well, although this system was not used for the dissertation. The IAP team developed six key analytic questions, or objectives, as well as a coding framework. (See Appendix G for IAP analytic objectives and Appendix H for the IAP interview codes.) The transcripts were coded by a research assistant using the qualitative data processing software Atlas-ti, and made available to the collaborators through a secure server approved by the universities for research data transmission.

In addition to the transcripts, case summaries were written by each interviewer after each round. These were an important source of information for the dissertation. The case summaries were used to help keep the team abreast of all the information in time with the rounds of data collection, and informed ongoing, iterative thinking about the concepts and questions the team was pursuing. The team discussions helped challenge theoretical perspectives that individual team members brought from their academic disciplines, their prior work, or interests. The case summaries reflected the evolution of thinking of each team member about the material.

5.2.2 Focus Groups with Service Providers

At the close of the three years of interviewing, three focus groups were held with social service agencies to gather contextual information about welfare reforms. The agencies were selected on the basis of being mentioned by the participants during the interviews as services or centres they had used. Two of the focus groups were focussed on services for Aboriginal-identified people. A total of 23 different agencies were represented in the non-Aboriginal focus group, and eight agencies were represented in the two Aboriginal focus groups. The focus groups

39 The original ethics application had included this option.
included a range of types of organizations, including representatives of major social agencies, government-funded non-profits, publicly funded government organizations, and grassroots self-help organizations.

Each focus group was recorded while notes were taken. During the focus groups, the IAP team provided a brief review of the conclusions from the interviews and then invited reflections on the results and related issues from the service providers’ perspectives. (See Appendix E for focus group questions). In the two Aboriginal focus groups, participants were prompted to discuss issues they thought might be specific to Aboriginal women, including their own perception of their place amongst Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal social service agencies.\textsuperscript{40} I co-facilitated the non-Aboriginal group with our community partner and led the Aboriginal focus groups with support from other team members. The focus group transcripts were coded by a research assistant and shared among the IAP team members. (See Appendix I for focus group codes).

The focus groups served as a form of member checking, in that the IAP team was able to confirm our emerging analysis with an audience who was familiar with the impacts of the policy reforms. In addition, the IAP team could see how income assistance reforms were impacting social service agencies, as well as the changes that the agency staff saw for clients. The focus group information was not independently analyzed for the dissertation research. Instead, some of the information was used to contextualize analysis of the interviews with the women.

\textsuperscript{40} While Aboriginal service agencies focus on Aboriginal clients (some are not exclusive), non-Aboriginal agencies serve both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal clients
5.2.3 Neighbourhood Selection and Observations

Recruitment for the study was done in the northeast quadrant of the city of Vancouver. The neighbourhood areas the IAP team selected have a preponderance of lone-parent families and a concentration of the urban Aboriginal population in the Metro Vancouver area. (See recruitment map in Appendix F.) Low-rent apartments and supported housing in this part of the city are affordable for low-income individuals and there are many social services located in these neighbourhoods. These types of areas may develop into “service-dependent” neighbourhoods (Dear & Wolch, 1987); but they may also become locations where identity is formed, generated or maintained, so place lends to identity (Ruddick, 1996).

It is important to note that the recruitment area included but did not focus on a very low-income neighbourhood known as the downtown east side (DTES). Much research has been done with the very low-income individuals who live in this small area (for examples and reflections see Benoit & Carroll, 2001; Culhane, 2003; Nicholson, 2005). There is a concentration of residents and visitors to this area that have mental health or substance use issues. This area has a concentration of single-room occupancy hotel rooms (SROs) which are affordable to individuals with very low incomes which contribute to the clustering of people with issues. While sex trade work takes place in a number of areas in the city, the DTES is known for being frequented by very low-income street sex workers. The concentration of people who present multiple challenges to support and legal services makes this area unique. In addition, the neighbourhood is adjacent to Vancouver’s thriving historic Chinatown, and the area also faces intense development pressure from rising real estate prices. While some IAP study participants accessed services, conducted business or stayed in shelters in this area neither the IAP study nor the dissertation work focussed on the unique challenges or culture of this neighbourhood.
5.2.3.1 Field Observations and Field Notes

As the team members visited East Vancouver to conduct data collection, we made informal observations, but these were not systematically recorded. I started my field notes during the recruitment phase when I sublet an apartment in East Vancouver for six weeks during April and May of 2004. After that, I kept field notes during each of five rounds on my interviewing visits, and during the focus group recruitment and facilitation. My own observations helped me complete my case summaries and reminded me of questions I had when I was reinterviewing the women. They became an important source of reflection for the dissertation analysis.

Field notes can be used for a variety of purposes, including mapping complex webs of power, including how "material structural conditions contribute to shifts in discursive constructions and social processes" (Naples, 2003, p. 45). Mapping these relations in detail can also be used to show how relationships change over time. My notes included reflections on my expectations and assumptions, as well as details of site visits and how the interviews went. For example, my record of the third visit to Cynthia, in November, noted sex workers close to her house at 9 a.m.; the gutter\textsuperscript{41} had fallen off her porch roof, which allowed rain to cascade down the front steps; and the lack of heat in the living room. I was concerned about the disrepair of house and the lack of heat in what is typically a cold and rainy month in Vancouver. The reflections on my visit initially led me to record the lack of supports in her life and the role she is being expected to take to support her family. Thus the state of disrepair of her house, or the presence of sex trade workers around her young children might, in an individualizing discourse, could be taken as “proof” that she does not keep her children in a safe space. In contrast, this

\textsuperscript{41} There are regional variations on this word; here it is called an eaves trough or gutter, but in some places it is called a downspout. It drains rain water off the roof and down a pipe.
participant was a person who had a strong moral ethic which she expressed in many ways, from baking cookies to wanting to stay home with her children. Through these activities, she constructed and enacted the role of being a good mother. My reflections on the contrast between my reaction and her expression led me to a critical reflection on the lack of supports for someone like her, the expectations she lives with, and the way some of the things that I am concerned about indicate the lack of safety she must live with in order to achieve other more important things. Thus the field notes were an important part of my critical reflexive analysis for the moments of being in the field.

As I worked through ethical dilemmas, I was led to reflect on the difference between my reaction and the participants’ responses to what I perceived as trauma. I had to ask whether my response was marking difference, rather than an indicator of absolute trauma within the lives of the participants. Gunew (2005) suggests that writing about sadness can be a way of contesting the purview of the observer to determine what qualifies for sadness so that, for example, autobiography may be a place to indicate, shape or own sadness. Authorship becomes a starting place for an empathic response, where my response enables me to step into the picture, rather than to stand outside and judge.

The meaning of trauma and its transformative nature has been studied by Marris.

“(Bereavement) . . . follows from the disintegration of a meaningful environment without any change of purpose – though out of bereavement a new sense of purposes may emerge in time. In reality, we are likely to perceive the changes we encounter as all these at once - part substitution, part growth, part loss - in varying degrees; and the collective experience of change is even harder to discriminate in these terms, as it bears on people so differently. (Marris, 1974, p. 22)
While Marris starts with a reflection on the personal, he ends with a commentary on social evolution. This prompted me to reflect on what it is I have a sense of loss or possibilities about, and what change is held in tension. Turning to the social, as Marris does, I am also led to wonder who I am in the collectivity, and how what I experience as loss and deprivation is experienced by participants like Cynthia. Attending to these kinds of cues heightened my sensitivity to, for example, the priorities Cynthia set, which were not about the material deficit, but about the loss of her mother, her sense of belonging in neighbourhood, and her relationships with family now and in the past. Thus, keeping a field diary served as an important evolution of my analysis, which continued from the project through to the dissertation.

5.2.4 Policy Review

The dissertation questions are designed to seek to understand the agency of women in the context of policy change. To help set this context, three eras of welfare reform were reviewed using secondary sources. (See chapter 3, on BC welfare reform). Three examples were selected from each era, based on regime shifts, and key moments I was aware of through my background of working in advocacy and within government. The first period began in the early 1990s and ended with the introduction of the BC Benefits (Income Assistance) Act in 1996. During this period, there was some modest experimentation with eligibility criterion under the previous model of guaranteed income provisions (Guaranteed Annual Income for Need, or GAIN, Act). (See the Glossary for definitions of acronyms.)

The second period I selected followed the demise of the Canada Assistance Program (CAP), which was a cost-sharing arrangement between the federal and provincial governments.

42 The official title of the Act is the BC Benefits (Income Assistance) Act, more commonly known as the BC Benefits Act.
which had included a parity of services agreement. When it was replaced by the Social Union Framework Agreement (SUFA), the provinces were free to diverge in terms of program objectives and delivery formats. Although the Family Maintenance Enforcement Program (FMEP) started earlier, in 1989, I reviewed it as an early example of experimentation with public-private partnership in social service delivery, which was particularly relevant to parents. The changing format represented experimentation with and instability of program formulas through a period of deregulation.

The third era of policy reform, which I looked at more closely, was the implementation of welfare reform in 2002, including the replacement of the BC Benefits Act with the Employment and Assistance Act. The IAP data was collected to study this reform and the review looked at regulations that impacted lone mothers like the ones in the study. The examples I reviewed help to ground the women’s experiences in a continuously shifting policy context and introduced the reader to both ruptures and continuities of the 2002 reforms in the context of policy evolution.

5.3 Analyzing the Lone Mothers’ Interviews for the Dissertation

The analysis for this dissertation occurred in three successive stages. The first stage occurred while I was with the IAP. As described above, this work included developing the case summaries, participating in interdisciplinary team discussions, and making regular presentations to the larger CHILD group as well as in symposia. This merged into writing papers with other team members.43 The next two stages of analytical work were conducted after the IAP ended, when I began to focus on using the material for the dissertation. I conducted two separate but paired phases of analysis to examine the new research questions.

43 See the preface for full list of IAP publications.
5.3.1 Drawing on Two Analytic Approaches as Mixed Qualitative Methods

To answer the dissertation questions, I selected two related qualitative approaches, narrative analysis and grounded theory methodology, for their separate but related strengths. The use of narrative methodology allowed me to focus on each individual trajectory and the meaning of change over time for each participant. This was particularly important in considering the cases of the Aboriginal participants, as this approach helped to preserve the relationship between colonial and individual histories of each participant. The second approach, grounded theory methodology (GTM), was used to investigate how women responded to the welfare reform. Through the GTM I looked at how some of the conditions, like poverty, created common problems, as well as how different women responded, revealing strengths and challenges they each had. I utilized a critical feminist lens in both these approaches.

Combining analytic approaches raises some issues similar to those which occur when using mixed methods in quantitative-qualitative studies. The analytical output changes depending on which method takes priority, whether the two methods will operate in tandem enriching each other, or whether one will inform the other in a sequential manner (Hanson, Creswell, Plano Clark, Petska, & Creswell, 2005). Hanson et al describe, for example, how qualitative analysis may precede the quantitative to develop constructs which may be then tested through a random sample. Alternatively, a survey may be deployed simultaneously with in-depth interviews to explore correlations and explanations simultaneously (Hanson, Creswell, Plano Clark, Petska, & Creswell, 2005). Bryman (2006) outlines five analytic strengths of mixed methods which might be considered; triangulation, complementarity, development, initiation, and expansion. I decided to use the two analytic approaches in a complementary fashion to, as Hanson et al suggest, enhance, clarify, illustrate and elaborate the developments of the other
because, as Mason (2006) argues, the strength of combining qualitative approaches is the ability to explore phenomena in depth. The challenge, though, as Mason argues, is in reconciling epistemological and ontological assumptions embedded in the methodologies. Both GMT and narrative were amenable to being used in ways that drew on the pragmatist roots of each tradition (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), but making this conscious choice assisted in organizing the data as a consistent type of artefact.

5.3.2 Investigating Agency with Grounded Theory Methodology

The first phase or stage began with grounded theory methodology (GTM). The research questions focussed on volition and possibilities within a specific context, a type of question well suited to a research method that can investigate process. GTM is used to study what are called “basic social processes” or BSPs (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The BSP captures meaning embedded in action, consistent with the philosophy of pragmatism on which it is based (Blumer, 1986). A grounded theory study reflects what is important to the participants by investigating the person’s apprehension of a situation, and the constraints of their context as expressed through their agency (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Morse, 2003). A grounded theory should make clear what ‘problem’ participants are solving by identifying priorities in action (Glaser, 1978). Using GTM meant looking closely at the data to see what the women understood they were working towards, irrespective of the theories of action I might bring to the data.

GTM has become well known for having a structured method of data development (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) which was helpful in re-analyzing the data because it ensured that prior work was systematically re-examined. (See Appendix J for description of the coding development process and the coding schema.) Analysis starts with a system of “free coding” where intuitive labels are attached in line by line coding analysis which inductively builds codes
The first round of coding for the dissertation focussed on the transcripts of Natasha’s interviews, one of the younger mothers. This coding captured the full range of responses to IAP interviewing questions, including a great deal of material about the routines of parenting and the material aspects of surviving. The process of iterative sampling is part of what is called “theoretical sampling”, pursuing further information to answer emerging hypothesis (Glaser, 1978). After reviewing these codes it became apparent that some material was not relevant to the dissertation questions. I stopped coding and returned to review the theoretical critiques of welfare reform, identifying what about these women’s lives might inform their interaction with or as a result of the policy environment. I then also developed an explicitly critical lens and conducted a narrative analysis of a sample of the transcripts. (See Appendix K for an example.)

After completing the review and narrative analysis, I re-approached the data for a second round of coding and theory development. One of the challenges of GTM is that originally it had a strongly empirical and post-positivist orientation (Benoliel, 1996; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Morse, 2001). In the second round of coding I explicitly employed critical perspectives which have been developed for GTM so that I could attend to the way the women participated in a variety of discourses (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Eastlick Kushner & Morrow, 2003; MacDonald, 2001; MacDonald & Schreiber, 2001; Wuest & Merrit-Gray, 2001). Coding with a critical lens led to a focus on the various levels of rhetorical device, including the reiteration of scientific discourses which have become public discourses. For example, the women used scientific language of early childhood education to talk about what they needed in order to care for their children. The narrative analysis, which had focussed on the women’s histories, sensitized me to
the way different women struggled to shape their own narratives and using a critical lens prompted me to attend to what was not said. The coding in this second phase captured much more than the material aspects of survival; it also included the discursive constructions of self. This led to theorizing about how women in these circumstances construct their futures, so that the processual focus of GTM was critically grounded in the contexts of circumstances and time.

5.3.3 Looking at Time and Context with Narrative Analysis

The second phase of coding started with a narrative review of three cases, which sensitized me to critical questions I used to continue the GT coding. This phase of narrative and GT analysis addressed two issues that had the potential to be subsumed in the first phase by the focus on process. The first issue was the unique histories of the Aboriginal women, and the opportunity for critical analysis of the greater context of colonial/post-colonial history in Canada. The second was the change over time, both at the scale of the individual women’s lives as well as at the level of the social context. While the research questions did not directly focus on either of these issues, the socio-political history and context frames both the policy reforms and women’s agency. Narrative analysis offered the opportunity to examine the relationship between context and each woman’s own history.

Narrative methodology may be done various ways, and I chose to focus on key transitions that the women recalled as significant in their lives, past, present, and future. This approach used a combination of life-history analysis and meta-structural approach analysis that focussed on the format narrative takes (Bruner, 2004; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In narrative analysis, what is said is understood to be a socially mediated reflection of the context, from the broader socio-political climate to the micro conditions of the interview setting (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2008; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Tanggaard, 2009). Focusing on what
interviewees find significant draws attention to the frames they utilize, including their understanding of the interview agenda (Tanggaard, 2009). In this approach, what is said and heard is treated as an intentional dialogical construct in a dance of changing meanings (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007).

While looking at frames leads to analysis of how society positions or contextualizes the issues people are facing, seeing text as intentional dialogue leads to reflections on identity, continuities or discontinuities of identity and the rhetorical construction of audience by these women. For example, Cohen (1997), who interviewed homeless people, found that participants tended to construct their own journey to homelessness as the result of unique accidents of circumstance, while they attributed others’ homelessness to poor choice. Cohen looks at how these individuals negotiate social stigma around homelessness by using him as an audience to construct an identity. The relationship to audience reveals attempts to reconcile the discontinuity of accepted self-identities with external events or life changes, but narrative may also display discontinuities due to traumas that change self-perception, (Chandler, Lalonde, Sokol, & Hallett, 2003; Riessman, 2008). Looking at narrative as constructed reflection, rather than a verbatim recounting, sensitized me to the ways hidden texts and silences reveals individual experiences as well as to potential trauma arising from circumstances such as extreme poverty. Clough (2002) cautions, though, that even when analysis searches for meanings, part of experience is always invisible due to the sheer inability of language to capture the full range of experience, the lack of words adequate for experience, and the ephemeral nature of awareness. Clough suggests it is incumbent on the researcher to attend to and surface those moments which may be unarticulated, particularly if it is due to inequalities and marginalization.
In addition to analyzing narratives by looking at the construction of discourses, narrative analysis offers an important opportunity to look at how Aboriginal women construct and experience the colonial history in Canada. Contemporary indigenous authors suggest that attending to the format and the content of what Aboriginal people are saying while being sensitive to Western or cross-cultural filters is an important first step in building better practice through research (Baker, 2005; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). As Haig-Brown (2003) notes, this is tricky territory in that the researcher needs to understand the purpose of the story and take up a role or position in relation to their responsibility for recounting such stories. This again speaks to the issue of audience, in this case with the particular roles of listener and teller (Carlson, 1997; Reid, 2004). In the interview relationship, the researcher needs to attend to the way participants may take on a particular telling for the purpose of communicating through the researcher to a broader audience. The role the researcher chooses, as editor, witness, or recorder, for example, has to be carefully reflected on, and made transparent (Haig-Brown, 2003; Robertson & Culhane, 2005; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). I, as the researcher, have to carefully select how and what I construct into a coherent research narrative.

The narrative analysis sensitized me to meaning and contextual issues. In conjunction with the GT focus on women’s agency, attending to the discursive construction of identity and audience through narrative analysis respected women as authors of their own stories, while assisting in the contextualization of their actions into a broader socio-political context.

5.4 Limitations and Strengths of Using the IAP Study Data

Limitations in an original study may be replicated or amplified through the application of additional filters in secondary analysis (Payne & Payne, 2004), but the difference in research objectives between the IAP and my dissertation presented subtle rather than major challenges.
Chapter 5 – Methodologies

The first difference was in the objectives, as discussed above. One of the limitations for the dissertation was that in the original study we did not directly ask the women about their own volition or what they felt constrained them most. The IAP data was confidential, which mitigated attempts to ask new questions, which would have occurred with an original sample. However, the extensive amount of material, premised as it was on the women’s authorship of their own stories, offered ample opportunity to explore women’s agency through purposive sampling.

In addition to the difference in objectives, as Tanggaard (2009) points out, the interview setting is never neutral, and the relationships development between the interviewers and interviewees in the IAP influenced the conversations. The IAP decision to allow participants to tell their own story meant that “truth” was adapted to the moment and the relationship in the way that Oakley discusses (1981). While the IAP interview questions were neutral, starting with “Tell me about a typical day,” the participants nevertheless were aware that our inquiry was instigated by the shifts in policy, and this was reinforced when we asked for updates on changes in reference to particular policy imperatives. The data has to be understood in the context of “telling a story” to interviewers who were inquiring about the effects of policy changes.

Further, as trust develops participants share more fully. Rather than just speaking to an audience they imagine, we, their interviewers, become more complex as an audience to them. In my interviews I observed that the participants’ depictions of themselves changed as they grew to know and trust me. This also meant that as our familiarity increased, our understanding of the participant’s lives became more particular to the quality of the relationship, even though we were challenged through the interdisciplinary team setting to review the stories. The conclusions and “truths” from the IAP were present for me as I moved into the dissertation work, too, so the dissertation reflects my original relationship, particularities of data collection, and understanding
that developed. Coming to this material as both a primary and secondary researcher meant that I carried with me deeper insight, but also ingrained judgements. As Varcoe (2006) notes, the research relationship is a two way street, and both parties are affected by their engagement. This subtle complexity requires conscious vigilance to stay critical.

5.5 Strengths and Limitations of the Two Analytical Approaches

In qualitative methodologies, ensuring validity refers to attending to research design, data collection or analysis to demonstrate the applicability, accurateness or credibility of the findings (Creswell, 2003; Polkinghorne, 2007). In this study, this applies to potential issues with the original IAP study as well as the secondary analysis plan, criteria for each methodology, and how the two fit together.

In narrative research, the reader must be convinced that the analysis is “correct” or true, must find the results meaningful, judge the results to be neither shallow nor too involved, and be satisfied that the relevant facts or events have been considered (Bruner, 2004). The emphasis on persuasion means that the researcher must “recognize and embrace the interactive quality of the researcher-researched relationship . . . use stories as data and analysis . . . (and) understand the way in which what we know is embedded in a particular context” (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 7). In this sense, authenticity is put to the test of being communicated, and trusted. However, as Guba and Lincoln (2005) point out, trustworthiness does not result from demonstration of procedure but out of effort made to communicate convincingly, including by presenting original descriptions of the participants to demonstrate the basis of the analysis.

In GTM, the audience should be able to recognize the choices that are part of the process presented as the BSP and apply them to their own experience with the same problem or to a similar type of circumstance (Hall & Callery, 2001; Mauthner & Doucet, 2003; Tanggaard,
The presentation of theory, therefore, is not just an “aha” moment for the reader, but, as Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 242) state, it must be “general enough to be applicable to the whole picture.”

The person who applies the theory will, we believe, be able to bend, adjust or quickly reformulate a grounded theory when applying it, as he tries to keep up with and manage the situational realities that he wishes to improve... The person who applies theory becomes, in effect, a generator of theory, and in this instance the theory is clearly seen as a process. (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 242.)

The outcome is intended to be flexible and modifiable, a criteria that places a post-modern emphasis on how research is “read,” which leads to a concern about engagement with the research audience(s) (Clarke, 2005).

Both GT and narrative methodologies seek to uncover and discover the perspectives of participants as insightful informants, as well as of sources of information about the social construction of meaning. Guba and Lincoln (2005) define this as authenticity; a fair representation of all parties’ perspectives, including attending to silenced voices. Authenticity arises out of a constructivist epistemology in which knowledge is understood to be co-constructed (Guba and Lincoln, ibid). The analytical approach for the dissertation was consistent with the original IAP study in which women were also seen as authors of their own stories, which were trusted to reflect what was important to them and therefore what was relevant to the original IAP research question (Gurstein, Pulkingham, & Vilches, 2011).

Ethical relationship may be considered another aspect of validity in qualitative research (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Considering the impact of research brings an additional test to the role of the researcher as an engaged member of the research, rather than as an objective, value-less
researcher. Both the IAP and the dissertation work paid careful attention to the socio-political context by partnering, forming questions and developing ethical relationships with participants and communities (Thorne & Darbyshire, 2005). In addition, as discussed above, the IAP study was designed as a critical feminist study, as was the dissertation analysis. For example, the dissertation questions focussed on agency as opposed to what Williams, Popay and Oakley call a coping perspective (1999), respecting the women’s experiences. The focus on everyday life can be used as a method to counter hegemonizing discourses (D. Smith, 2005). As discussed above, considering the history of scientific perspectives on Aboriginal people, the choice to attend to the individual narratives for the dissertation work was also made out of consideration of ways to utilize the stories of the Aboriginal women in as much of a holistic way as possible. The choice to contribute to a politically informed knowledge landscape also fulfills the criteria that Guba and Lincoln (2005) call resistance, by which they mean how the research contributes to change.

The small sample size mitigates statistical generalization, but as Flyvbjerg (2006) puts it, theoretical generalization is possible, in which the insights from structural analysis or understanding about the ways things work can be carried to new phenomena to gain insight. This way of reading research requires judicious interpretations, though, rather than “criteriology” as Guba and Lincoln called it (2005), and this relies on an ethical engagement with a variety of audiences. By utilizing pragmatist foundations of knowing in action, a critical feminist point of view and a reflexive analysis of positionality were engaged. I argue that the two methods strengthened each other, and enhanced my ability to look at new research questions by assisting a rigorous, systematic, re-examination of the data and my relationship to it. The two methods also effectively utilized some of the unique attributes of the data, including the sample of Aboriginal women and the longitudinal nature of the data.
5.6 Looking Forward

In the following chapters, I focus on the findings and implications. The three findings chapters are divided into progressively more abstract findings. In chapter 6, I focus on the material struggle with poverty; in chapter 7 I look at dreaming as a path to the future, and in chapter 8, I look at the structural constraints and the need to rethink the public/private divide. In chapter 9, I reflect on the strengths and limitations of the findings for understanding gendered dimensions of welfare reform and social planning theory and practice, and I discuss avenues for further research.
Chapter 6 – Economy of Poverty

CHAPTER 6 – THE ECONOMY OF POVERTY FOR LONE MOTHERS ON WELFARE

The research findings reveal that women are raising families with very little, yet dreaming of the future, and pushing back regulatory impositions to make physical and social space for themselves. Figure 1 shows this process, titled “Dreaming a Way Out.” The next three chapters each expand on a part of this process. In this chapter, the process of “staying alive” is described. Examining the lives of the 17 women clearly reveals that they need more than they are allotted through the income assistance. However, they survive in surreptitious ways because the regulations that were introduced in the 2002 reforms prohibit income assistance recipients from earning cash without 100% deduction of extra earnings. They women must “scramble for small things” either by earning cash in the informal, or “grey,” economy and hiding it, or by strategically use debt and social capital to resolve liquidity crises. However, in order to be able to maintain that scrabbling, they must sustain themselves bodily or they will not have the resources to survive. The women spoke of needing to sleep or exercise and to eat good quality food. As lone mothers on welfare their work of mothering was also not often validated, and so they affirmed the importance of the work they were doing as mothers to themselves, each other, and to us, as interviewers. They also had to protect themselves from the incursion of debt, such as which occur if they were forced to obtain child care so they could attend an appointment, for example, or by advocating firmly against the imposition of unfair charges or rent increases.

The activities of “staying alive” are continuously threatened by surveillance and duplicity because of the dependence on informal processes. These risks ultimately entail the inability to retain children and survive. Successfully staying alive, though, means that the processes of maintaining the household, represented at the top of the diagram in the box of “Sustaining Family,” have room to occur and flourish. If the women could succeed in their struggle to stay
alive, including maintaining their own health, then they could sustain their families. If they could maintain that balance, then they had room to dream, represented by the cloud to the right of the diagram. Chapter 7 focusses on the way that dreams may be ephemeral, more connected to identity than to material conditions, and not related at all to policy objectives. However, having dreams was central to the women’s ability to have meaning in their lives, to their motivation, and
to their ability to survive. If they lost their dreams, as one participant seemed to do, the women sank into despair and seemed to lose their motivation to go on. The contrast between the policy objectives and the women’s own dreams illustrates the way the women’s agency was central to contesting the poverty the women experienced.

Although dreaming appears as an exit in the diagram, dreaming infuses and inspires the whole cycle of action. It is the reason which drives effort. The other exit option, dissolution of family, indicates failure of the enterprise of maintaining a dream and surviving, though it is not, of course, the end of either the family or of the individual. It does, however, represent the failure of the dream to keep the family together. All of the women in this study expressed the desire to keep the family together, though this may have been a result of the self-selection, which occurred because our recruitment focussed on lone mothers (Gurstein, Pulkingham, and Vilches, 2011). However, the risk of failing was enough that these women might redouble their efforts, maybe going without food or taking extreme measures to regain the ability to maintain the delicate balance necessary for sustaining their family. Interventions might occur, though, either formally from an agency such as child protection services, or informally from family, if the failing became obvious to others. While interventions could bring more resources, the consequences of having these interventions might also be surveillance and judgement or interruption of the activities the women were engaged in to survive, and the women might have their children removed or might give up their children.

The consequences of these processes of staying alive, sustaining family, risking failing, and dreaming a way out, are discussed in chapter 8 “Mediating the public/private divide.” Chapter 8 focuses on the structural, implications of dreaming, which occur between public censure and material need.
6.1 Staying Alive

The cross-sectional analysis which is the focus of this chapter describes the physical work of surviving, depicted in the centre of figure 1, by the box “Staying Alive.” In the next chapter, the connection to the world of meaning, and how dreams of the future inspire women to carry on are explored. In the process of laying this foundation, simplistic definitions of women on welfare as merely recipients are broken down to reveal ways that their activities generate an economy and populate the physical spaces of the city. The narrative analysis reveals the way poverty has meanings in time. Present-day impoverishment is not the only kind of poverty; the potential of future poverty is projected back into hopelessness today, and the lack of resources to make a future adds to and deepens the meaning of current-day poverty.

6.1.1 Defining Poverty

While various economic calculations identify poverty lines in terms of financial figures, it is difficult to tell what poverty means in terms of life experience. In Canada, this understanding is perhaps made more difficult because the commonly used poverty line is a relative measure, marking a comparison to higher income earners rather than being defined by any absolute measure of need. A better definition of poverty is a key foundation to exploring how to ameliorate poverty better. If the capabilities measure described in chapter 2 were to be used, for example, understanding what constitutes opportunity and what does not, and what opportunity may be and mean in the context of a developed nation and in the context of lone mothers’ lives would be imperative. When the women in this study talk about what they do to survive, they are describing the details of what poverty is. As they do this in the context of raising families, not only do they indicate what the gendered experience of being a lone mother is, but they also describe how a layer of children in Canada are growing up.
A few studies of lone mothers in Canada begin to outline what poverty means to them. McIntyre and her colleagues (McIntyre et al., 2003; McIntyre, Officer, & Robinson, 2003) reviewed the activities of rural lone mothers in eastern Canada as they sought to feed themselves. They confirmed what the Canadian Dietitians Association (sic) has been reporting for years, which is that welfare rates are inadequate to provide for a basic nutrition basket (Dietitians of Canada, BC Region, and the Community Nutritionists Council of BC, 2009). Beyond challenges to basic nutrition, McIntyre (2003) documented absolute hunger. She found that mothers would go without food and winter clothing to feed their children. Insufficient winter clothing can be a serious danger in Canada, especially in the area in which MacIntyre was conducting research. The choices demonstrate the dire decisions women are forced to make. Food Banks Canada confirms this picture of insufficient funding and inadequate welfare rates: the first food bank in Canada opened in Edmonton in 1981; food banks have grown to become an institutional feature. Of the total food bank customers, 38% are children and youth (Food Banks Canada, 2011). A study in northern BC, which looked at women’s economic struggles, additionally found that households were vulnerable to dependency on food banks and relatives in order to eat (Kaweesi, Wagner, Hara, & Reid, 2007). Additionally, they found that Aboriginal women, who might be expected to benefit from the distribution of country or Aboriginal rights food, were not necessarily part of the distribution system if they lived off reserve. Instead, nonstatus Aboriginal women depended on the generosity of individual family members, a situation that could be

---

Country food is a term that is used to refer to game, berries and other foods harvested from the wild country. Treaty food, or food granted by Aboriginal title, is food that is gleaned from the land by historical rights accruing from treaties. Harvests are sometimes specified; for example, the Stó:lō people have a right to fish from the lower reaches of the Fraser River, contiguous with agreed upon historical limits of their fishing grounds, irrespective of federal conservation regulations. Some Aboriginal communities and members are dependent on country food for sustenance.
uncomfortable (Reid et al., 2008). This chapter looks deeper into the meaning of poverty, adding to this discussion by using women’s agency to look at what poverty is and means to them.

6.1.2 Critical Feminist Positions on the Nature of Poverty and Work

The work of managing poverty is described in this dissertation using the concept of scrabbling for resources, a concept which emerged from the data analysis. Layered through this discussion, though, are assumptions about what work is. Work that is recognized and legitimated by the Income Assistance policy is that which takes place in the formal economy as waged labour. This definition makes work synonymous with the public sector of the formal economy or marketplace, as Jenson terms it. The remaindered part takes place in the private or domestic sector, and by virtue of its invisibility in that realm is aligned with nonwork.

Feminist scholars and economists (Elson, 2002, 2005; Waring, 1988; Warren, Pascall, & Fox, 2010) and economists looking at the nature of welfare reform (Cameron, 2006; Dolfsma, Finch, & McMaster, 2005; Fenster, 1999) have long argued that this is a false dichotomy. A Marxist political economy perspective points to the social reproduction of labour as an important, though invisible, handmaiden of the formal monetary economy, as discussed in chapter 2 (Luxton, 2006; Neysmith, Reitsma-Street, Baker Collins, Porter, & Tam, 2010). In addition, the experiences of the women in the study indicate that the line between earning, or generating economic benefits, and domestic life is not as simple or clear as even the abstracted debate suggests. The line between the recognized economy and private life is closer to what Bourdieu described coining the term social capital to describe the economic value of sociocultural activities (Morgen & Maskovsky, 2003; Policy Research Initiative Government of Canada, 2005; Portes, 1998). In this study, work is differentiated as paid work in the formally recognized economy and unpaid work in the informal or unrecognized economy (also called the
grey economy) and home and community. In addition, the concept of social capital is used to describe bartering, exchange and trade, though questions are also raised about the overall utility of these concepts for the situations described here.

6.2 A Manufactured Need

In the income poverty paradigm, the need for cash is often balanced quite simplistically against the provision of funds. However, the women could not meet all their material needs within the context of the current rental market on the low allowance they received. In this section, three examples of the way women manage are given, the first two focussing on the interplay between housing, the housing market, and regulations, and the last between the regulatory system of the Family Maintenance Enforcement Program (FMEP), the Income Assistance regulations, and the women’s cash flow. These examples demonstrate how poverty is not just an equation between physical need and the means to meet that need. An inability to meet basic or material physical needs is manufactured through the regulatory system.

One of the ways that the difference between income and needs was met was by subletting rooms or using accommodation to raise extra cash. For women in the private rental market, their options were to move continuously, as Natasha did, seeking affordable accommodation, or to endure substandard accommodations, as Cynthia did, or to share or sublet to others, as Laura and Nancy did. Irrespective of even these manoeuvres, all the women who were not in subsidized public housing were under-housed; that is, did not have enough space for their family. The difference between needs and the options available to them, though, were the same challenges others in similar situations faced, and this provided an opportunity to sublet to others who were similarly unable to afford adequate housing. Mary Jane expresses these complications:
(Q) Are you back in the same place, now, that you moved into [before]?

(A) He moved out three years ago and I ended up continuing to pay the really high rent . . . I was paying, it was $865 [a month] when I moved in there, and then . . . it would have been about $950 [with] all my phone and utilities and even when I started going there to pay more than half of the $865 because I wasn't really getting all I should have from the Welfare and I wasn't [able] to ask. I just felt so ashamed – people feel differently about asking for money – not everybody feels great about it. (Mary Jane, Rnd 2, 210-224)

Mary Jane reveals exactly the attractiveness and the risk of such arrangements. As long as she and her boyfriend were on good terms, this situation worked perfectly. The shared rent was $865 or $432.50 for one person, plus utilities. This amount fits perfectly into the housing allowance of $520. In addition, the two adults are sharing one bedroom, so fewer rooms are needed overall. However, there is no contract between the two adults, and when the relationship breaks down, the boyfriend, who was not the father, felt free to leave. When he moves out he leaves her with the burden of the whole rent. Although this example is drawn from an intimate partner situation, the same risks applied to roommates, too. Renting a place that was more than a woman could afford was attractive, though, because of the lack of availability of affordable rental accommodation, as the comments from Gemma attest:

Everyone keeps saying the rental market is really good right now, because everyone is buying so there’s lot of places out there. Yeah, there’s lots of places out there in a higher end rental market, but people that are living in $600 to $700 basement suites, single parents or even families don’t have the money to be buying a place and moving out of $600 basement suites. (Gemma, Rnd 1, 65)
There were few options for women who were renting and trying to find accommodation for families, as discussed in the chapter on the impact of the BC reforms.

Women could manage by using the home as both home and income generator. However, when she sublet her unit to boarders or roommates, the women needed to operate as a landlord collecting the amounts owed, including shares of utilities and other costs. The women were put into this position because of the income assistance policy. In order to claim the shelter portion, the recipient has to show receipts, which means, typically, that she has to be the official lessee. The women were thus forced into a cash hierarchy that they were dependent on, and vulnerable to failure in. The informal arrangements, like Mary Jane had with her ex-boyfriend, meant she was without official recourse to redress.

It was not only the complications of sharing that created the potential for sudden fluctuations in income and the generation of unmanageable costs. The combination of a difficult housing market (a landlord’s market) and counterproductive income assistance rules left women vulnerable to abuse, and not only from intimate relationships, as Gemma’s life reveals.

My landlord lives upstairs and he tries to be supportive, but he has no children, and he doesn’t understand what it’s like to have two young children. He actually ended up calling the Ministry on me a couple of weeks ago because of my yelling at my daughter, and luckily my social worker is fairly understanding and she didn’t take it very serious . . . Like I can hear word for word. If I’m quiet downstairs and he has company I can hear their conversation, like it’s really bad, and vice versa, so I can just imagine . . . I agreed with my landlord that I’m not giving him notice until I find a place. (Gemma, Rnd 1, 66)

Gemma expresses resistance, first, pushing back and resisting threats to her ability to balance surviving with sustaining the family. She goes on to point to her success.
So if that means only two weeks, or if that means only five days that’s what it mean. I said, hopefully if everything’s ideal, I’ll give you the full month, and if not I’ll give you two weeks and he’ll give me half my damage. That’s the deal we worked out.

(Gemma, Rnd 1, 64,66)

Ironically, the landlord may actually profit out of this situation if Gemma is forced to move suddenly, which could occur if he calls the Ministry and she feels she cannot live with the fear of having her children removed. The lone mother is facing a set of difficult issues, which start with a substandard rental. First, this apartment that Gemma has is in poor condition with mould and rat droppings. Her own mother (the children’s grandmother) calls a social worker to investigate because the grandmother is concerned about the children’s health. However, in addition, because of the lack of sound proofing, Gemma then has to face surveillance over her landlords’ discomfort with her parenting practices. She manages to “make a deal” with her landlord so that she would not lose her whole damage deposit if she has to move suddenly, either because of surveillance or the health impacts. Gemma is actually not out of pocket yet, but if she does move, the Income Assistance policy is to refund the damage deposit if the next rent amount is less; if the next unit costs more, the damage deposit and moving costs are not covered. Thus, between these two circumstances, Gemma will be stuck paying out of pocket, either losing half the damage deposit or possibly also paying all the moving costs and not being reimbursed for the damage deposit. Given that in Vancouver the damage deposit is half of one month’s rent, she

While rental suites in older homes, or secondary suites as they are called, are permitted, city bylaws set standards for ceiling heights, exits, and many other details which are difficult for retrofitted suites in older houses to meet. Thus there are many illegal suites, which help provide much needed housing for the population who rents but do not get inspected at all. This is unlike other jurisdictions, such as the U.K., where separate inspections for fire code and so on mean that even if units fail on one dimension, like city bylaws, they are inspected for safety.
might regain $150 on a $600 unit if she left it early, but she would have to pay $300 on the next unit if it was $600, plus pay moving costs. She would not get reimbursed from the landlord until after she moved, since the damage deposit is retained if there is damage. The Ministry for Income Assistance provides reimbursement after the amounts are paid, so altogether, this means paying out of pocket before the reimbursement cheque. Gemma can literally not afford to move, in spite of the rodent droppings, mould, and over-reactive landlord.

These two examples of ways that the housing market interact with regulations and social mores demonstrate the active role that regulations play in creating liquidity crisis. Shelter allowances that are inadequate to cover market rental costs, and low availability, makes women vulnerable, not to an inability to rent, but to the complications that arise from trying to manage. However, housing was not the only circumstance in which regulation causes cash flow problems. The Family Maintenance Enforcement Program (FMEP) is a program that collects maintenance payments from noncustodial parents on behalf of lone parents which is mandatory for welfare recipients. The women must sign over the right to pursue collection in order to receive income assistance benefits. Once collection is confirmed, the amount of the payment is deducted from the woman’s income assistance cheque the following month according to the schedule of payment. However, the woman may or may not receive the payment from the father, and, as Marissa explains, the fluctuating income creates sudden liquidity problems.

(A) I think it was five days after welfare day. And they asked me, ‘Well, you just got your cheque.’ But the thing is, his dad [is] paying two payments each month to catch up, instead of the one before, and they take it all off. And I told them, like I have laundry, food, bills – they think that I get a big sum of money or something . . . I don’t get to keep it because I’m not working.
Welfare day is the common way to refer to the last Wednesday of the month, when cheques are issued, and what Marissa is explaining is how soon after this day she runs out. She has a shelter portion of $585 which is paid directly to the landlord. In addition, she is mandated to receive $130 from her child’s father, plus she receives $128, termed a “support” portion, for food and all else for herself and her son. Her monthly expenses are supplemented by the federal CCTB and NTB child tax credits cheque on about the third week of the month. In the months when she receives the maintenance payment she collects double, because she has already received her welfare cheque. But the next month, after she has declared the maintenance payment, the amount is deducted. In addition, she also, sometimes, does not receive the maintenance cheque. This means that she receives two times the amount one month, but the next month she may receive an equal amount less. She has no savings and cannot manage her needs with cash flow fluctuation of more than 200 percent, and so she goes to the ministry for a crisis grant. The maximum allowed disbursement for an emergency grant is $40.

I’m stretching. I don’t know, I don’t know how I do it but I, you know, I go to food banks, I go to Salvation Army, they give me like a voucher for clothes and see I don’t . . . I got this actually from [the child’s] Nana; she sent it to me. [My child’s] dad has a new woman in his life and I told her, ‘Why don’t you give it to her?’ and she’s like, she’s really nice, she’s like God put on her heart [told her] to give to me. So, I thought that was nice. (Marissa, Rnd 2, line 405)

Marissa is lucky that her son’s grandmother passes on this gift to her, but it shows how vulnerable women are to the fortunes of the fathers. In addition, her son’s father, had funds but he chose to give funds to his mother instead of making the mandatory maintenance payment. Marissa cannot contest this as she was required to sign over her rights to enforcement. Thus, the
interaction of the Income Assistance system and the FMEP guarantees that she is in a double bind. The automatic deduction reduces the family’s overall financial stability by removing resources the custodial parent could call on in an emergency, creating poverty of resources (Gurstein and Vilches, 2009). The cash flow fluctuation generates deeper poverty that has to do more with liquidity rather than absolute amounts. In addition, to impoverishment through cash flow fluctuation, the non-custodial parent’s contribution cannot increase the child’s standard of living, surely discouraging even to non-custodial parents who want to support their children.

These three examples demonstrate that not only actual need, but the intersection of market conditions or other regulatory systems with the Income Assistance regulations combine to create liquidity crisis for the lone parents. While women use inventive strategies to manage they are also vulnerable to a variety of external events such as failure of others to contribute, and therefore to surveillance and neglect. These conditions intensify the need which is already present due to lack of resources.

6.3 Scrabbling for Resources

The work involved in locating life’s necessities seems to be summarized by the phrase “scrabbling for resources,” as depicted in Figure 2. This expression references the microscopic level of benefit; the constant and minute nature of each of the activities that add up to gain.

Every day I’ve been go, go, go, and a lot of times people think ‘Oh, you’re on welfare, you just sit around at home.’ But even my mom says, all this energy you spend trying to do different volunteer work, or make a little bit of honorarium here or a little bit of, because I do different volunteer work and I make honorariums, but it is almost the same as just going out and getting a job. I mean it takes a lot of running around to do.

(Gemma, Rnd 1, 52).
Three kinds of scrabbling are explored: generating income, manufacturing debt, and fighting back. Scrabbling includes activities that generate income, such as working for monetary return or selling things, as well as the work of gleaning – rummaging through bins of free items, collecting recycle items like cans and bottles for money, or picking through garbage, either for resale items or items for personal use. In addition, women find ways to borrow money by pawning their belongings, and they share, trade, and barter, to bank favours for future recall.

Fighting back, the term used by Lister (2004) in describing one of four agencies she identified, is used here to describe the way women resorted to self-advocacy to claim entitlements or benefits that they felt they were due. Following this discussion of scrabbling for resources, the next section describes the way some of the women escape from this scrabbling by transitioning to paid labour in the formal economy, a solution encouraged and enforced by the Ministry for Income Assistance regulations. However, the three examples featured here demonstrate how difficult this is under the regulatory and public policy conditions. Finally, the section entitled “Taking the Nickel,” describes other ways out, like marriage. This expression is borrowed from the way children are duped into keeping secrets by being paid tiny, insignificant amounts of money, and reflects the way these routes provide immediate relief, and even happiness, but also offer room to doubt the long term viability and benefit to the women.

6.3.1 Generating Income

One of the ways women in the study could meet their needs was by making money or raising cash. Cash was necessary for a variety of needs. Bus fare, for example, could generally only be obtained for cash. Large amounts of food, or specialized food, had to be paid for with cash (food bank bags may provide enough for a day or two). Children’s school supplies and clothing, baby bottles, formula, or diapers, utilities such as heat and electricity, job-hunting
expenses such as resumé preparation, and personal items such as women’s sanitary supplies had to be purchased. The simplest way to obtain funds was by labouring for income, but earned and gifted income had to be reported. After the 2002 reforms, it was deducted at a rate of 100% from the next month’s welfare cheque. The result evident in this study was that the labour for income had to occur in the informal economy. In this section, three ways of generating income and their consequences are described: labouring for income, selling one’s household assets, and doing sex work.

6.3.1.1 Labouring for Income

In the work of obtaining cash, the kinds of resources needed and the types of work performed were particular, as was the relationship of this type of work to their other duties. Molly, for example, did craft work at home and sold piñatas for a little bit of extra cash. As she notes, it took planning and raw materials that she had to purchase. It also cost her in terms of time she could spend on other things.

When people just ask me for piñatas, and I sometimes I know for the whole month I’m going to be doing piñatas, so if I do five, I’m going to have this, and I can buy this. And I can make plans. (Molly, Rnd 1, line 225)

As Molly notes, the extra cash enables her to plan ahead; not just to scrabble from moment to moment. This is significant for understanding the financial stress women were in, as Molly was the one participant who did have the full support of her extended family. They fed her, clothed her daughter, and helped with child care when they could. In spite of this, Molly could not “make plans” – she needed her own resources in order to get ahead. Thus raising cash, which could be for mere survival, also enabled a broader range of agency.
However, raising cash in the way that Molly describes it required several assets. First, for Molly, this activity was possible because she could care for her daughter (toddler age) while she did it. Thus the activity itself was of a type that enabled Molly to “multi-task”; she could watch her daughter while she worked. This was made possible because she held an apartment on her own and she had a television. The television was important because, although she did not have cable, she could put a cartoon on and her daughter would stay quiet while she worked, yet they were in the same space sharing time together, and Molly was able to watch her. Making piñatas was a type of work that could easily be set aside for a few moments while she attended to a need of her daughter’s. She could also talk while she worked, so she could fulfill her caring duties. Having the apartment on her own enabled her to set up her piñata materials and leave them out. She also had space to let the piñatas dry in between stages of production.

The conditions of Molly’s life were all particular to enabling her to do this kind of informal economy work. Very few of the women engaged in this type of work. Natasha, for example, would not have been able to do this because she shared her space with a roommate or her mother or boyfriend throughout most of the study time. Laura was sharing two bedrooms with another household and up to eight children and she could not have set out crafts, either. It also would not have been possible in the situation Cynthia had, with a child with special needs who was less independent and not easy to monitor. Only one other woman consistently raised cash by selling things, and she was selling drugs in the illegal market. It appeared that she was a reseller at a small scale; she told a story of almost getting caught when she moved into wholesale selling (selling to those who would then sell to users). However, like Molly, this participant relied on her community networks to take orders and sell to purpose. Molly, however, did not have to enter the public marketplace, and therefore lightened the possibility of exposing herself
to possible discovery and censure. The participant who was selling drugs was risking criminal charges. Censure was a powerful motivator in limiting this kind of activity.

6.3.1.2 Selling Assets

In contrast to producing items for sale, it was much easier for the women to sell the assets they had. Arlita put a blanket on the boulevard\(^{46}\) and sold her household goods. However, the conditions of this activity were particular, as they were for labouring. Like Molly, she was able to fulfill her caregiving duties while she was generating income this way.

I bring stuff to Granville on a sunny day, like today . . . We spend three hours down there and make about $40. You know, that’s not a lot of money but kids are outside playing, they can go to the park. We can sit back and laugh and read through the books, because for years that’s all I did was buy books. I belonged to five book clubs. (Arlita, Rnd 1, 671-673). \(^{47}\)

Similar to making piñatas, raising cash by selling things required resources, although in this case it was Arlita’s own possessions. Unlike Molly, selling did not enable Arlita to “make plans” – she was using the money to meet needs for buying food or other necessities. Moreover, Arlita sustained two losses from selling her household goods. The first was that her son was very upset over losing his things; Arlita was still feeling badly at our last interview, two years later, over things of his that she had sold. Arlita, too, had regrets over losing her considerable collection of books, since she loved to read. The second loss, though, was being subject to public censure. The first censure was official: it is illegal to sell materials on the boulevard, and the police will tell

---

\(^{46}\) Arlita lived in an apartment and did not have a yard from which to sell things.

\(^{47}\) Granville Street is a main pedestrian and transit avenue in the central downtown area which links the entertainment and business districts.
people to move along. For Arlita, an even greater risk was the tear in her social fabric and the slow transformation of her identity.

My girlfriend, who I no longer speak with because she doesn’t like all the things I’ve done to get money this year, like she’s totally appalled at the whole thing, and totally appalled I would pawn my son’s Play Station™. She sees me at Grandview on a weekend, on a sunny weekend selling stuff. She’s doing her teaching and . . . I don’t know, she just can’t be a part of my life if she can’t [believe] in this desperation of how my life is going. (Arlita, Rnd 1, 513-517)

Arlita, who by interview one said she no longer speaks to her former girlfriend, is creating a social boundary. She retreats from her former professional life and cuts her girlfriend off, even though her girlfriend probably offers her what sociologists call social capital. Arlita loses a confidante as well as a door to both another way of life and her own former identity. This is what Gurstein and Vilches (2009) call a depletion of lone mothers’ resources. By forcing women to utilize their networks and their own resources for daily living, policy regulations deplete the resources the women might need for more extraordinary efforts, like looking for work or for emergencies. These resources are not necessarily physical, as in this example.

Part of the challenge of the income paradigm, as described in chapter 2, is that the provision of money in the form of government support embeds an assumption that money is a goal in itself rather than a means towards an end. If the disbursement were sufficient this incongruence would not be troublesome as all needs would be met. However, the insufficient support allowance forces recipients to find additional ways to meet their needs. Nancy’s teenage daughter was denied benefits after she had a child, while she was trying to attend high school.
She was on social assistance also and they wouldn’t give her any crisis grants at all. A couple times she got really short of food, she called them and she [had] been on social assistance for a very long time but she (had) never asked for crisis grants. She’d have her ex that was able to help her but then after he stopped helping her and she called the Welfare asking them for a crisis grant and they said no. And then she said to them she has no food at all. So it was really horrible for her for a while because she ended up just having yard sales and selling her stuff. Bringing her stuff to the pawn shop, like her a little bit . . . She has almost nothing in her house because of having to have yard sales. So, that’s really hard. (Nancy, Rnd 2, 193-204).

Nancy’s daughter is forced into a series of steps that progressively fail, putting her at increasing risk. First, she pleads for help from the government office, but is denied, and so she raises cash by selling the assets she does have – her household goods. However, according to the rules, she is required to declare all income, including charitable gifts, gifts from family, food bank donations that she receives (classified as gifts in kind). Nancy’s daughter, who is already vulnerable, is placed in a catch-22, being both denied and unable to do anything legitimate without having her gains removed from her. She had few options at this point. She is rescued by Nancy, who takes both her daughter and her granddaughter in.

Raising cash by selling household assets could thus be seen as a ready source of cash; one which could fill gaps in immediate need. However, there were many consequences and the resource was finite. Women talked about looking for things to resell; Arlita resold some new jeans she got from a social service agency that was giving out free clothes. Natasha looked for bottles and cans so she could get the recycling refund, and women talked about the business of
looking through garbage bins for things to resell. Ultimately the rewards got smaller and the effort bigger, but as Arlita says, the activity is relatively easy to manage with children.

6.3.1.3 Using the Body for Income: Sex Work

In addition to raising money by making or selling things, four of the women in the study used the most basic asset they had and sold sex. To discuss the women in this study, it is important to note that advocates who are focussed on sex trade work distinguish between “outside work,” such as the street sex trade, and “indoor work” such as film industry work, exotic dancing, and massage parlour work. Besides these two categories, there is a further distinction between sex work which is personal, like escort services, chat line or internet work, and massage parlours, where the women provide service to individual clients, and entertainment work, such as exotic dancing, film, and photo work, which do not typically engage individual clients. Outside work is considered the most dangerous, while some entertainment work, like film industry work and photography, is regularized with benefits and expenses covered.

Of the 17 women involved in the study, four were currently or formerly involved in sex trade work, though of different kinds, in different ways, and with different risks. Of the two women who were involved in outdoor sex work, one was engaged on a regular basis and the other only occasionally when she was short of funds. One of these women had been engaged in street sex work from the time she was pimped as a teenager. The other woman who did street sex work went to her local corner when she got desperate at the end of the month. Both of these women risked discovery, arrest and surveillance through their public acts.

Of the two women who did or had done inside work, one had been organizing her own “dates,” as she called them, for many years; she explained that she kept a roster of four or five regulars, some who travelled and visited Vancouver intermittently, and others who were short
term. She had steady work and she generally arranged to do this work at a location that was not her own house. The network and resources were important to her work and she explained how she maintained contacts, known to those in the trade, who will rent out a room cheaply. In other cases, her dates might provide her with a location. The other woman who did inside work had formerly been involved in entertainment work, where she had been well paid, but had worked late hours. She had chosen to leave that industry and was seeking a new trade that would sustain her family and allow her to be home with her children.

While all the work served the purpose of raising funds, Anne, who had been engaged in street sex work, also noted that the different kinds of sex work could be associated with different motivations, and therefore different costs.

In a lot of cases the people I know will just go out and make a little bit of money. Just pull one date and go home, because that’s enough to get the child and themselves food. And in a lot of cases with that, it’s the end of the month call, and in particular a five-week month. (Anne, Rnd 1, 937)  

Anne’s words describe what the other woman who did street sex work said about what drove her to engage in outside sex work. Anne, who was trying to leave her street life and a career of sex work, did not see her engagement in street sex work as a choice; she described how she had been tricked by a man she thought was a boyfriend into drug use after she left home as a youth, and then put her to work on the street.

---

48 As described earlier, welfare cheques are issued monthly and twice a year, the time between cheques is 5 weeks rather than 4.
I had trouble with the addiction. The addiction was not brought on by my choice of trying a drug. It was marijuana, it was the only drug I did. My ex drugs, and of course I did not know what it was, cause I’d never seen the stuff before in my life.

(Anne, Rnd 3, 702-706)

As Anne points out, while cash pushes the work, the different ways the women are involved have different consequences. For her, sex work came with addiction, including the process of being pimped. The background and context to her entry to income assistance was through this exploitive relationship. One of the challenges, though, was that the work did not always result in straight cash remuneration. This seemed to be more true for the inside “dating” work than the street-based work. The dating work was sometimes partially paid in favours, such as dinners out, short trips, new cell phones, or clothing. In addition, although Anne did not deal or sell drugs, women might become involved in buying and selling drugs for substance use, utilizing their network of dates and male friends. The reward, therefore, of doing sex work, might be small, especially when compared to the costs.

Anne’s comment about being tricked into street sex work and then being exploited is indicative of structural exploitation. Irrespective of the immediate and individual motivations these women had for engaging in sex work, structural conditions and histories implied that the move to sex trade work was not an uncommon situation for the type of class the four women in this study who were engaged in sex work represented. All four were Aboriginal or visible minority, fitting a profile of the deeper vulnerability of these populations. In addition, as Anne indicated, she was young, and as she hints throughout the interviews, she had trouble at home with her mother. Her mother put her out at one point; today Anne identifies as someone with dual diagnosis, that is, with mental health issues as well as substance use issues. The structural
issues of disadvantage suggest that the consequences associated with this way of raising funds are not just the direct costs and implications, but may be part of a gestalt of issues.

The two women who were doing or had done inside work both seemed better resourced. The one who had organized her own dating work had grade 12 education and was doing escort work before she was on income assistance. The other considered entertainment work her career. During the study she returned to school and upgraded her skills to facilitate a switch to another career. Like women observed by Kong (2006), indoor sex work did not seem to be identity-consuming for these two women. As with the women Kong studied, sex work seemed to free the women in this study to do other things because of its relatively high remuneration and the ability to be discreet. The physical risk to both of these women was also much lower than for the women involved in outside work, who were subject to the potential of surveillance, the risk of random violence, and a much higher risk of sexually transmitted disease (STD).

Each type of work had its dangers; in the street sex work the women were subject to assault, and this happened to one of the women during the study. The women on the streets were also subject to surveillance. Being on the street made them highly visible, and the woman who went to the corner was worried about being reported to child protection authorities by her neighbours. Women engaged in dating work were subject to stalking, and for much of the study, the woman who arranged her own dates used a complex system of friends as enforcers to help her stave off clients or former clients who were overly interested in her. She was also subject to public verbal assault through public graffiti that named her as a sex trade worker. This was used deliberately to threaten her through exposure to unwanted solicitation and name calling. She had to switch phone numbers regularly and was very careful to keep her home location secret from all but a close circle of friends. The irregularity of being on call, because she had ongoing
relationships and needed to be available when the men called, also seemed to me, as an observer, to take its toll on her ability to be in control of her own schedule and focus. These risks added additional burdens to their lives for the women who were involved in sex trade work.

In summary, the body was an available asset that women could use strategically to take care of gaps in income. However, as with other means of generating income in the illegal or informal economy, women were vulnerable to duplicity, surveillance, the possibility of catastrophic failure to maintain sustaining income, and, as well, to personal physical dangers. Nevertheless, the body represented ownership of the temporary means of escape from the impossible constraints of income assistance and material need.

6.3.2 Manufacturing Debt

The challenge of meeting essential material needs is not wholly met by generating income, as important as supplemental income was. The women in the study used debt very strategically at very small scales to manage cash liquidity problems. Most often they borrowed through the informal economy or by calling on social capital, but they sometimes had formal debt or borrowed in the formal economy as well. Money could be owed for the long term, in the sense of contracts, most often student loans, or money could be owed in the short-term, such as when a damage deposit had to be paid before a reimbursement could be collected. This latter was a liquidity issue rather than a structural debt, but structural deficits could occur too, such as a difference between the amount coming in and the expenses. The implication of either kind of monies owed might be not having enough to eat. While structural debt demanded an increase in income or a way to meet needs by borrowing or receiving gifts, women managed liquidity needs by orchestrating such things as delays in paying utilities, exchanging favours with friends, or, sometimes, by pawning items. There were consequences to these kinds of debts, particularly if
the debt was being used to meet basic needs (structural debt), or if debt was being traded through social capital deliberately, cultivating obligations and friendly exchanges for reliable favours. Debt was manufactured by the women because of the constructed powerlessness of their positions.

6.3.2.1 Formal Loans: The Business of Pawning

Pawning represented one of the very few, if not the only, way women could raise debt through the formal economy.\(^49\) Individuals on welfare often do not qualify for bank accounts, and are not eligible for credit card debt. They could, however, pawn items if they held or could obtain something of value. Several of the women in the study mentioned using pawnshops, some regularly for what seemed like cyclical cash flow problems. However, pawning carried risks. Because of the nature of the pawn business, it is a good cover for fencing stolen items, and pawnshops can be raided and closed on suspicion of passing stolen goods. Arlita lost her wedding rings this way, although she presumably could have claimed them since they were legitimate pawned items.

\(^49\) Pawn loans are high-interest loans but offer several options. In some cases, some goods can be left at a pawn shop for consignment sale. In this case, the owner retains privilege of ownership, but the item is put for sale immediately. This is not a pawn, but the pawnshop operates as a dealer, taking a commission. Availability of the cash depends on a sale, though, so this option does not work if cash is needed immediately or if the pawnshop owner does not feel the item has value. This option is more common for high-value items like musical instruments. In other cases, an item may be held for collateral in exchange for a loan, with a specified repayment period. If the person taking the loan does not return to pay back the loan, the item will go for sale; the pawnshop owner recoups their costs through the sale. During the holding period, the items are held in a back room, not on display. One further arrangement was that the pawnshop owner would buy the item outright, and in this case, cash was paid out. In that case the pawnshop owns the item but the seller takes a wholesale price. The pawnshop will typically not take on this risk if they are not convinced they can sell the item. The seller also takes a smaller cash value because the pawnshop owner is accepting the risk that the item may not sell, or may not sell in a timely fashion. I am indebted to my personal friend, Zave Shapiro, for this explanation.
(A) We had no food in the house [for] 3 or 4 days, and we pawned the Play Station™ and the games, and he [my son] was very upset. On the 20th when I get my baby bonus it will be to get his Play Station out.

(Q) How much is the baby bonus?

(A) Four something.

(Q) How much did you get from pawning the Play Station?

(A) $80. That’s the Play Station and 6 games. I pawned my wedding rings a long time ago. I had these rings, and I pawned them, and then the pawn place closed down because they were taking in stolen goods. (Arlita, Rnd 1, 281-289)

Apart from the risk of losing valuable assets, which could be pawned again in the future, the game of catch-up with the pawnshop was not always successful. Sometimes the women could not afford to get things back. Arlita did not seem to mind that she had lost her wedding rings, but Cynthia regularly pawned the silver First Nations bracelet she seemed to treasure.

Pawning raised cash but the debt was relatively controlled. Generally the items women pawned had value relative to what they could pay back, such as the $80 Arlita noted. Whether it was $50 or $100, the amount was something the women could conceivably manage, even though it shifted the burden of expense from current time to future. Nevertheless, it was one way that the women could manage unforeseen expenses, the need for emergency funds, or desired expenditures that could not be saved for.

6.3.2.2 Borrowing, Barter, and Trade

A different kind of debt was enacted by trading services or favours for support. Molly as mentioned above, looked after her aunt’s children and in exchange, her aunt and uncle supported
her by feeding, helping with child care when they were not working, referring her to a part-time job where her aunt worked, and passing on hand-me-down clothes to her and her child.

My aunt is working there and because I take care of her kids, she says, it's better if you work there too, in the afternoon when she doesn't work. Because she works in the morning and then she picks up the kids and she takes care of [my daughter] and I work in the afternoon till seven. (Molly, Rnd 2, 185)

While it was not an explicit or formal trade, both parties understood that they were doing things for each other, helping each other out. While Molly seemed to see this as a natural, though generous, arrangement, at the very end of the study she seemed to express some relief that she was free of her child care duties.

By doing the helping work in the context of relationships where obligation and gifts are honoured in return, Molly was able to use the exchange of informal family relations, creating a social capital “loan”. However, as some point out, social capital can be positive or negative, affecting the recipient through exerting critique or demanding conformity to a goal that is not desired. Negative social capital, or what is sometimes termed “downward levelling norms,” may become rigid and reinforce negative in-group behaviours (Portes, 1998). This type of theoretical framework may be used uncritically to explain what appear to be self-defeating behaviours (see for example, White, Spence, & Maxim, 2005). The issue here is similar though not quite the same, in that social capital may generate obligations which are difficult for women to escape.

Molly expressed some relief when she finally had social housing and her daughter was old enough that she could share in watching the children without relying on her family. While Molly reaped many benefits from her familial exchanges, it is possible to imagine situations where the
uneven power dynamics between recipients and their relatively more well-resourced families may exert pressure to return favours.

Natasha experiences the negative consequences of relying on informal trade when she relies on her mother for room and board, and later, for childcare. Her mother expected assistance with elder care in return, apparently irrespective of the obligations Natasha had to look after her own child and meet Income Assistance expectations. The tension made the relationship increasingly unstable, and the result was not only that Natasha made a fragile relationship more tenuous, but that she also ended up homeless twice. Molly’s success can thus be framed as a risky form of debt, which although returning ample rewards for her, may not in all cases. As Gurstein and Vilches (2009) point out, government policies which demand women seek the support of family and friends before petitioning government may risk both their personal relationships as well as future benefit, draining women of energy to address problems in current and future time.

6.3.3 Fighting Back: Resisting Debt

Part of raising cash was resisting debt by fighting unfair bills, or fighting to get money the women felt was due them. Women also resisted the liquidity crises that were manufactured by external circumstances. Women were constantly alert to this; and avoiding the imposition of charges before they occurred. One of the primary sources of manufactured debt arose through shelter disputes. Molly demonstrates how this occurred as a series of events caused extra charges to her; the first was that her suite flooded during a bad rain. She could not live there for six weeks, and refused to pay rent. She was then charged utilities through the landlord because there was only one electricity meter for the whole house, which she contested:
So, because when he was telling me to pay the rent, I say “No,” because, this is not, I’m not paying for something that I’m not getting. Because upstairs, I pay 25% utilities – upstairs they were having [the] heater – so the utilities are more expensive. But I haven’t; I wasn’t using the heater, so I just pay whatever I was paying the month before, like an average. And I told [him] you have to pay this to the tenants upstairs, and he was like, No, you have to pay. I said, ‘No, I’m not, I’m not getting any heat. Why should [I] pay that?’ It was $79 for like, I was paying $15. So it was like crazy. [I] told him, ‘No, I’m not paying that.’ (Molly, Rnd 3, 623-625)

Molly won her argument, but women did have to negotiate, persistently and with patience or temerity. Cynthia negotiated with her landlord over who was going to pay to repair the heater that had broken. It was November, and she had no heat, but it was a gas-fuelled radiator and required someone with a gas fitter’s license to repair. The landlord did not want to put any more money into the house as it was condemned, which Cynthia knew was the reason she could rent it for basically the amount of her shelter. Eventually he let her use the rent money to pay for the repair, but until then she had to live with no heat in November when it is cold and raining in Vancouver.

A typical point of advocacy was resisting rent increases. Jeanie, Mary Jane and Carla all fought rent increases. As shown in Gemma’s case, discussed in the first section on the way need is manufactured, problems with a landlord could be over conditions. Resisting his surveillance and trying to make small space for herself in case the situation got worse, she negotiated a reduction in the future charge of a damage deposit if she had to move. This kind of advocacy speaks to the constant alertness and adroitness the women required to meet basic needs like
Even when they won concessions, like Gemma did, they sometimes still had to move. However, the negotiations highlight how the imposition of charges is subject to random events that the women cannot control or predict. A landlord may decide to raise the rent or distribute utilities costs in houses that have been divided into suites. Each charge must be negotiated, as does the cash flow to do repairs. While the tenancy law sets out responsibilities and guidelines, settling a dispute with a landlord through formal processes could take months, and meanwhile, as in the case of Cynthia’s broken radiator, the family cannot go without.

The realities of negotiating with roommates and landlords put the women in positions where they needed support from Income Assistance. This meant they had to fight with the Income Assistance workers for what they felt was owed them, according to their understanding of the rules or an appeal to morality. Carla, for instance, found herself needing winter jackets for both herself and her daughter. Her first appeal to her own Income Assistance worker was unsuccessful, so she asked to see the supervisor.

I came in contact with one for a clothing cheque. At the time my daughter didn't have a winter jacket and neither did I. And he denied me, and I really needed it, so I said I want to speak to your supervisor . . . When I explained the situation, she said, ‘Well, I'm looking at your record. You've had enough crisis grants already. We can't help you.’

(Carla, Rnd 2, 670)

Carla did not take “no” for an answer; however, her persistence resulted in intense scrutiny. The supervisor asked her for receipts, as well as the name brands of the clothing she was wearing. Eventually Carla decided to resort to free clothing bins. However, this did not satisfactorily solve
the problem and she had to go back to the worker. She then faced very detailed and personal scrutiny.

And when I did have to go in for a jacket for me, he looked me up and down. He kept looking at all the clothing that I was wearing very thoroughly. He was like, ‘I see you’ve got a pair of Felix [ph] shoes on. How much did those cost?’ They’re like 2 or 3 years old. ‘I don't know, I don't remember.’ (Carla, Rnd 2, 674)

The Income Assistance worker continued to scrutinize her:

He was like, ‘They look like worth about $120’ . . . And then he said, ‘So what other name brand clothing do you have right now?’ I'm just like, ‘That's about it.’ And he’s like, ‘And your daughter?’ And I [said], ‘She gets all her clothes mostly from Zellers™.’ (Carla, Rnd 2, 674) 50

The staff person then suggested she shop at low-cost stores. Carla told the interviewer she had tried buying really cheap underwear, but it fell apart the first time she washed it. As if in a scene from Oliver Twist, the staff person threatened to put her on a payment plan if she asked again.

So then they said to me, ‘If you ask us again, we're going to balance your money for you.’ And I said, ‘No, that's not happening.’ I do not let anybody balance my money even though you guys do provide me with cheques and support and rent, I still will not let you guys to do that.’ I'll just fight and try my hardest for that to happen because I’ve seen it happen to other ladies. Like I'm a very on-time lady. I get all the bills paid the day they have to paid. I get my rent paid two days before it's supposed to be. I like to be on top of things. (Carla, Rnd 2, 674)

50 An economical department store.
Carla actually has no legal or regulatory power to prevent the Ministry from putting her on a payment plan. However, she fights back, an important point for her and others. Although this struggle is fought over winter jackets, the jackets themselves and the need for them recede as the struggle is transformed by Ministry regulations into a debate over whether Carla has asked for help too often, whether she exceeds norms for the poor by displaying brand-name clothing, and whether she manages her money well. On the logics of it, if she is wearing brand-name clothing, one would assume that she is managing her money well. However, the offense presumed is reminiscent of the case of servants who have the temerity to wear clothing similar to their employers.' The officer uses the occasion to exceed the spirit of the negotiation, which is based on a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy. If the Ministry staff refuse to acknowledge need, they can hardly also assume the right to then investigate the details of a person’s life. To do so violates the implicit contract of impartiality. What is revealed instead is an offense against class: Carla dresses as well as the worker, perhaps even in clothing the worker cannot afford. Her offense is rising above her station, and blame is lobbed using an implicit accusation of cheating, cloaked in a “we will help you manage” framework.

On a material level, Carla’s choice is also defensible. Even though going to free clothing bins might seem like an obvious solution, and many women did, there are several problems with doing so, not the least being the potential for bugs and other dirtiness. Some of the free clothing may be in good repair and fashionable, but if the clothing was stained, soiled, torn or frayed, or if it needed adjusting to fit, the women seldom had the means or time to repair it. Not every size

---

51 See the Chilean movie La Nana (2009) for an excellent treatment of the social boundaries around employer/employee clothing. One scenario explores what happens when the domestic servant, who typically wears a uniform, is given a gift of an economy-price sweater but uses its cash value as down payment on an expensive name-brand sweater just like her employer wears.
was available, and this was especially a problem for larger women. The women might accept the social implications of dressing poorly, but this was a bigger issue for children, especially youth. It may have been important to Carla to dress well, as she acknowledged that she struggled with low self-esteem or perhaps depression. Certainly women who were looking for work needed to dress cleanly and presentably. The bigger issue, though, in asking for support was the risk that it created for the women. While Jeanie appreciated the mid-month cheque distribution system, and asked for it, Carla preferred to maintain her independence. The worker and the supervisor were clearly threatening Carla as a punishment for her temerity in asking for support. However, as Carla pointed out, she thought she was entitled to a winter clothing allowance. Special needs, over and above the monthly bills, thus put the women in a difficult position that could create crisis, or, if they went to Income Assistance, could create conflict and generate threats to their overall money supply and management system.

The three ways women gained resources for surviving, by generating income, manufacturing debt, and fighting back, demonstrate the dire, gritty, nature of poverty. That poverty is difficult is no surprise, but the role played by public policies, which are ostensibly about helping, reveal the duplicitous and often impossible conditions they create. Poverty takes on a decidedly late-capitalist era flavour here, and the neo-liberal reforms which preference individual agency are in full play. The women are revealed as authors and agents of their own lives, manoeuvring in savvy ways to survive and keep their children. However, the costs are great. Some women are unable to retain their children. Those with significant challenges are very vulnerable to external events, including interference and surveillance. The private housing market plays a formidable role in creating impossible conditions. As Gemma noted at the
beginning of the section on liquidity crises, while some benefit from the booming real estate market, others pay the price.

6.4 Transitioning to Work

Moving into paid labour in the formal economy was only one focus in the spectrum of work that women were engaged in, but this focus was work in itself. It required resources and, during the transition, a fine negotiation of goals and Ministry regulations. At the same time, imagining the final achievement of moving into the paid economy represented a kind of transition to freedom for the women, which gave work a more amplified significance than merely providing income and meeting needs.

6.4.1 Motivating Identities

The women longed for paid work in the formal economy, even if they knew they could not go to work at the moment and even while they were busy with the work of surviving, caring for their children, working on their health, supporting others, or making changes in their community.

They would love me back at my job. I would just walk right in and go to my job again. I mean, it’s hard to say, right, if I was keeping the $200, I would be working right now a certain amount and keeping my hand in. And that is reality, because I have to think about practicalities even as far as my time and, once you get classified a certain way, you kind of want to keep being classified that way, because it’s so much work to jump between categories. Like they had me, I’ve been a working mom, and I’ve been totally a welfare mom, and then now I’m a depressed mom, so … (Mary Jane, Rnd 1, 539-551)

52 Prior to the 2001 changes, welfare recipients who were classified as employable were permitted to keep the first $200 that they earned.
Mary Jane’s comments reflect the importance of work beyond its income-earning value. For her, and for others, work was invested with an alternative identity that reflected the greater status of her postsecondary education and a profession. She also points out that “keeping [her] hand in” would enable her to keep her skills fresh and her connections in place for when she is ready to go back full time. Mary Jane does not envision being on welfare a long time, even though she has four children. She looks forward to being self-sustaining; staying connected to her work is part of cultivating the relations to make that happen.

Natasha was also motivated to go to work, though her motivations were related to her past experiences. Her own parent had received income assistance after a divorce while Natasha was growing up. Natasha had left home early and supported herself, but she found herself needing social assistance after she had an unplanned pregnancy. She did not want to see herself as a person on welfare; her identity was not of being a “welfare mom.” This core value drove her to get a job.

For one, the guy [I had his child] wasn’t feeling like going to work, and my son’s four months old already. And then when he did go to work, all he did was drink. Then he started to disappear. At one point, he disappeared long enough so that I had to seek social assistance, and that’s the last place I wanted to be when I was a single mom. I don’t . . . I didn’t want to be here, right? (Natasha, Rnd 1, 261)

Natasha doesn’t see herself or her identity as a lone mother on income assistance; she wants to be self-sufficient. Cohen (1997) similarly found that homeless people spent a great deal of time explaining to him how they were not like other homeless people. He suggests that these conversations indicate ways that the homeless person constructs himself or herself and the imagined audience, and that embedded in the resulting tension is a transformative possibility.
What Natasha’s desires tell us, in part, is that the symbolic is as important as the material here; she is constructing herself as much as she is accomplishing the instrumental task of getting a job.

6.4.2 Orchestrating the Steps

Andrea, Gemma, and Molly were the only three of the 17 women who seemed to have obtained sustainable employment by the end of the three years. Sustainable employment for these three women was having a job that paid sufficiently (for example, Andrea was earning $10.25/hr) plus a stable child care arrangement and regular daytime hours that enabled coordination with formal child care providers. All three also felt that their work was a chosen career direction, something they felt comfortable doing and could see themselves doing in the future. All three used their own resources to locate and purchase or fund training: Andrea paid out of pocket for child care as well as choosing to be docked during the time she was out of compliance; Gemma had educational credits saved from a prior volunteering program; and Molly took a student loan for $16,000 and put herself through a private college. The wages they finally achieved seemed modest, and for all three, their employment was term (temporary) at the point we ended the interviews. While their success may be attributed to their initiative, the barriers they had to surmount provide a clue as to the challenges others faced.

Moving to employment required careful coordination with Ministry regulations. The Income Assistance staff are required to draw up an official employment plan for each woman as soon as she loses her temporary exemption from work, when her youngest child turns three. The plan (EP) is a contract; it binds the woman to a course of action for which she is accountable as a condition of continuing to receive assistance. Every step of their efforts is then orchestrated by the EP. When Andrea starts the process, she is first approved to do upgrading to get her grade 12 equivalency. When she finishes she is recommended to some employment preparation programs,
including a self-esteem building course, but she is interested in getting training that will sustain a living wage.

Initially I didn’t think I was going to pass the GED, it was just, go find a job. But then it kind of opened up and you know, yeah, maybe I do want to go back to school and you know, want to train, especially with the computer thing.  

(Andrea, Rnd 3, 112)

She is interested in gaining computer skills, but she can’t sit on the college wait-list for 8 months because her employment plan requires that she look for work.

(Q) So what they’ve left you with is you’re supposed to look for work?

(A) Yeah, unless I can get into a course right away. Then it’s feasible for them.

(Andrea, Rnd 3, 138-140)

Eventually she settles for teaching herself computer skills.

I got pretty fast at it, but I can’t actually put down how many words per minute. I couldn’t tell you because I’m not doing it right. So even programs, like upstairs at the library where you can take a course for GED and you can learn how to type . . . You can’t take it if you have your GED or your grade 12. You can’t get in there to do that.

(Andrea, Rnd 3, 344)

By the end of round 6, Andrea had a sustaining job. As she puts it, she “just said no to welfare.” She took construction work through a temporary labour agency and learned how to do cabinet detailing on the job.

But it’s still through the temporary agency that we were going to – I decided to go through. I just said ‘no’ to welfare. It’s a construction company, and I do cabinet detailing . . . And it’s called skilled labour, so I get a decent wage, and this will probably go until Christmas or just after it.  

(Andrea, Rnd 6, 58)
Andrea gave up on her ambition to learn computer skills and leave behind what she had done when she was younger, which was helping her father in his construction business. However, she did fulfill her ambition to get her grade 12 equivalency, and perhaps in the future she may return to school. What is clear is that she struggles with the regulations and prohibitions of the Income Assistance policy; it both helps and hinders, especially in interaction with the availability or lack of availability of helping programs. Some are too far for her to travel and still manage child care; others have wait-lists or start times that would put her out of compliance with her employment plan. At one point, Andrea deliberately stepped out of compliance with her plan so that she could take some training, and she was docked $100 per month. It was at that point that she “just said ‘no’ to welfare” and found herself a construction job.

These steps were formidably difficult for Anne, who had spent a decade and a half on the street and she did not have legitimized work skills, an employment history that could be referenced, or the educational certification necessary to go back to school. She had few resources to help her in switching her lifestyle to a legitimized one. She was, however, highly motivated to change her life and her career.

I'm going back to school in January. I'm going to NEC [Native Education College]. I'm going to finish my Dogwood [grade 12 diploma] and I'm going to start the process for my BSW (Bachelor of Social Work degree). I may work down here one day! I want to be a social worker. (Anne, Rnd 2, 446)

Anne resented the conditions that make it harder to go to work: the welfare wall, described in chapter 2. She saw the reduction in welfare rates as a direct contributor to an increase in the gap between women’s desire to go to work and the possibility of them doing so.
So she [the former government minister] did that, because she figured that with less money people would have less, provide an incentive to find work, which it doesn’t. When you’re hungry, you’re hungry. It’s not an incentive to do anything. (Anne, Rnd 1, 889)

Unlike others who use extra cash to plan, Anne suggests that government policies are driving women into “survival sex” – engagement in the sex trade for the sake of getting life’s bare necessities. In contrast to women like Molly, who had resources like housing and a middle-class extended family behind her, Anne has no permanent housing because she shares or lives in shelters. Her extended family is limited to her one parent and her children, and her parent is not in a position to give her much and Anne has a difficult relationship with her. After years on the streets, Anne does not have possessions she can sell on the boulevard, like Arlita, either. As a result, she does not have other alternatives for setting aside reserves to help her move forward.

The contrast between Andrea and Anne highlight the difficulties with the one-size-fits all model of transitioning to employment. Their stories also reveal commonalities, which is that the journey is long, arduous, must be sustained, and requires resources. Anne, who was facing current challenges in staying housed and dealing with substance use and mental health issues, was not likely to succeed.

6.4.3 Balancing Family and Child Care

The welfare regulations are difficult to manage, but another issue, common to all the women was that work had to fit with the requirements of looking after family. The struggle to go to work in spite of the child care challenges is exemplified by Natasha, who tried working evenings in a small restaurant after her child turned three. She starts by saying how much she was making.
Like $300 in two weeks – Yay! For me that’s a whole lot nicer, you know? And I wasn’t working full time. Mind you, my sweetie had to come all the way out from here to babysit my son quite a few times and the bottom line was, he can’t do that. He was [at] work in the morning at five . . . like he leaves at six in the morning for work and he is not babysitting with pay, he’s doing it out of the kindness of his heart and he’s doing it when he’s exhausted and after an hour and a half trip on the bus. It’s a lot to ask for him to do it five days a week. (Natasha, Rnd 2, 168)

Natasha noticed that her son began to regress, stopped using the toilet and started to act out.

I had a job at [restaurant] and of course, it’s night shift so I needed my mom to look after my son. Well, that didn’t work because she couldn’t; she’s exhausted. And my son needs Mom-time at the end of the day, so that really didn’t work . . . My son backtracked; he stopped eating, he stopped going to the washroom by himself. He started having accidents all the time. [At] first I, it’s not a nice thing to say, but I’m familiar with this because we have moved before and every time we move, little things back up, especially with the little guys, one of them is washroom – but the eating thing really scared me.

(Natasha, Rnd 2, 94)

Both the job and the child care were only manageable because Natasha was staying with her mother. If she had been paying rent, she would not have been able to survive on her earnings of $300 biweekly. If she had not had help with child care, she could not have gone to work. Thus she trades the certain dependency on welfare for the more tentative dependency on her family and friends. In the end, this balance of work, child care and expenses was not sustainable. For various reasons, both the job she is referring to here and a subsequent job collapse and she returns to dependency on welfare, feeling further behind and more panicked.
The Ministry did provide child care subsidy for parents if they were taking pre-approved training, but the recommended (and mandatory) employment plan was sometimes out of step:

(A) You have to go get a pre-employment form and it has to be approved by them before you start it.

(Q) You were explaining that you’ve now lost the subsidy until you start the new program, so there’s no bridge funding at all?

(A) There is subsidy - the subsidy is in place but that is only three-sixty-something for him and then $147 for my son per month. That’s what the subsidy is, but the actual daycare cost is $525 a month and my son’s is $220, so I have to pay for that. I have to cover that. (Andrea, Rnd 2, 81-87)

Andrea pays for the difference between the subsidy and the actual child care expense out of her pocket and somehow makes ends meet. Even if she can cover the cost, which, she says, in the context of the cuts “really sucks,” she still cannot always obtain child care. She turned down an equipment operating course she was interested in because it was offered in a Vancouver suburb and she would not be able to be back to her house before 6 p.m.

While Natasha was determined to go to work in spite of the child care challenges, some women explicitly wanted their jobs to be of a type that would allow them to be available to drop their children off at school or pick them up. They anticipated that as their children grew and more child care options were available because of their ages, they would move into full-time work. Work needed to fit in with their parenting duties, in particular because there was no one else to take primary responsibility for the children. Perhaps this responsibility defines lone parenting; it is being solely responsible. Although supports like Natasha had from her mother could be available, and although they could be safe, like Molly’s, ultimately each woman had to
determine what the limits were to her inclination to have others look after her children and the level and the kind of safety risk she was willing to tolerate.\textsuperscript{53} Having child care they could rely on was fundamental, because otherwise they could not fulfill responsibilities to an employer.

\textbf{6.4.4 Being On-time and In-phase}

The expectations around parenting through stages of child development opens up dissonance with normative time implicit in policy and social expectations that women will progress through stages of work readiness at the same time. Normative time frames are driven by expectations that adults will progress from status to status in accordance with an age cohort or hierarchy of advancement. Deviations are fall-outs from the ideal and are associated with lower status. Thus the interplay of status changes orchestrated by the confluence of policies has important implications for the women in the study. Child care policies around staging of staffing ratios as children age from infant to toddler and preschool age child are consistent with child development theory (NAEYC, 1997) The linking of income assistance policy thresholds for transitions to work coincides with the availability of child care for preschool aged children, which starts when children turn three. The progression women are mandated to make from dependent status to employability engagement is thus tied to child care policies, but these stages are disconnected in other respects from child care provision, such as around geographic availability, cost, coordination of sibling care, and hours of operation. Cox Covington (2003) has documented significant spatial mismatch between the need for child care and availability in poor

\textsuperscript{53} The women constantly made decisions regarding the safety of child care situations. Cynthia did not feel that her special needs daughter was safe in a licensed child care facility and preferred her friend’s care; Natasha took a risk leaving her son with her mother or boyfriend because she wanted work and obtained a job at night, for which there was no licensed child care. Molly would only leave her child with family; she did not feel that a regulated non-Catholic setting was morally safe.
predominately African American neighbourhoods in the U.S. In Vancouver, the ratio of child care spaces is lowest in East Vancouver where children are more likely to be at developmental risk, whereas, although the absolute number of spots is lower in more affluent neighbourhoods, those middle class neighbourhoods have a better ratio of available spaces (Hertzman, McLean, Kohen, Dunn, & Evans, 2002). The implication is, given the difficulty these women had in accessing spaces, that the child care and income policies are only tenuously connected. The discordance caused significant stress to the women in this study. They constantly talked about the difficulties of engaging child care, and the necessity of extra expenditure beyond the subsidies, and as a result, the impossibility of the pressure to be engaged with an employment plan as soon as the child turns three.

When the women were impatient with policy structures and tried to move ahead on their own timelines, like Natasha, they often ran into barriers, but women talked about being explicitly discouraged from stepping outside the policy framework, from getting off time.

They want – what’s it called – an employment plan. Right? And she doesn’t want to see me. She wants me to go do my homework and find out if I want to go into training, or what kind of training, and come to her when he is 3, and of course get childcare ready and that. But she doesn’t want to have an employment plan until he is 3, which is in August. (Andrea, Rnd 1, 196)

When Andrea decided what she wanted to do, she was told that the Ministry for Income Assistance could not fund that program. She could pay for it for herself, if she wished.

Of the women who found sustaining jobs, none simply went out and got a job like Natasha. Molly, Andrea, and Gemma laid plans carefully and took progressive steps over the course of the three years. By the end of the IAP study, they were working, though in Gemma’s
case with some challenges. Knowing the obstacles, the women were parsimonious, and carefully planned their approaches. The three who were successful at making the transition often broke with policy in important ways. After Gemma completed her ten-month training program, she felt like she needed a short break before going to work. She refused to stay in compliance with her employment plan (EP), which required her to move straight into a retraining program.

I was trying to transition from school to work. I just needed help until I found a job. And they started [to do] the job ready programs and these workshops every day. You had to go to building your self-esteem, getting ready to leave welfare, blah-blah-blah. And I was like, ‘I don’t need these things,’ you know. Like my self-esteem is fine now. I’ve just graduated. I know I’m going to get a job out there. I graduated at the top of my class. I’m not worried about any of that. I just need a little bit of help. And they were pretty ignorant about it. (Gemma, Rnd 5, 335-337)

What Gemma describes is the “one size fits all” approach of the income assistance policy. She was penalized $100 per month for going out of compliance. However, Gemma set her own timelines, which worked for her, and the future that she envisioned and planned for. She enrolled in the support program, and bent the purpose to help her explore some options.

I started it in April and I finished it just after [the] interview. It was successful, but I’ve already been in a peer support training program before through Family Services so I knew a lot of the stuff that was taught . . . Actually the best thing it did for me was it made me make a decision on what I was doing with my $2,400 tuition credit, because I’ve had it for five years now. I was just procrastinating, didn’t know what I wanted to be when I ‘grow up’ . . . So when I did that program, the facilitator was really awesome and she helped us get focussed on our goals or what we wanted to do. (Gemma, Rnd 2, 136)
Gemma was strategic in using the educational credits she had earned earlier under a volunteer program to choose training that would sustain a trades-style career. These educational credits were an asset that none of the other women had because the program had been discontinued.

6.4.5 Intention, Context and Timing

One of the differences between Andrea, Gemma and Molly and the others was that they were focussed on careers and not on just on income from any job. In contrast, Natasha found a job, but only by happenstance. When things did not work, there was no incentive to stay. She was also not prepared with all the components needed to support working life, and the job she found did not match her needs. For example, Natasha’s child care arrangements were dependent on the kindness of friends and family, so although child care did not cost her money, it was not sustainable, either. The dependency on charity of friends arose because the hours of her work were not suitable for licensed child care. Eventually she could not sustain her working hours.

The context of child care availability was also a struggle that Gemma was having because she had a special needs child. Although Gemma trained for and obtained work that could be sustaining, her schedule consisted of on-call work with clients whom she had to travel between. Thus while she was working full time at between 7.25 and 8 hours a day, her work time, including travel time, lasted up to 10 hours, was variable, and was subject to change without notice. The variability and unpredictability was difficult to balance with child care, even though she was able to find a child care provider who could care for her children over this lengthy and irregular work day. The importance of child care highlights how treating women as atomized, individual adult units and ignoring their family responsibilities has real consequences for both them and their children, and prevents success at managing the work-family life balance.
In other cases, physical health challenges held the women back. Cynthia could not sustain the construction work she was interested in; even though she had trained in construction, which was sponsored by the Ministry, her disabled limbs would not allow her to do heavy, sustained, or detailed work. In addition, like Gemma, she had a child with special needs, and this child was asked to leave a licensed, qualified, child care setting because she was hard to manage. However, in neither case was the Income Assistance office forthcoming with support, guidance, or interest. Cynthia obtained temporary disability status (Persons with Persistent Multiple Barriers, PPMB) after the second interview, but she reported not receiving any counselling, guidance, or interest from the government ministry. Without support, she did not know where to turn or how to manage the extra needs she and her daughter had.

In the context of wishing for a job and being mandated to find work, the lack of supports meant that women faced difficulties in transitioning to a self-supporting or semi-supporting position. It is doubtful that Cynthia could sustain work with her current level of disability. However, if she were already in a unionized workplace, for example, one could imagine that she would be provided with accommodations and supports to enable her to be productive. Comparing Income Assistance support to the rights of workers with disabilities for inclusion reveals how unsupportive the regulations are. Supports would enhance her ability to parent and to work around the house, diminish her pain, and provide her with the possibility of leaving welfare. Cynthia’s situation highlights the importance of anticipating and supporting transitions off welfare as well as the importance of appropriate or stepped planning. Proximate goal setting under guidance would assist Cynthia to improve her quality of life.

In addition to following lines of inquiry that focus on how women transition to work, a more critical question asks whose responsibility it is to ensure adequate income, how
employment is serving these women and families, and how child-rearing and labouring are combined in the concepts of the Income Assistance regulations. This discussion makes it evident that the policies which are intended to support transitions to work are not serving individuals because they are not focussed on sustainable employment. In addition, the rigid timelines do not allow women to begin to prepare early enough for successful transitions, and the policies which require substantial work histories prior to re-admission on the welfare rolls intimidate women. In addition, the 100% deduction of working benefits and the sudden end of all income assistance involvement form part of what is called the welfare wall. For these women, it made struggles more dire, more underground, and the transition to work more difficult.

6.5 Another Way Out: Taking the Nickel

For all of the women in the study, the reality of being pressured to go to work was a formidable challenge because of the ongoing need to put time into scrabbling for resources to meet pressing daily needs. In addition, they required a sustaining job because the remuneration had to be sufficient that a woman could stay off welfare long enough to qualify to go back on, if needed. In addition, for women with few marketable skills, like Anne, the challenge of finding work was formidable, making the pressure intense. Sometimes the women also needed to deal with health issues for themselves and their children or extended family members, including the children’s fathers. This could be overwhelming, as it was for Jeanie, whose younger daughter had special dietary needs and whose ex-partner developed a serious health issue. Finally, as if there were not enough challenges, the expenses of child care meant that women with more than two children, or with special needs children, needed wages to be very high for the job to be
sustaining, even if they could find suitable child care.\textsuperscript{54} The efforts of women in this study to resolve the pressure to move into paid employment demonstrated several problematic disconnects between expectations and supports for this cycle of activity.

Nonemployment routes seemed to provide relief for the women and to fulfill some of their hopes and desires. These options tended not to help them exit a cycle of dependency, though. Nancy, for example, partnered with a man who had multiple children. Not only was Nancy (aged under 25 at the start of interviewing) taking care of her own children and supporting two of her siblings, she was also co-parenting her new partner’s children. This consumed her attention, although by interview 2 she was sharing a pregnancy with the new man in her life. By the end of the interviewing, she and her partner were living together and trying to get sole custody of his children. If successful, she would have had more than six children in the house. Nancy was content with this; she was not working and by interview 4 she was formally married and off welfare because her partner had a sustaining income. While his employment was through term contracts and they didn’t have a lot of money, Nancy did not worry about this. They were surviving; however, this life does not enable her to buffer future events. Should the marriage break down, or should she become widowed, she would have four or more children in her care. From a family perspective this may be very positive; from an individual perspective, it is a heavy burden to bear. Nancy’s situation also highlights how ill prepared society is to support families with many children. The care that was socially shared three or four generations ago is now the sole responsibility of individuals identified as parents, which highlights the structural assumptions built into child care and income assistance policies.

\textsuperscript{54} Children with medically confirmed special needs are eligible for enhanced funding, but child care centres also must have special licenses to be officially funded to supervise such children. This requires a special certificate and a higher staff ratio, which small centres cannot manage.
Some of the women found other, more problematic, solutions to the dilemma of going to work or staying on income assistance. These solutions speak to the challenges of transitioning into paid employment, but also to the diversity of priorities that exist in life. According to the rules, it was not possible to continue on income assistance as an employable person without meeting the job search requirements. However, in spite of not getting jobs, none of the women who stayed in the study came to a point where they were without income. Some of the women moved to disability status which meant they received slightly more and could retain earnings. In addition, Arlita was temporarily excused from seeking employment for the purpose of recovering her health and regaining custody of her children. Laura, who was on disability status for a bad back, was anxiously anticipating joining a class action law suit with other residential school survivors. She expected that the lawsuit would bring up bad memories for her, but she also saw it as an important step to take for the sake of others who had had these experiences. The movement to disability status or temporary exemption for child protection reasons gave the women reprieve, but except in Arlita’s case, did not seem to support them to move to a different status. This failure was most poignant with Cynthia and Olivia, who talked about wanting to work and did extensive community work, but did not have the wherewithal to move from these efforts.

Notably, the women who moved to disability status were all Aboriginal. The three women who moved to employment were non-Aboriginal, though two were visible minority and one was an immigrant. In the context of historical colonial policies, potential cultural histories, and postcolonial dynamics, the presence of these Aboriginal women on the disability list points in a number of directions: either their circumstances were more debilitating or they had fewer

---

55 Although unconfirmed, the interviewers understood that two of the five women who left the study, N’k and Natasha, lost their housing and had their children removed by child protection services.
resources. While the sample is too small to answer such questions, the cases are illustrative and suggestive. Cynthia endured a violent, random assault when she was walking home one evening. At that time, she had been living in a very low-income neighbourhood by the ports. By her own word she was a strongly moral person who had low regard for people who used substances; it does not seem likely that her lifestyle contacts endangered her, just her residence. This neighbourhood felt like home to her because it was close to where she had been raised; an Aboriginal descendent, her parents had moved to this working-class port-side neighbourhood in the middle of the last century. This particular history, arising out of colonial policies which disenfranchised women from their First Nation communities, caused many individuals, including Cynthia’s mixed-origin parents, to move to urban areas where they could get jobs. Thus Cynthia’s presence in this neighbourhood, with its high crime rate, was not a coincidence, and it speaks to the greater vulnerability of women with similar histories that have placed them in such areas. Today, Cynthia raises her family in this high-risk neighbourhood. In the morning as I walked to her house to interview her, I passed street sex workers plying their trade at 9 and 9:30 a.m. Thus Cynthia’s daughters are being raised with exposure to activities which may put them at risk of random violence, if not of lifestyle options that most parents would not want their children to choose. Cynthia herself said that the women working “did not bother her” but she was sternly disapproving of wanton and open drug use and talked with fear of the open drug use situation in the Downtown Eastside (DTES).

Disability status did not appear, at least for Cynthia, to provide access to care or support. In spite of being excused from the requirement to seek work, disability status did not appear to require evidence of treatment, and there appeared to be no follow-up or referral to medical care. Thus disability status appeared to buy time, but not to support the women to change their lives.
This seemed to be true for the women who were highly motivated to get ahead as well as for ones who seemed stuck. For example, Carla, who was determined to be mistress of her own destiny but who faced difficulties, including having a second child during the study, obtaining disability status seemed to legitimize her health struggles and provide an avenue for authorized supports like child care, but not resolve the underlying issues. The strongest value was that it appeared to provide a rationale to her for her existence on welfare. Thus disability status, which Cynthia and Olivia resisted, may have been part of a strategic ploy by Carla to “save face” while at the same time “buying time.” In the words of de Certeau (1984), there are tactics (responses to events) and strategies (responses that require more energy and have long-term prospect). The move into disability status appears to follow the line of being a tactic; for women who apply for it or accept it, it removes pressure, but it does not reposition the individual or generate an escape from the ever-present weariness of welfare.

### 6.6 Summary

The work that the women engage in as they scrabble for resources is textured with tensions that arise from expectations of what work is, which are embedded in the Income Assistance policy. These expectations make life difficult. Not only are women expected to look for work, they must also hide the remuneration or benefits they gain to maintain the illusion that they are not busy with non-authorized activities. That is, they must appear to be looking for employment even if they are labouring to survive. This double bind makes the women themselves contribute to the stereotype that welfare recipients are not industrious.

Not all raised income or benefit is treated the same way, though. Money that is raised in the formal economy is taxed most heavily by the Income Assistance system, at 100%. To make money in the informal economy, whether through cottage industry, sex work, or by selling
assets, also clearly contradicts the Income Assistance policy and puts a woman at risk of being
discovered for welfare fraud, but this income is not taxed. These two options mean that every
interaction the woman has as she is raising money makes her vulnerable to being reported if she
does not declare her income; and declaring it would void her effort. Using the alternative social
exchange and benefits system, though, had limitations in terms of what kind of expenses barter
could cover (child care could not be used to pay rent, for example) and it also left women
vulnerable to exhausting their relationships, being exploited, or being left without recourse to
failures in those relationships even after investing in them.

The lives that these women presented indicate that the lines between earning or
generating benefits in the marketplace, nonprofit sector, or government (private or public) and
the domestic duties (private) were not simple or clear. There is, first, the world of work that is
constituted of paid work in the formal economy that is differentiated from unpaid work in the
home. Secondly, there is also work that is paid versus work that is for gain in a range of
situations, such as trading and bartering, in the informal and the illegal economies. The women
thus worked the “public-private” divide. They were fully aware of what the public presentation
had to be; they were equally skilled at working in the realities of the private sphere to meet the
needs of themselves and their children, in whatever way they could. In the grey economy in
which they dealt, they needed to protect themselves, which they did by seeking the security of
friends who could be trusted, by taking limited risks, and by fighting back to get what they
thought was due them, from landlords or from government. This all had to be done while silence
was maintained about what was really going on: the real need could not be expressed, because to
reveal the extent of the real need would require a balancing explanation of how survival actually
occurred. Thus both government agent and recipient participated in a careful dance that
maintained a veil of secrecy over how deep the poverty was, and what the real effects of the policies are.

The nature of poverty is revealed as constant work; whether it was work for survival or parenting, or of meeting Income Assistance policy expectations. The women worked at getting work; gathering resources and supporting themselves while they patiently waited and bid time until their children reached policy milestones. Being an income assistance recipient made women vulnerable to extortion, and the policies themselves seemed to force an underground economy to exist. In the context of international concern over the growth of the informal economy, and the increasing and persistent poverty of lone parents (male and female), it may be of interest to consider the implications of policies which, as a side effect, promote the growth of the informal economy.

The instrumental work of getting food for the table, primary health care supplies, or paying rent, was supplanted by performative work based on the identities which were framed for the women and which they needed to cultivate in order to claim benefits. They had to fit into different profiles of need to sustain the flow of cash from the Income Assistance ministry. These performative dimensions are important to the discussion of how citizenry is being shaped, and in particular, how women and gender are shaped by what seem to be gender neutral policies like income assistance employment plans, non-profit funding, minimum wage, and child care policy. In the next chapter, performative work is compared to aspirations, or dreaming, to explore the scope of women’s agency. Some of the key elements have to do with the kinds of futures women envision for themselves, including Aboriginal women with their specific cultural and colonial historical pasts.
CHAPTER 7 – HOW LONE MOTHERS USE DREAMING TO CREATE A FUTURE

Although income assistance employment policies are ostensibly future oriented, the steps ensconce a mechanized vision of economic success. In contrast, women dream of a future where life is different. They dream of a better life for themselves, or time to relax, or a happy family life, or a better job. These dreams are ephemeral, difficult to grasp and unique to each person and her history. These dreams are not just instrumental visions that fuel strategies; they constitute the women’s identities and extend into creating individual and communal futures. Their struggles suggest that enacting identity supports their dreams. If this is true, then performance of identity is a form of resistance to the imposition of policy visions for their futures.

Dreaming is challenging in the context of the kinds of constraints the women face, though. Having and holding a dream means countering others’ competing visions, including those embedded in the Income Assistance regulations. As a result, dreams are something that the women must closely guard. Dreams also require time and space from the pressure to meet basic needs. If women lose the struggle to survive, they may not be able to hold onto their dreaming. The women are aware of this, and they struggle to make space to keep their dreams alive. In this chapter, I start by exploring the significance of dreaming to the way the women constitute their futures. After outlining some examples of dreams and the way they are enacted, I explore the way some women make space to keep their own identity in tension with ministry regulations and other flows of power. The next chapter focusses on ways that the tensions embedded in dreaming muddle the division between the public and the private.
7.1 Dreaming as a Constitutive Act

It seems contradictory, in the context of real material need, to talk about dreaming. Surely there are more important things to discuss, and even if not, how can policy respond to the need to dream? Are dreams not beyond policy? And yet dreaming seems to play a central role in explaining why one woman chooses one path while another chooses a different path. More than resourcing, which speaks to material constraints, or opposition, which confines the scope of goals to plans defined by others, dreaming is connected to each woman’s individual history and future. Three participants’ stories provide contrasts in the meanings and types of dreams, and how women follow them: (a) Mary Jane, who had professional training in child care but was struggling to care for four children; (b) Andrea, who moved back to Vancouver after her father died; and (c) Olivia, an older Métis mother originally from the Prairies who was battling depression. Although each woman’s dream is unique, their struggles to dream help define the meaning of poverty and lead to understanding why and how the women are motivated to change themselves and society.

7.1.1 Dreaming as Family

For some of the women, like Mary Jane, poverty was a barrier to having a wished-for family life. For example, when she retells how she first ran out of money and applied for welfare, her dream defines the significance of welfare to her.

---

56 I am indebted to Brody (1981) and Riddington (1988) for their extensive discussions of the role that spiritual dreaming plays in making, or mapping, the future for the Dunne-za people of present-day northeastern BC. Western culture has difficulty treating dreams as serious phenomena with material consequences; we bifurcate the concept with words that we understand to translate to material effects, like “vision,” “goal,” “focus,” and “aspiration,” and, on the ephemeral side, “fantasy,” “hope,” “wish.” Dreaming may fit into this latter class, but in this study it also had material effects.
I had this really nice worker, and she gave me a cheque for like over $100, a crisis cheque. And I remember how I felt to get that money because we had nothing; we had gone there with nothing. I barely could make it to the office, that’s how little money we had. And then we were just walking around with my kids, and buying them food, and then it was really neat. (Mary Jane, Rnd 1, 112)

Mary Jane’s gratitude indicates her wishes, not in terms of money, directly, but in terms of the outcomes that money provides. Her vision of family well-being is made clearer in a subsequent comment she makes after she first loses a rent subsidy from the City of Vancouver and then is reapproved for it. Although poverty is costing her very real and extreme hardship, she wistfully regrets not the suffering itself, but her dream of providing a good life for her children.

I was actually hoping that, for the first time since my rent came down, like, ‘Phew,’ giving this breath of relief . . . Just thinking ‘Wow, this could be my kids’ new life, we could actually go places and do things.’ And it would be neat . . . There’s so much that could have been so much different for their life. I mean, if we just had a little more money all the way down the road – their whole lives would have been different.

(Mary Jane, Rnd 1, 263-267)

Although material deprivation is paramount in both of these quotes, it is what Mary Jane does with the money that is interesting. Her first impulse is to celebrate by buying food out, even though what she buys is very modest. Given what she received, a popsicle or pizza slice or, perhaps, if she is really indulging, a meal at a fast food restaurant would be an indulgence. The spending, though, modest as it is, enables a bonding experience that gives her family quality time. She expresses longing for what the money could do when she says, “Their whole lives could have been different.” Her yearning is not only a characteristic which defines her poverty,
but it is specific to her family’s future. In addition, Mary Jane yearns for what she feels others’
have but she does not, a marker of social exclusion.

Similar to Butler’s (1990) method of examining gender as performance, the acts of being
or becoming a mother or family can be viewed as performance; for Mary Jane, celebrating with
food and a family outing is part of a performance of making a family through a process founded
in ideation. The performance and ideal was unique for each woman; Mary Jane fulfilled her
particular normative dream through buying treats. Performing in this way gives her a sense of
pride and happiness, as well as satisfaction in maintaining her own social expectations. When
viewed as performance, the acts take on, not functional significance of poverty alleviation, but
identity-forming significance in the way that Butler proposed. The performance of family
identity is composed of small activities, like walking around and eating what they like, which
together constitute the larger dream of a better life. This is not a dream to do something, but of
living a certain type of life; it is a dream to be, and it is marked through celebration, modest as it
may be. As she does this, Mary Jane’s construction of her family life gives us an ideational
landscape upon which poverty is overlaid.

Mary Jane’s longing speaks to the power of the welfare funding to control individuals’
lives; this power over the dream is generated by the context of poverty and the restrictions on
disbursements. As a woman with postsecondary education and a profession, Mary Jane could
have said, “and then I could get a haircut and get a job.” However, in addition to the practical
challenges of finding and paying for child care for four young children, the primary concerns she
expresses are to maintain a sense of family well-being for herself and the children, and to protect
her children from the feeling of poverty. Not only is the money insufficient to meet her modest
needs, the dream is explicitly beyond the recognition of the Income Assistance policy, which is focussed on employment.

What emerges from focussing on the content of Mary Jane’s dreams is a redefineition of poverty as the inability to have a good family life. This definition focusses on the outcome, an approach which is closer to the concept of quality of life approach to poverty (Nussbaum & Sen, 1993). In addition, Mary Jane’s experience is a yearning for a good life, and this also defines her experience as one of comparative lack, cognitive awareness of this lack, and the emotional state of yearning. Poverty is not something that passively happens to her; it is responded to so that celebrations like going out for food take on a performative aspect and form an ideational landscape upon which lack is overlaid. Viewing her response as a constitutive performance shifts the significance of poverty from resolution by doing to a state of being, and from a material circumstance to an existential experience. The income assistance regulatory system emerges as a barrier, or enabler, to the achievement of dreams, rather than only a disburser of financial assistance. As a consequence, the argument about sufficient income which is embedded in the poverty paradigm shifts to one about outcomes, as defined by the recipient.

7.1.2 Dreaming as Lineage and Future

Although family was prominent in these women’s talk about their struggles, or even primary for women like Mary Jane, the women’s dreams could also be about life goals, especially expressed in terms of family lineage. Andrea, whose father had recently died of a terminal illness, credits her father’s dream of living on the coast with motivating her to move
from the prairies\textsuperscript{57} to Vancouver. Living out her father’s dream connects her to her family history and her identity, and is likely a positive expression of her grief that helps her to heal.

(Q) So what made you decide to come here?

(A) My dad and I used to live here. We lived in [a suburb of Vancouver], and [when] I lost my dad – he always wanted to come back here and I wanted the ocean. I wanted my kids, or my son, anyway, to see the ocean and come out where it’s not cold all the time in the winter, freezing cold. But mostly, my dad always wanted to come back out here and that was the biggest dream after I lost my dad to cancer. (Andrea, Rnd 1, 450-456)

Andrea’s dream, no less than the aspirations of people who are not poor, is constitutive. Her dreams have motivated big changes in her life, and are the background to her arrival on the coast and her dependency on income assistance. Through this enactment of her dream, she connects her children in time to relationship and family, building something beyond the immediate circumstance of poverty. One social effect of her efforts is the creation of the kind of social cohesion and sense of belonging discussed by McDaniel (2003) and Yuval-Davis, Anthias and Kofman (2005). As in Mary Jane’s case, Andrea’s performance is generative, creating a definition and meaning of poverty through identity. In her case, though, poverty is defined as a corollary of transition.

Andrea’s determination to build a life on the coast fuels a systematic search by her for ways to sustain that dream. The link between the dream and the motivation is interesting in context of the economic rationalism of poverty policy, but can also clearly be seen when Molly expresses her dream in terms of her identification with her father, too. Molly’s father was an

\textsuperscript{57} The former grasslands in the middle of the North American continent are called the plains in the U.S. and the prairies in Canada.
entrepreneur, and as in Andrea’s case, Molly uses this dream to construct a series of steps to achieve her goal, irrespective of the income assistance policy.

Actually, I want to start working [with] a company or some self-employment. But what I want to do in a few years from now, I want to open my own business . . . Like maybe two years or three years from now. So that’s why I want to take the course now so I can get a job and start working; because I want to work in a business . . . My aunt and [I] were talking [and] I said, ‘Yeah, I want to do it, I really want to open this business because I don’t like working for someone else, telling me what to do.’ (Molly, Rnd 3, 379-381)

Molly’s dream fuelled a series of steps that were aimed at enacting the sense of self that she held constant in her dreams. Molly had some postsecondary education and she was highly motivated to work, but at a sustainable job that would be meaningful to her, not just any job. As the interviews progressed, we followed Molly as she obtained social housing so that she could manage the risk of going off welfare, took a $16,000 student loan, resigned welfare, enrolled in a private college, and started working, at first on a term contract basis and then in an ongoing contract, gaining work experience that would enable her to eventually fulfill her dream. The relatively enormous debt and the risk she took was enabled by her aunt’s support, but fuelled by her ambition. Her dream not only motivated her, but shaped the future she wanted to create, connecting her to her father and her lineage, and pressing identity into service as a central mechanism for planning the future.

The dream of identity, expressed in these two cases as intergenerational identification with their fathers, is not the instrumental sort of goal setting that is recognized in income assistance policy, which is more narrowly focussed on getting a job. Yet it is dreams expressed in selfhood that create meaning in the women’s lives, and which motivate Andrea and Molly, no
less so than Mary Jane’s dream of a normative family life motivates her to take certain actions. Andrea’s dream, in contrast to Mary Jane’s, differs in connecting the past to the future and framing it in terms of intergenerational identity, from her father through her to her son. Like the normative dream of family, dreaming through time highlights the ways in which the instrumental goals of the income assistance policy work at cross purposes to a broader ideational landscape. The meanings of their dreams motivate both Andrea and Molly to take extraordinary steps; for example, as described in the previous chapter, Molly was willing to assume debt because of the long time line for achieving her dreams. This raises questions about the definition of poverty, and whether it only exists in current time or has future and past dimensions. It also, again, highlights the importance of identity to the instrumental movement out of poverty.

7.1.3 Dreaming as Healing

For some of the women, dreaming was clearly centred in attempts to change the trajectory of past events. This was particularly evident when the Aboriginal women talked about their struggle to protect their children from the kinds of upbringing they themselves had had, and in some cases, the kind of parenting they experienced as children in state care. Olivia uses the story of how her mother fell into drinking and hopelessness to explain why she herself falls into depression and drinking, and why she longs to make a better life for her children.

You know, I can’t win either way, and I’m trying to tell that to the [child protection] ministry. I said, ‘I’m not doing anything, check up on me.’ I said, ‘No matter what, I can never win,’ you know. (Olivia, Rnd 4, 162)

Olivia attributed her troubles to her upbringing in the foster care system.

---

58 Sandercock (2003) introduces healing as a core planning function; while these women’s dreams are reflective of personal dreams, their wishes extend to the communal realm and connect with Sandercock’s articulation of planning functions.
Because from the moment I was young I never speak for myself, you guys took advantage of me since you put me in care. You took me away from my mom, which she couldn’t help it because she was sick too. I was eight and my mom had gone to a residential school and the only thing she can cope with is to drink alcohol. But she never hit me, she never talked back to me, you know. She was always beside me like I am with my children . . . When she was 42 years old and she lost her husband and she lost her two kids, so, she says, she drank herself to death. (Olivia, Rnd 4, 163-174)

The background of Olivia’s childhood life sets a meaning to her current life on welfare that almost renders policy objectives around income irrelevant.

Olivia was motivated by past events to be seen to be a good parent so that she could retain custody of her children. One of the ways she approaches this is to demonstrate that she is a good parent. For example, neighbours make vexatious complaints about her parenting to child protection authorities and the housing management. She defends her parenting to her interviewer by pointing to advocacy and ‘other mothering’ that she engages in, including caring for neighbours’ children after school and taking in a runaway youth. She also demonstrates a moral position by arguing with school authorities that her daughters should not have to wear gym clothes like shorts if they do not want to; she sees modesty as their right because she was inappropriately touched as a young girl. In spending time telling this to the interviewer, advocacy fulfills a performative function for Olivia, constituting her rights as she performs them through story, and affirming to herself and others her place in society. As with Mary Jane’s

---

59 This rights-based approach is the foundation to her progress through changes in her life. Over the course of the six interviews, Olivia slowly goes through a health crisis and then starts to regain her health and her confidence, lifting out of depression as she successfully stands her ground over her daughters’ rights, takes in a runaway to save her from the streets, and “other-mothers” neighbourhood children. Her challenge to child protection authorities to find fault with her seems to sustain her.
vision, Olivia’s dream of having a family and of being a good mother lays an ideational
landscape over the experience of poverty, in this case experienced through the crowded social
housing context where her neighbours watch her closely.

Olivia’s past experience is haunted by a challenge faced by many Aboriginal people, including several of the women in the study who were caught in the wave of child removals which began to occur as the residential schools were closing in the 1960s. The damaging intergenerational effects of this have been forcefully articulated by many Aboriginal authors; see, for example, Fournier and Crey (1997) and the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples Volume 3 (1996). Today the effects are felt in the struggle to parent by people who were themselves children of either the residential school system, as Olivia was, or who were raised in foster families, as N’k and Arlita were (McDonald & Ladd, 2000). It was not until 1986 that the legal statutes that stripped Aboriginal women of their official Indian status when they married non-Aboriginal men were rescinded. Prior to that, the Indian Act removed children from their communities and parents to send them to residential schools, while adult women were disenfranchised from their communities when they lost status. Many women, like Olivia, N’k and Arlita in this study, who did not attend residential school themselves, experienced the consequences of the enforced attendance when they were removed from their parents and placed in foster care. Others, like Cynthia, were descended of Aboriginal women who had been disenfranchised from their communities through their mother’s loss of status.

---

60 Bill C-31 altered the inheritance rules of official Indian status in Canada. Prior to 1986, any Aboriginal woman who married a nonstatus person (whether Aboriginal or not) lost their Indian status permanently. Often women did not know that this would happen. This rule also applied to any status person who graduated from postsecondary school or served in the military. After 1986, women and their descendents who had lost status were eligible to reapply, through their bands, if they could prove lineage.
Working to redress these histories formed part of the dreams of many of these women. Laura articulates how her dreams are embedded in a broader vision. In interview 5, Laura reflects on an invitation to participate in a class action case regarding sexual abuse at the residential school she attended. She starts by explaining how receiving the papers makes her feel.

I started feeling really antsy and stressed . . . In the long run I have a feeling I’m going to hook up with a lot of this residential [school] stuff because I’ve been there and I’m going through it. And when the process is over then I can help other people . . . mostly my cousins and people that I’ve grown up with – they’re people that I can relate to because, like some people weren’t touched but there were a lot that were. (Laura, Rnd 6, 123) 61

Laura grew up in an on-reserve community and is closely connected to her extended family, many of whom also attended the same residential school she did. Her comments reflect the ongoing direct and indirect effects of residential school on herself and her whole community. 62

When I get this money I don’t know what I’m going to do. But what I do know is that I want to go on a trip somewhere. When I do get this money, I need to stay grounded. I don’t want to start drinking, doing drugs. I want to have a good life. I want to be able to give something back to my kids, leave something for my children. I want to be able to have my granddaughter set up for college. I want to be able to be that good mother. I want to be, you know . . . He [boyfriend] said, ‘You are a good mother.’ ‘No, I said, ‘I want to be a great mum.’ (Laura, Rnd 6, 151)

61 It is not clear if Laura meant sexually touched or emotionally affected.
62 While Aboriginal people were equal economic partners in the fur trade era, they gradually lost economic ground in the twentieth century by being unable to participate in the developing industrial economy. Part of this was a colonial policy of minimal education. See Payne (1977) for the effects of colonial practices in the Arctic north; see Adelson (2000) for the effects of the famine that followed the collapse of the fur trade among the Quebec Innu; Fiske (1991) for the impacts of colonial policies on gender relations in the BC Northwest; Marker (2004/2005) for the ongoing racism in high schools in the 1970s in the US Pacific Northwest.
In the context of these struggles with past trauma, having a family and raising children securely was a transformational dream. The women were challenged, though, to manifest this dream because when they were growing up they may not have experienced how to create a healthy, cohesive family. Nancy talks about fighting with herself to be a good parent when “My Mom came out of me.” (Nancy, Rnd 2, 729) In addition, though, they might also have unhealthy family or community members who need rather than provide support, as Laura alludes to when she talks about wanting to help her cousins. Sometimes others’ difficulties became part of the women’s dreams as they wanted to be available to help heal others once their own health is stable enough. This was not only true for Laura, but also for Anne and Carla, two of the other Aboriginal women who wanted to help urban Aboriginal women like themselves. Thus the dream they expressed to heal through the act of better mothering or community healing was about healing the past to make a better future. They wanted to ensure that their children did not experience what they themselves had experienced, and that other Aboriginal people like themselves would be healed.

The dreams women like Laura expressed were often not only for their own individual health and healing, but also intergenerational and community healing. The dream of a better life is a dream of future equality in society, or what may be called social inclusion, which implies that social inclusion has a future dimension which is anticipatory. Lack of anticipation of future inclusion could represent social exclusion (see Valenzuela, 1999). Getting a job could hardly begin to resolve these complex issues that had long histories and futures. In some cases, employment might impede progress towards their dreams, even though the women desired self-sufficiency. For women like Laura, surviving on welfare may not have been different than the
colonial past; her ideational landscape did not ignore poverty, but overlaid it with hopes of communal futures and the possibility of transformation from the colonial past.

All three types of dreams discussed in this section, from the dream of a good family, to dreams of futures based in intergenerational identities, and the dream of healing many of the Aboriginal women expressed, are performative of identity. The identities that are constituted through these dreams are the tools through which the potential to shape a different future occurs because of the way the identities collect meaning and motivate the women to act. As well as expressing and constituting identities, the dreams also indicate the way that family poverty can be characterized through time by intergenerational effects and other characterizations of the future and the past. Poverty is not stationary in an instrumental sense, only in the public imaginary which confines it to present need. The scope of the dreams highlights the way transformation and the future expands beyond the individual, and even the women’s own families, to be expressed in collective wishes for healed community and culture.

The enactments of those dreams shape the future. Andrea creates family continuity by ensuring relationships are constituted in familial identity even while she addresses her personal grief over the loss of her father. It is this ideational level of accrued meaning in dreams that stands in juxtaposition to policy, even if the women agree with policy directives in that they want a job and to be financially independent. Thus the act of dreaming can be seen to occupy contested terrain between the women and income assistance policy. What is at stake is the content of dreams, the meaning of dreams, and flowing from that, technicalities over the means of achieving those dreams.
7.2 Unrequited Dreams as Social Exclusion

Although poverty was a significant barrier preventing the women from enacting their dreams, the regulatory policies created additional barriers to enacting a life that is more than only about survival. The dream Mary Jane expresses, to just walk around and experience a day without want, a day when her children have the freedom to eat something that is purchased, is part of a fantasy that may be unrealistic in some ways; all of us experience natural constraints on what we can do. In the context of the very low welfare rates, however, and what we know about the structural constraints, which make women statistically more likely to be in the kinds of situations that Mary Jane finds herself, we need to ask what the meaning is of the barriers she experiences.

The concept of social exclusion provides a framework for describing the way that impoverished women and children are denied the option to participate in political, social or economic opportunities (Beauvais & Jenson, 2002; Dobrowolsky & Lister, 2005). However, Good-Gingrich (2008) suggests that social exclusion has been intensified by the collusion of state and market that has occurred with neoliberal reform, because it collapses the range of opportunities available to those on the margins. The collusion, or rather, as she puts it, the elision of state with market, pins lone mothers against an idealized, pan-American, individualized male figure. The idealization of this figure is present in casual talk, as Mary Jane expresses:

---

63 Read “pan-dominant-culture” – Good-Gingrich is writing from the U.S. but the same would apply to any dominant culture type, likely male.
One time because I didn’t get my cheque, [it] was 4:20 when I went in, and my welfare office closes at 4:30. They have all these young guys working as security guards, and they were all heckling me and stuff, for no reason. Like, I’m just there. And I had childcare for my kids. They were in the day camp, and they’re going, ‘Why don’t you get a job? Get a job!’ And that’s what these security guards were saying to me, like . . . and they’re only letting two people in at a time and they had like twelve security guards. So . . . then, I said ‘Yeah, maybe I could have your job, but I have four kids. Do you think I should bring them here with me?’ . . . Because there’s no way they should try to push me around. They don’t even know – there [are] all these people there, and when I’m standing in those lineups at times I’ve seen the real face of what it is. Like, they try and say all these people are on drugs or all this stuff and you’re not looking at that at all. It’s a totally different situation than people think . . . I even met people I worked with before. I mean, come on! These are not people buying five houses with their welfare and stuff.

(Mary Jane, Rnd 1, 375-387)  

Mary Jane very aptly captures the double jeopardy that Good-Gingrich describes. She is stuck between her material need and her responsibilities to her children, which make her unable to get the kind of job the security guards have because she cannot afford child care for four children. However, she talks back and directly challenges the trope in play. By asserting similarity with others who have lost their jobs and are in line for social assistance, she contests the individualizing nature of the guards’ comments. She also challenges the stereotype that they promulgate, which is of a lazy person who is unmotivated to get a job.

64 Day camp typically refers to full-day care for school-age or preschool age children that is available on summer breaks, holidays, and teachers’ professional days on which there is no school.
Lone mothers like Mary Jane know that to talk back and assert themselves in this way, is to exercise defiance which may risk their benefits. The comments exemplify the stigma that makes economic marginalization synonymous with social exclusion, and were not unusual in the women’s experiences. What was at stake for Mary Jane was her identity; although she may have deliberately picked a less risky target because the guards’ contract employee status meant that she was not dependent on them for welfare disbursements. Throughout the study, though, women experienced similar sentiments, sometimes as simply conveyed as through the constant paperwork official staff filled out as they made unrealistic job searches mandatory. Retaining her dreams occurs in the context of comments and attitudes like these ones, where the parameters and rules are defined by others and enforced through regulations which are made de facto mandatory because of the dire poverty. The women know the social game that is being played, but fighting back against these tropes, while potentially costly in the immediate sense, preserves their sense of self and their dreams.

What goes beyond the social exclusion literature, though, is the possibility and opportunity of not only individual repair and well-being, but the extension of life into the collective. Lone parents stand at a threshold of intersecting arenas, beyond the dimensions of culture, social capital, and economic value articulated in a Bourdieusian framework (Fowler, 2003). As indicated by the three dreaming scenarios described above, dreams are about connecting past and future identity, weave generations past and present together, repair political and communal trauma, and reform and heal mental and physical health. This is closer to the realms of communal life that Sandercock (2003) discusses in her works on community planning.

\[65\] Contract status might explain the abusiveness of the guards because employees are bound to uphold codes of ethical service. However, other women in the study, like Molly, also encountered dismissive comments from staff who were directly employees.
The multiple futures ensconced in these dreams make social exclusion terrifying for its future implications, but also generates urgency for the women’s dreams. In order to have and hold their dreams, the women need to conserve their energy and work in hidden ways to enact their overall goals, beyond mere survival. Thus dreaming is both about what they dream, and a contest between them and the state, which works towards its vision of their future, one that is focussed on overcoming only the economic aspect of marginalization.

Dreaming, when understood as part of a desire not to have to participate in the exercise of making oneself invisible, is a dream of equality, a political dream. It is a dream to be able to participate as others do in society, and, in particular, to not have to erase or remove oneself specifically because of the regulatory and legal imperatives. Mary Jane does not want to pretend that she can hide four children and show up at the welfare office “just like others” at any time. Yet the policy demands she be capable of doing this, while public acts reinforce the stigma. Consent is manufactured through the creation of impossible conditions of needing support and being required to be subservient. Being defiant like Mary Jane risks denial of benefits, but benefits are insufficient and subservience is counterproductive to survival. This creates social exclusion of the broader type described by Yuval-Davis, Anthias, and Kofman (2005), which is not just economic, but also political.

The policy reforms instituted in 2002 encourage social exclusion by encouraging the trope that is implicit in the security guard’s heckling; that of a lazy, unmotivated, or socially irresponsible individual. The guard’s behaviour is the activation of the trope, the way that ideology passes from mind to social reality. In turn, the trope creates a parallel avatar which the women like Mary Jane must prop up by not being too defiant, in spite of their actual experience, so that they can continue to receive benefits. The double-action generates a self-alienating social
exclusion where Mary Jane censors herself and in so doing, prevents herself from being a full participant. At the same time, in the context of appearing compliant, their defiance appears even more incomprehensible to the public, reinforcing the opinion that welfare recipients lack agency. The original enactment of their exclusion through a stigmatizing trope becomes invisible. This double-life is what Mary Jane alludes to and protests. Preserving an alternate sense of self, the real self rather than the avatar, becomes part of the focus of resistance. The women must manage to preserve the true sense of self to maintain and nurture their dreams. The ways in which they struggle to do so is the focus of the next section.

7.3 Enacting Dreams: Resisting Public Expectations

Resistance to the imposition of ministry directives or even to the ever-present need to survive was key to preserving the space to dream. The resistance which was exercised in service of survival, as discussed in chapter 5, was of the type described by Scott in describing the resistance of Malay farmers, such as foot-dragging, blocking, and so on. However, the cross-sectional analysis also linked resistance to saving space for dreaming. Without the ability to preserve a little space or time from the requirement of meeting urgent needs, women could not keep hope for the future. Thus, when Olivia talks about how she wants her daughters to have a different life, the quality of mental well-being and health she wants are a form of resistance to the goals set out in policy. The advocacy she enacts, which is a bulwark against criticisms of her mothering, are a form of resistance that makes space for her to regain her mental and physical health by ensuring she does not have to move. At the same time, those acts are healing; they resist the depression that comes from hopelessness and memories of loss; they are empowering.

As discussed in chapter 2, the definition of resistance does not have to be confined to opposition to those in power, although the goal of current policy, and particularly policy under
welfare reform, is restrictively narrow and provides an excellent foil for resistance. In seeking to explore how resistance works, policy and the neoliberal reforms can be viewed as one expression of power, but others include the gender relations which shape the experience of lone parenting, the housing market that makes finding housing difficult, the experience of colonialism which informs the history of the Aboriginal women, and the global conditions which drive neoliberal welfare reform. This section on resistance explores the objects of resistance as well as the means of resistance, or the tools, in the manner that Scott and others described (1985). The understanding that is used here, though, is that resistance is multi-valent and resistance can be enacted through performance of identity.

One of the ways the women maintained distance from the policy “truths” they were obliged to participate in upholding was by differentiating themselves from policy frameworks. Through talk that pointed out ways in which policy did not work or fit for them, they defined themselves as something outside of policy. Carla does this, for example, by naming the failure.

It didn’t take me far. No. I thought it would have; they make it sound really good. It’s just like they advertise good, get you in, they get the money, that’s about it. But I’ve always wanted to go. Like, I mean, the learning skills they had was – No, I already knew half of the stuff that they were trying to teach me, but they still insisted that I had to do this in order to get here, and have to finish this in order to get there. I don’t know, I’ve been through programs like that. And so, they said you’re ready to go up a notch and maybe you want to go down to [other] campus – it was a 3-month program.

(Carla, Rnd 1, 294)
In doing so, she performs the autonomy of keeping her dreams, which are to get her grade 12 equivalency and become a youth worker. As she does so, she becomes clear here that in both senses she is framing and reclaiming an identity that is distinct from the policy imaginary.

No, I didn’t consider the teachers much supportive there at all. There [were] some problems between the teachers and me, because of the help and I just woke up to them, like, there could be more help than in this program. More one-on-one help, kind of thing, that’s what I was needing. And then they said to me, ‘You seem like you’re a very needy person. That’s what I think your problem is.’ And I’m (saying) ‘A needy person? No. I’m a person that wants to learn and get education skills, that’s what I am, and that’s the kind of help I’m going to need then you guys have to provide it – do your job.’ (Carla, Rnd 1, 298)

Maintaining her own assessment of what is going on and naming her needs helps Carla to define herself outside the parameters of the regulatory system, which does not allow her free choice of training programs and which subjects her to the teachers’ labelling. Her self-advocacy pushes back and helps her to preserve her dream. She does not assume the mantle of deficiency, of neediness. Carla eventually achieves her GED in spite of the various obstacles, but she does it through the process of maintaining and asserting her identity. It is her performance of this identity that resists the trope and sustains her dream.

The performance of identity as resistance occurs in the context of various interlocking systems that the women are required to participate in. As Income Assistance staff direct women to various programs, identity travels ahead of the women through the classifications that grant them access. These classifications sustain tropes that prepare the field of social expectations

---

See Solomon (2003) for a similar description of the way racialized welfare stigma is resisted by African American women in a welfare training program in the eastern U.S.
before the women arrive. Each of these engagements brings the women into contact with staff whose focus may not be particularly supportive of their whole lives. For instance, the employment training staff members are increasingly working for agencies that are paid on a quota basis for placement of individuals into jobs. Women who do not “succeed” in terms of finding job placements cost the agency financially. The staff, who are working with the clients, are not accountable for their behaviour to the participants, but to the paying client of the welfare ministry. The participants have not chosen this course or schooling; they must enrol or risk losing benefits. The client/choice model that neoliberal rhetoric is premised on is not operating here. Each system, whether it is a training program, a support program, or, as in the next section, the Family Maintenance Enforcement Program, has its own expectations. Evading the labelling and mandated outcomes was an important way that the women maintained their sense of self and kept their dreams and visions in sight.

The double bind and complex systems of dependency of these systems are exemplified in Gemma’s experience with the family maintenance enforcement program (FMEP). The FMEP collects maintenance on behalf of any woman. For women on welfare, the FMEP is mandatory as a condition of receiving welfare, and women must sign over the choice and right to pursue maintenance from the father of their children to the FMEP. A woman can only officially exempt herself from the program if contact would endanger her life due to past domestic violence. However, sometimes, and perhaps for many women, the FMEP causes problems. Gemma describes this:
My daughter’s dad was court ordered to pay child maintenance when she was about a year old, and . . . he’s been really good about it. I was on welfare at the time, and then [when] I got a job when she was about two and a half, it wasn’t as big of a deal, I just declared that I got this money to welfare, and they took about $100 off, and then it was just between me and him. So that worked really good while I was working, and then when I went back on welfare, and they sent me this letter, ‘Oh we don’t have any record of how much he’s paid and we think he’s in arrears,’ and they froze his bank account, like they cancelled his driver's licence and they did all this crap to him, until I went and signed these papers, signing my rights over. I said, ‘Well, I have a verbal agreement with him that on the first of the month he puts the money in there, what’s the problem with that? I’m declaring it, welfare knows.’ [They said,] ‘Well, when you’re on welfare, family maintenance is our right. You have to sign your rights over as that.’ (Gemma, Rnd 1, 90)

The challenge, as Gemma points out, was not that the father was not participating. The issue was who controlled the payments. Typically women are required to sign over management, including pursuit, of maintenance, as a condition of receiving welfare benefits. This did not seem to happen at first, perhaps because Gemma was employed. A deeper problem, though, is that this model constructs one parent, typically the father, as noncustodial and the other, typically the mother, as the custodial and therefore dependent party. Gemma challenges this model by reframing it as her right to choose. What she is contesting, specifically, is both the articulation of mandatory payments under the FMEP and then the mandatory linking of those payments to her income assistance benefits. She contests the program’s authority to construct her relationship to the father as well as to threaten her if she does not comply. In articulating this resistance, she not
only claims the right to shape her own relationships, she reasserts her autonomy from this very coercive measure. However, she does so without benefit of legal protection; the regulatory system upon which she is dependent requires compliance.

Gemma enacts this resistance at the encouragement of her child’s father, reflecting the way that coercion and resistance occur in gendered context.

And it was her dad that convinced me to fight that. He said, ‘That’s full of bullshit, we’re both grown adults, you’re getting the money for her, you’re declaring it, why does it have to go through them?’ So I fought it, I kept writing letters . . . I never once did anything they asked, they kept saying you have to report it, blah, blah, blah, and I just kept reporting it to welfare, and I kept getting all these threatening letters, saying if you don’t report it you can be charged, and all this. Anyways, I finally got a letter a few months ago that said something with regard to that we’ve now okayed that you can get your money directly deposited to you and you don’t have to report anything to us unless there’s a payment missed. (Gemma, Rnd 1, 90)

A critical gender analysis might focus on the fact that it was the father who objected, but it was Gemma who risked her benefits and did the work. In addition, although she was successful, her net material circumstances did not change. Through resisting the policy directives, though, Gemma rebukes the mandatory subservience that is integral to the Income Assistance system. During the interview and at other times of telling this story, she re-enacts this resistance through her “talk,” performing for the interviewer or others. Cohen (1997) noted the same type of self-constituting performance among the homeless, as previously discussed in chapter 5, which served to separate their identities from the stigma that they perceived around homelessness. Gemma affirms her identity and her sense of authorship, or agency. Resisting successfully helps
her maintain the sense of autonomous identity she needs to dream and to conduct her life as she sees fit.

Both Carla and Gemma achieved resistance by asserting separation from the unilateral subjectification required by various mandatory systemic involvements. Resistance involved identifying what they needed and wanted, independent of policy. The acts which followed were an outcome of their analysis and ability to fight ownership of their agendas. As a result, resistance was instrumental towards generating opportunities to enact their own visions, or as the analysis showed, their resistance constituted (generated) an interstice that preserved space to nurture their dreams and goals in. This is clearer to see in Carla’s comments about her training program, but Gemma also preserves opportunities to forge her own path. Doing so takes resolve, vision, and resistance.

Using an analytical lens that focusses on the flows of power, and how disadvantage is replicated through apparently benign systems of policy and the trivia of administrative work, both Carla’s and Gemma’s stories attest to the continuation of structural disadvantage. The experience that Carla has, of being in a program where she is working to get her GED is part of a legacy of the struggle of Aboriginal people to obtain the privilege and support of completing higher education (Barman, 1996; BC Stats, 2005; Boulter, 2000; Fiske, 1996). Of the 9 Aboriginal women in the study, only 1 of 8 had a grade 12 education, while 6 of 8 non-Aboriginal women in the study had grade 12, including two with postsecondary training. Although the sample is not representative, it is striking that this is so even though the non-Aboriginal group includes 3 women of colour and 2 immigrant women (overlapping categories).

When Carla speaks back against being labelled as needy, forges ahead in spite of poor

---

67 There were 9 Aboriginal women in the study, but we did not confirm Nk’s educational status in the single interview we did with her (T1).
instruction, and claims and renames her own reality, her actions are not only part of the arsenal she uses to fulfil her own dreams. Resistance in this context is part of the greater picture of women and Aboriginal people fighting to gain the educational status others already enjoy.

Gemma’s struggle to maintain control of her relationship with her children’s father and cash flow reveals the way the flow of power is funnelled through administrative structures to disadvantage her and divide the family. Her struggle reveals the way that gendered disadvantage is tossed back and forth in a three-way struggle; what works to the father’s advantage or disadvantage does not necessarily benefit her. The ability of the FMEP to garnishee wages, seize the driver’s license, and so on, as Gemma describes, can cripple the noncustodial parent’s ability to manage his or her own affairs. The material achievement that Gemma obtains through her advocacy is the rejection of interference from the income assistance system in the father’s life, while also maintaining her involvement with the FMEP program and the mandated payments, so she maintains a status of compliance with IA. The way the income assistance and FMEP systems interacted, though, reveals that the funding structure privileges the state and pits the noncustodial parent against the parent. The dollar for dollar deduction of FMEP payments from the recipient’s income assistance cheque reinforces social exclusion by first, robbing the woman of income, but secondly, robbing everyone in the family, including both parents and the children, of resources for moving on. In the greater picture, it is not surprising that the experience of a lone parent of colour, and a woman, is disadvantaged in a way that reinforces social exclusion. Although both Gemma and the father point to the retention of dignity, as the outcome, a broader picture sees them as both victimized and Gemma’s advocacy as yet another action that privileges the male noncustodial father without benefiting her directly. Either the state or the male parent wins, in this case, but not her or the children.
Gender is conflated with autonomy in the programmatic expectations Gemma faces, and it interlocks with systemic disadvantage for women. A similar disadvantaging of women through destabilization of income flows was observed after neoliberal reforms in New Zealand, where the recipient’s income flow was fractured after the enforcement of a mandatory payment system (Patterson, 2008). This view agrees with Fraser and Gordon’s (1997) thesis of transferred dependency wherein patriarchal dominance is transferred through the ages from system to system, from family pater to economic corporation to, in this case, the bureaucracy of welfare. As others have noted, the current welfare reforms reflect a broader gendered shift in the entitlements and privileges available through the state under welfare reform (Breitkreuz, 2005; Rainford, 2004; Skevik, 2005). The resistance that is being enacted by these women is working counter to, not just the income assistance system, but to the various flows of power, including the histories of colonialism and gendered disadvantage.

The tools of resistance described in this section were not the direct, interpersonal, resistance that occurred in Scott’s (1985) depiction of the resistance of Malay farmers to their landlords. The resistance described here was about affirming the self in the face of nameless policies that exerted constant pressure to act in certain ways. The field of tension was over this shaping of identity. To the extent that Carla or Gemma or others resisted the course of action that was implied through being identified as needy or incompetent, they enacted resistance. The direct focus of resistance was to make space from the ever-present demands of both material need and policy incursions by claiming access to legitimate training programs or the authority to organize their own maintenance payments. When Carla refused to accept what she assessed as a poor quality of training, and resisted being called needy, she was asserting her rights as an Aboriginal woman to claim equal access to programs and citizen benefits which have historically
been denied. This was an identity based motion, and asserts her claim to follow her own dream as an Aboriginal woman. As Solomon (2003) observed in a training classroom mostly comprised of African American women on welfare, their resistance to the white instructor was not just about the training they were receiving; it also carried the weight of racialized tensions in U.S. history. The tools of resistance look like a stubborn determination to resist and evade capture of dreams, but also, to keep some small ownership open so that their dreams could be enacted.

### 7.4 Nurturing Dreams: Protecting the Self

Keeping the dreams that were described in the first section alive required more than just resistance against coercion. Space needed to be created in which to dream. Women found, cultivated, or preserved those spaces between the unending responsibilities of child care, household management and the public expectations of the income assistance ministry. Like the unstructured playtime that is necessary for children’s healthy growth (NAEYC, 1997), women needed freedom from the responsibilities they held 24 hours a day. If they did not have a break, women moved continuously between doing child care and the work of surviving or working without sufficient time for themselves. However, for the women in this study unmanaged time, free time, was exceptionally rare. Arlita demonstrates how this space is generated when she talks about getting together and sharing a half-dozen beer between herself and her girlfriends on a Friday night:

> Now it’s like sometimes on a Friday night, I think, gosh, let’s just pick up some beer if we have the money and call up so and so, and so and so, because they’re in the same boat. They’ve got two kids, they’re having a hard time, they’re going through everything that I’m going through, I know what it’s like – let’s just have a beer and yeah . . . it’s like [escapism] is almost priority. (Arlita, Rnd 1, 585-587)
In this unmanaged time, responsibility for children could be shared (though not abandoned or relieved), and external expectations and material need could be put aside, Arlita and her friends could find freedom to be themselves, to express their own opinions, to laugh, and to enjoy themselves in the company of other adults. The narrowness of the space expresses its rarity; even financially, when Arlita says “a beer,” she literally means four or five women will share half a dozen beers for the evening. Like Mary Jane’s excursion in taking the children out for something to eat and “not worrying” about the cost of food, the scale of entertainment is extremely modest, though the freedom it buys is expansive. The rarity of leisure indicates its value; as Arlita notes, “it is almost a priority.”

The unrelenting nature of responsibility, which makes the interstice rare, is not abated for lone mothers by working, however. This double bind is captured by Gemma when she loses time for leisure when she starts working. In contrast to her success in getting a job, her dilemma is impressive in demonstrating the challenge that women face, and the value of small help that they receive.

I’ll be working right up ‘til quarter to 6... so, I’ll get my friend who does my evenings and weekends to pick him up from daycare by 5:30, quarter to 6, bring him home and he starts supper for me and he starts my daughter’s homework for me and then I’ll join them an hour or so later. And so I basically get no time to myself. I’m home and I deal with them until bedtime – between 8 and 9 before they’re sleeping. And then I’m up for another hour doing whatever, trying to get dishes, my own laundry, my own cleaning done and then I’m back in bed by like 11 p.m. (Gemma, Rnd 4, 150)

The loss of personal time erodes Gemma’s commitment to work, particularly as she has a son with special needs who requires more attention. However, as she also indicates, she has
completely lost her personal time. She is nostalgic for her time on welfare before working life even though she is financially better off and pleased with the progress she made. Choosing to train for this particular type of job and then achieving employment was part of her dream, but her motivation is undermined by the loss of personal time and time for her family.

I mean, there’s no other way to run life other than being sleep deprived and working full time. So, I kind of miss some of that, like just be a couch potato and just hang out with my son at home. I miss that. (Gemma, Rnd 4, 154)

The wording of her reflection, phrased as “kind of missing that,” underscores the importance of leisure and unmanaged time to her. In the midst of these comments, she is trying to find time to spend with her older child, who has started school, as well as attending to having her younger son assessed through a specialized children’s development program and then placed in a supportive preschool which she feels also suits them culturally. Meanwhile, though, her friends give her advice:

And then I keep like my flyers for Disneyland and Las Vegas, West Edmonton Mall kind of at home. My friends say, ‘You’ve got to hang these up... they’re just like in your pile of papers. Like, put them somewhere so that you can keep yourself connected to what you’re working hard for and when you get up in the morning, maybe you can keep them next to your alarm clock.’ And it’s all good ideas because I’ve got to – if I didn’t get anything out of it, I would burn out really quick. (Gemma, Rnd 4, 156)

The price of letting her dreams slip away could be burnout. Gemma manages the need for dreaming by organizing her work and home lives into distinct spheres. Like the women on welfare, dreaming provides her a vision of what she would like to do next, and it provides her with motivation to keep surviving. However, to keep space for this dream, she followed a
nonprescribed path through welfare, saving up educational credits and taking a nonapproved training course that guaranteed her a more sustainable wage in work she wanted to do. Now that she has a job, she preserves this space by wearing a uniform and changing out of it when she gets home; this helps her to stay focussed on what is “her” time. She had full-time work and because the wage was sufficient, she could think about managing her work hours to accommodate her responsibilities as a parent. Income assistance policy ignored this dual responsibility for child care and survival and in doing so, squeezed the time and space that women needed for dreaming.

7.4.1 Finding and Creating Supportive Environments

The interstice that women sought for dreaming did not just occur in the material experience of individual life; it also was impacted by, and generated through communal experiences and the benefits of some kinds of physical spaces. Some of these were formal spaces, while others were informal or found. Jeanie, for example, used and cultivated informal and formal opportunities through community agencies where she could relax and socialize while staff, other clients and children helped mind and occupy her children.

I was all worried because, you hear about, if you don’t go do what they want, they’re going to kick you off welfare. If they did that, what would happen to my two kids, right? So I got anxiety attacks really easy, and [so] it’s my comfort zone here. But, yeah, I’ve been getting a little bit of, not really part-time work, helping around here, so it’s been keeping me busy around here, and then Tuesdays I help with the food bank. And then Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday I’ve been cooking for the [program], and they give me $40 a week, they call it an honorarium. And there’s odd jobs to be done around here, like helping with the clothing exchange or something. So it’s, yeah, kind of helped having that extra few dollars coming in each week. (Jeanie, Rnd 2, 229-233)
While the extra cash was very useful, the wraparound services helped to allay Jeanie’s anxiety attacks about potentially being judged to be a bad mother or doing nothing. She anticipates that this could risk her welfare cheque and then her ability to keep her children. She finds this formal program to be a home, a place where she could find companionship, support, sympathy and affirmation for the work she was doing as a mother. While the instrumental support of shared responsibility for child care and the financial honoraria were helpful, it was the wraparound services which were key to allaying her anxiety. She said many times “It’s my comfort zone.” (Jeanie, Rnd 1, 486). Child development literature does not often attend to anxiety and reassurance as parenting needs, but it is a key issue for lone parents who must perform many tasks under stress, and particularly for Aboriginal and perhaps other parents who are in marginalized circumstances (Greenwood & Fiske, 2003).

While Jeanie found support for who she was in formal, family-dedicated space for marginalized families, other participants found this kind of support and affirmation informally. Natasha, for example, describes meeting people in her neighbourhood who give her a sense of security.

I met a lot [of people] through my building or walking around. Like when I first came to rent [this] place, we stopped a lady on the street because of her dog and said ‘Oh, what a beautiful dog’ and she didn’t know what to think of us and kind of held back. She’s actually my very good friend now for the last three years. I don’t know what I would have done without her; she’s kept me very sane when I want to pull my hair out.

(Natasha, Rnd 2, 64)

It is clear that location helps to render a resource that is not just about friendship, utilizing proximity to allow people to trade child care, share food and information, and so on. Classic
attributes of social capital, like information sharing, emotional support, and instrumental help are present because of the place-based nature of the community of people in similar circumstances. As Natasha notes, her friend kept her sane, but she also traded many things with neighbours, which she wistfully recounts losing when she gave up her home:

[In] June, I moved out . . . I couldn’t afford it because the rent was $715 and now I realize how really affordable it was because of the space, because of the location, because all my friends are in this neighbourhood. Not only that but my support, right? Not – some of the girlfriends, we don’t like each other all that well – but, you know what, she needs diapers and I need milk and we trade and we get along to make things work. (Natasha, Rnd 2, 60)

Consistent with social capital, this casual support was neither available on command nor given with expectation of obligation to pay back. It was free in the most unobligated sense, with an ethic of sharing and an understanding that arose out of empathy for neighbours and those in similarly difficult situations. However, as Natasha puts it, it keeps her sane, or, more broadly, it sustains her mental health because she, like Jeanie, is isolated and anxious about her living situation and her ability to cope, given the hardships she is facing. Neither Natasha’s family nor her child’s father give time or financial help freely, generously, or reliably. This lack of social support, but more, the lack of social distribution of responsibility, makes Jeanie and Natasha vulnerable to anxiety and, as Arlita puts it, makes relaxing “almost a priority.”

At the root of the lack of support is a problem with how privatization of responsibilities of mothering were not manageable for the women in the study without an intense sacrifice of their own well-being or safety: this unmanageability reflected to the women the public absence of value for mothering. It was difficult for the women to affirm their own mothering and so affirmation in community was extremely important.
I had to figure out how to do everything myself, wow, what a rush it was to go out and buy my own screwdriver and figure out I could fix my own little toy box . . . And I did it all by myself, and I felt wonderful that day. And that’s what a job gives you as well – you get to feel rewarded at the end of the day ‘Woohoo!’ (Natasha, Rnd 1, 382)

Natasha contrasts that with the lack of reinforcement for parenting.

Being a mom doesn’t have, it has different benefits. Nobody but your little guy is going to thank you for doing the dishes, and if they are not old enough to thank you, or they’re past the age where they care, it’s hard. I wouldn’t trade it for the world, but it sure is.

(Natasha, Rnd 1, 382)

These comments point to the loneliness Natasha faces and her vulnerability to the challenges she must face on her own. To the extent that the responsibility of her lone parent experience is individualized: it is turning to friends and neighbours that helps combat the individualizing nature of the experience. Mary Jane provides an illustration of the way togetherness, occurring in a space, combats stigma.

People every day around us fall between the cracks and people just keep walking by, they don’t even notice. And that was like it was for me. And so now I’m way more integrated. And all these new ladies moved into the complex . . . and that would be all these women on welfare and I just saw how neat they were . . . Like, they were defiant. And I think that’s a big thing, because they always look at the mom on welfare like this problem that needs to be fixed. And the way I see it is, the more people on welfare the better, because there’s more moms at home then. You know what I mean? Like, there’s more of a neighbourhood, there’s more of a community. (Mary Jane, Rnd 1, 582-583)
The stigma of being a lone mother is reflected in Mary Jane’s experience, speaking to Natasha’s loneliness as well, and highlighting the importance of community to combat the interconnected loneliness and stigma. For Mary Jane, this stigma was so powerful that she had been afraid to leave an abusive husband and become a lone parent. Her fear reflects the double bind that intersects with the regulatory limitations of income assistance policies; in addition to the limited choice between being dependent on welfare or stepping into an unsustainable job, women face the unpalatable choice of being vulnerable to abuse or stereotyped as lone mothers. For example, inasmuch as the FMEP trades Gemma’s dependency between the children’s father and the government, stigma also organizes dependency by marking lone parents so strongly that women like Mary Jane are afraid to leave abusive husbands. The community which develops out of Mary Jane’s activities of survival is an example of how found spaces help to give women the resilience from anxiety and stigma so that they can have energy to pursue their own dreams.

Not only do the women seek and find affirmation, but in their seeking, they also generates communities of support, shaping places as they do so. Jeanie generates belonging at her neighbourhood centre where she volunteers, while Natasha’s friendliness created networks of support in her neighbourhood. Mary Jane reaches out in her housing complex and finds friends. Molly details exactly how place enables support.

We really love that place. There is a lot of people [living] in that complex, speaking Spanish, like wow! Yeah and [my daughter] has a lot of friends because they have like a recreation area in the middle and the houses are all around . . . So I just let her go all day and I can be in my house because I can look at her from my house, so [it] is okay. There are all the kids from the other houses, so she has a lot of friends in there. You know all the kids and it’s really nice. (Molly, Rnd 5, 371-377)
The way this happens, and the physical characteristics which enable sharing, are important. The particular complex Molly chose had many other immigrants who spoke her original language, so she felt culturally comfortable and able to trust people there to have the same ethics she did. Like Natasha, Molly combats loneliness, the double loneliness, for her, of being culturally at sea and a lone parent. The physical organization of the housing complex’s structure enables her to fulfill her parenting duties of watching her child (who is old enough to go out on her own) and still have time for herself. Characteristics like the position of the window, the location of the open space, and the age of her child make this possible. As a result of being in this place, Molly is mentally refreshed. The space itself generates opportunity to find a person she trusts to take care of her daughter and a companion who wants to make handicrafts for sale with her. By being brought into close proximity with other parents her sense of self is reinforced even while she contributes to this environment with its ethic of sharing.

The spaces of support arise in specialized locations with characteristics of proximity to other mothers in similar situations. The functions of sharing, affirmation, exchanges and the contribution to creating environments of support suggest that women repurpose space even while they gain from these places. The work these mothers do stretches parenting and the work of child minding across the physical boundaries of private and public spaces. Staeheli and Nagel (2006) note that when concepts of home are more open, topographies of citizenship emerge that are broader than location, yet simultaneously grounded in locales. Their work may have an echo in the experience of these lone mothers, in that home is not contained within a single space, but operates at the physical scales of home, community centres, and neighbourhoods simultaneously. At the same time, these women generate “families,” or what is termed in anthropology kin-like relations between friends, neighbours, staff at centres, and biological and other kin relations they
have. The interaction of need and space creates a dynamic between gender and space that imprints these women’s neighbourhoods with the particular footprint of the lone parent.

7.4.2 Helping Others: Forbidden Work

One of the occluded activities that women on welfare engage in is giving and sharing of various types. The term “provisioning” has been used to emphasize ways in which women generate unseen communities through helping, (Neysmith & Reitsma-Street, 2005; Neysmith, Reitsma-Street, Baker Collins, & Porter, 2004). This term captures many of the responsibilities women take on and respond to, enumerating, also, the value of the hidden economy described in chapter 5. As reviewed earlier, income assistance policy effectively forbids giving or helping because these activities signalled and so women hid their helping from authorities. However, the giving offered the opportunity to sustain a virtual network of relations, which in turn affirmed the positive aspects of women’s identities. As they “become people” in their own and others eyes, they could move on to affirm their own dreams.

In some cases, helping and giving also produced instrumental benefits and there were many ways in which women gave. However, few of the women formally volunteered, aside from the outstanding example of Jeanie, whose work at the neighbourhood house was recounted above. Instead, they gave of their time to help others informally. Cynthia loaned a room to her uncle so that he had a place to stay when he broke up with his girlfriend; she also stored others’ belongings because she had a whole house with a dry space under the eaves troughs where things could be stored on the patio. Natasha gave leftover dog food to the woman she met with the nice dog; her new friend let her know of an apartment that came up for rent. This weaving of relationship into community constituted and built a supportive arena for the women. Instrumental
help given to others, and returned to them, helped them to survive, but was also the means by which they created an alternative world to the one offered through policy and work.

Affirmation was an important benefit that derived from helping and giving. For example, Jeanie’s activities of helping out in the community centre reinforced her image of herself as a helping person. It affirmed the continuity of her identity as well. She described how, earlier, when she had been street involved, she had also been a helper:

I never lived on the streets. I always had my own place or shared a place with somebody. Hung out on Granville Street, panhandled, smoked a little too much pot. But I guess that’s about what I did until I met [the children’s] father. I had my own place and everything. It was kind of a hangout because we were all street people and everybody would hang out at each other’s place. (Jeanie, Rnd 4, 935-937)

In contrast to being a former child in care, a former street-involved youth, and now a lone mother, her self-identity was strongly shaped as a helper. She had helped her addicted parents; co-mothered street youth, co-managed a downtown single-room occupancy hotel, and was now raising children on her own. Jeanie’s self-identity was affirmed by the friends, staff, and acquaintances at the community centre who came to her for help.

While the subtle benefits of feeling good and feeling they contributed to creating a good community were important, the tension between instrumental good and the self-affirming nature of giving made the women themselves ambivalent about why they were engaged in helping; they were both proud of it and excused it as “just” giving help. This is the way Jeanie tells the story; it belies the shame she is countering by giving and it hides the community-building results of the women’s efforts. The concept of social capital captures this type of help; however, various authors caution against taking up the concept uncritically, especially in relation to gender and
welfare reform because of the potentially coercive ways of constructing helping as natural (Bezanson, 2006; Luxton, 2006). It is important not to naturalize Jeanie’s helping; it occurs and is derived from an overwhelmingly negative context in which she struggles to survive.

Supporting a sense of self which was other than that of a needy person or a welfare recipient offered women respite in which they could imagine a different future, and out of which a different future might emerge. For Jeanie, and for others in spaces which supported lone mothers the space itself confirmed their identity, as well as generating, through their presence, community that affirmed their identity and value. Affirming their roles and identities as mothers helped to constitute, or perform, the future of their family, as well. The identity-based nature of the activity indicates a field of contest between participants and bureaucracy about the nature of identity and who controls definition of the women in a community place. This place where Jeanie volunteered, became a site, or field, of resistance against the income assistance policy.

Actions which affirmed a positive sense of self also constituted resistance to the overwhelming depiction of lack that was attached to the women. Jeanie worked as a formal volunteer, for example, as an ambassador who modelled parenting skills beneficial to early childhood development. She was doubly affirmed when she was offered a paid position with the program; although she could not take it due to her unexpected pregnancy, it would have been one of her first paid jobs. More importantly, the work grew out of something she loved to do, did naturally as a helper, and found self-affirming. In contrast, the work women were encouraged to consider in their training programs often did not fit in terms of lifestyle, aspirations, skills, child care/parenting responsibilities, or remuneration. Giving, in this particular case, opened up an avenue of work based on values and identity, and added an instrumental outcome to an affirmation of Jeanie’s sense of self-worth.
Advocacy was another kind of self-affirming giving, not typically thought of in the same realm as the altruistic helping that Jeanie is engaged in, but nevertheless a free gift of time. Natasha argued vociferously with the staff at one of the child care centres about safety practices when she found used intravenous needles on the playground. Giving was performative, again, as Natasha recounted her efforts to make her community safer. It was also self-affirming in the sense of placing her concerns into the neighbourhood politics, generating social inclusion. When Olivia argued with her public housing agency to repair the housing units, she also reinforced a public image of herself as a caring parent. Both women were careful to highlight their activities and emphasize to the interviewers how, although others might not care, or might vilify them, they did this for the community. This kind of advocacy positioned these lone mothers as important members of the community. In this sense, advocacy was a performance that generated community belonging for the woman as well as contributing to community cohesion; it was an antidote to the exclusion they experienced in so many arenas.

Giving to the community generated the kind of pride that often comes from work. Natasha describes how hungry she is for this when she recounts how she was rewarded by being allowed to train others in the restaurant she was working in.

I am a bad learner; I'm pretty good actually. After three weeks, I went from being a dishwasher to a waitress and I was making tips the whole time because I was good at it. I helped her teach a few other people that came in. (Natasha, Rnd 2, 170)

This is the kind of self-affirmation that neoliberal policies promote as the solution to poverty, and particularly cyclical poverty and the particularly stigmatized poverty that is identified through being in receipt of government assistance. However, the impossibility of sustaining work makes the availability of this affirmation rare. Natasha could not keep this job as her hours were
from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. most nights, no day shifts were available in this small owner-operated restaurant, and she could not locate child care for evening shifts, nor afford it. The pride and sense of competency that came from giving through training staff, which affirmed Natasha’s sense of competence and efficacy, needed to come from elsewhere.

As can be seen from these examples, giving provided the women with important instrumental or social support for resisting the overwhelming pressures of responsibility. However, there was a fine line between giving and being exploited. The giving that Jeanie did in her neighbourhood house helped her and others, generated a sense of community, brought her material benefit, and allayed her anxiety, but from a critical perspective, an honorarium of $40 for committing to cover lunch shifts on three days also constitutes inadequate remuneration for work that is necessary to run a program. As staff from other agencies recounted in follow-up focus groups, programs were conscious of this dilemma but were coping with budget cuts that were part of the same round of policy changes that had reformed welfare. Agencies were working with clients who were needier and in more crises, and yet program staff had fewer resources. Without volunteers, the program Jeanie gave her time to could not offer its lunchtime meal. This double bind of the agencies speaks to the way these lone mothers are being further squeezed at the same times that programs are being squeezed for funds. The consequences are that the boundary between informal and formal is being blurred and the general capacity for support is being reduced. It is not only the market and the state that are elided, but the “third sector” and their clients’ private life. With clients in deeper need, staff had less time for advocacy, making the work of women like Jeanie more important as part of the formal sharing environment even while less formal support was available to them. The complex interplay of policy, social support, and client need speaks to the dynamic nature of the support sector, another
aspect of policy-client interface that is ignored by the narrow definitions and mandate of the income assistance programs.

Helping occurred on the edge, or border, between public and private; as an activity, exploiting an interstice between public and private in ways that affirmed the women’s sense of self and their dreams. Performance as giving persons helped combat stereotypes of being a “needy” person, whether it was being labelled like Carla was, or implied as Jeanie feared. Although helping was not forbidden by policy, engaging in advocacy, sharing with others, or offering people help, including shelter, either violated various kinds of rules or risked taking time from job search or other mandated activities. In this sense, helping others violated the spirit of the trope of the dependent person which was constructed through welfare policies. Instead, helping provided an image of a contributing member of society.

Generating the sense of well-being that comes from being competent at a job occurred through giving and was integral to sustaining women’s sense of self, however, it was not just the symbolic importance of helping that was important. The acts of building and maintaining friendships could be instrumental in generating tangible benefits like information or leads on where to find housing. Helping and building friendships also generated and affirmed dreams and positively affirmed identity, especially of being a mother. Reinforcing self-identity was important in the context of the overwhelming absence of recognition of parenting offered through policy which negatively defined women as people without jobs. In addition, the rigid timelines defined them as people who needed to be coerced into action. This structure of conditional help from government did not recognize or acknowledge their other responsibilities as parents, community members, or family members, making affirmation of their contributions an essential mirror of their identities.
The three kinds of giving that are described here, giving in the sense of generating community, giving by volunteering, and giving through advocacy, were all vehicles of self-affirmation. They created networks of community, which the women concealed or diminished to some extent in order to hide the indication of illicit agency. Giving was necessary, though, to affirm positive identities, both of themselves as agentic individuals, as well as to counter negative definitions of themselves as only workers. These affirmations sustained and enacted their dreams, whether to be good mothers and have good families, or to become someone within their network of family and friends, or to heal self and community.

7.5 Summary

The previous chapter focussed on the struggle to survive in the context of severe restraints. This chapter started with an overview of dreaming – an act that took women beyond merely struggling to survive. Women’s maintenance of their own visions and dreams was connected to the broader wish of a good life for their family, to their identity and lineage, and to healing of the community or their past parenting, cultural and family issues. This latter issue was especially prominent for the Aboriginal women in the study and highlighted the way that income assistance policies may seem irrelevant to other, more urgent, needs like regaining health, including recovering from substance use addictions or healing from abuse. The women’s dreams were held in identities, which were visions of themselves and their children, families or communities. As with spiritual dreaming, this kind of dreaming constituted the future. It is this forward-looking momentum that inspires the women and shapes the outcomes they achieve.

The ways in which dreams were contested, though, through the imposition of regulatory regimes, brings forward two issues. First, the women must perform an identity of compliance to maintain their benefits. The performance hides their actual scrabbling for resources and survival.
Second, they perform acts of giving that affirm the value of their identity and roles as mothers, even while they generate community spaces which support women and which seem to reflect the gendered nature of their existence. This last observation emphasizes the way in which the social organization of public and private, with family being private, is impossible to maintain within the constraints of inadequate income and the regulatory system.

Women maintain and protect their benefits by enacting or performing a fiction of dependency and compliance in order to receive benefits. Maintaining this fiction protects them from state incursions into their private lives, which in turn, protects their dreams. In a double move, they then explicitly seek to perform their dreams into creation by affirming resistant identities. Dreaming is maintained by their ability to sustain dual identities, nurturing a “private” identity in a semi-public world. If they cannot nurture this identity, they lose the ability to survive and maintain their children because the reality of accepting the proscriptions of welfare regulations was an inability to have the minimum for life. In the next chapter, I explore the implications of these findings for the structural organization of public and private space.
CHAPTER 8 – MEDIATING THE PUBLIC-PRIVATE DIVIDE

The extraordinary constraints of poverty create an overwhelming and immediate practical problem, as discussed in previous chapters, and yet the conditions attached to income assistance add to the difficulties in surviving. Chapter 5 discussed the way women manage material need in the context of policy prohibitions, while chapter 6 focussed on how women enact resistance and make space for the future by dreaming. The findings discussed so far imply that one outcome of neoliberal welfare reform is a deep and perhaps deepening material stress for women and impoverished families, suggesting that the status of impoverished lone parents may be shifting towards further marginalization. Beyond individual and familial or community level scales, key questions for planning are whether women’s agency offers opportunities for social change and whether the social structure of gender is changing. Women’s agency will be used as a lens in this chapter to explore the implications for social change.

Focusing on women’s agency as a lens through which to construct an image of how public and private interact means understanding how dreaming relates to structure and agency. Dreaming occupies and indicates the space between public and private. Lefebvre (2003) framed the interstice as a space of creative movement, or agency, in which actions could disrupt the status quo. For Lefebvre, the specific means of creativity was through the materialization of the new, realizing the representation of dialectical awareness. The research questions asked in this dissertation focus on agency and opportunities for agency; however, the changing nature of public and private, intensified by neoliberal reforms, affects the scope and scale of women’s agency and suggests a narrowing of possibilities, to borrow words used by Neysmith and Reitsma-Street (2005). The tension between dreaming and policy implies that the primary field
of struggle is in a field of freedom rather than merely that of instrumental effort focused on overcoming poverty.

### 8.1 Falling Between the Public/Private Divide

When women like Mary Jane talk about “falling between the cracks,” they are talking about the gaps between private need and expectations of public support, or alternately, provision via engagement in the market. As described earlier, the organization of the relationships between market, state, and society can be used to characterize different policy-based approaches to provision for the indigent (Dolfsma, Finch, & McMaster, 2005, 2004; Jenson, 2008; Lewis, 1997). Jenson and Saint-Martin (2003) add the social service sector, or social sector as they term it, to the triangle of market, state, and society, noting that social services form an important source of support and advocacy for women on welfare. Focusing on the social service sector adds an important source of agency and interaction with the other sectors. Using these three, or four, sectors to analyze the public/private divide highlights the confusion between the vernacular of the “private” life of family and community, which is arrayed against the “public” domains of either state/government or the economic market. Thus the “public” realm is not singular, nor is it primarily the realm of formal commerce as it is for those who support themselves through labour. Deconstructing the constraining conditions offers the opportunity to explore the organization of the social and physical spaces and structures that are called public and private.

One issue is that the “private” nest of the family is revealed to be not as private as the ideal would suggest. As described in chapter 5, the private world of home and informal activity is deliberately engaged in as a source of revenue; the home is often shared, sometimes with family, sometimes with friends or boyfriends, and sometimes with paying boarders; it is sometimes the location of home industry or crafts; it is sometimes a source of material assets for
resale; and it is sometimes the site of incursions by child protection authorities. The paucity of support means that women must engage in what are *de facto* defined as public functions of earning income in the private spaces of home. The necessity that drives this activity makes the participants’ private spaces permeable to public incursion, so, for example, the public arm of the state may intrude into the private realm of home to ensure that women are not cheating by making undeclared income. However, if the private realm of home can be characterized as permeable, the public realm is also revealed to be not as clearly boundaried as the ideal may suggest. What links the two realms is the agency of the women as they go about their business of struggling to survive and dreaming their way out.

The market appears as a fragmented system of the formal and informal economies when viewed through the lives of the women in this study. The inability of women to obtain sufficient support in the formal market to sustain themselves means that the importance of the formal economy fades in comparison to the public realm of government. At the same time, policy renders conversations about market failings illegitimate: concerns about “private” needs are ostensibly occluded from the public focus on poverty. Thus the need for child care, for example, is not a “public” concern, and so it is not permitted as an explanation for why the impoverished women in this study cannot look for work or maintain a job. Further, although failure to engage in the market through employment is assumed to lead to material need, and is therefore taken to define poverty, critics of the poverty paradigm suggest (Bourguignon, 2007), that there needs to be further scrutiny of why and how the market fail so utterly to be a source of revenue. The struggle of lone parents occurs in a field of tension between public imperatives which govern market policy, and private necessity, revealing how the constructed public and private realms are related and how they are changing through neoliberal reforms.
It appears that the dynamics between need, activities which are rhetorically open for discussion, and the agency needed to sustain family is resulting in an unexpected outcome of neoliberal welfare reform. Revisiting the welfare diamond, it appears that the women’s survival activity of staying alive is occurring through recourse to the informal economy, creating a separation between their legitimized activities and their invisible activities (see Figure 3 Unintended Effects of Neoliberal Welfare Reform on the Structure of Government-Citizen Relations and the Economy). In Contrast to the intended effect of attenuating government support and replacing it with the market as a source of income, the self becomes a mediating force in which performance of compliance becomes the currency for obtaining state benefits, while extra market supports are obtaining in the informal market, through barter, borrowing, or exchanges in the illicit market. The third sector plays an uncertain role, with staff aware of the compromise, advocating on behalf of clients, but less and less able to provide effective support.

![Figure 3 Unintended Effects of Neoliberal Welfare Reform on the Structure of Government-Citizen Relations and the Economy](image)
One of the elements that seems to maintain the exclusion of lone mothers from the formal market is part of a dynamic described by Edin and Kefalas (2005), who looked at the lives of inner city residents of Philadelphia. They found that if the expectations of those on welfare are for serial minimum wage jobs, then (a) nothing is lost in having children early or often because there are no career interruption consequences, and (b) there is not a strong financial incentive to work because the standard of living is not appreciably higher than it is on welfare, but the expenses and inconvenience increase. As they put it, poverty is sustained because expectations of future earnings are necessary to escaping poverty. The public realm of government has two options for ameliorating the situation, which reveals another way in which the boundary between state and market is permeable: the state could opt to keep welfare rates painfully low as an incentive for going to work, or it could increase the minimum wage to ensure a sustaining wage for families. In this study, welfare recipients displayed this rational economic behaviour by focussing on dreaming a better life. However, as discussed, they also had nonmonetary goals like healing, or visions that involved their own identities.

The sources of support are focussed on the public realm of the social service sector, volunteering opportunities, and government support by the absence of an effective (sustainable or accessible) formal economy. The need for support from the social sector is intensified by the failure of the two “public” realms of the regulatory system and the formal market. For example, Molly’s dream of having a sustainable career was not possible within the options granted by the income assistance regulatory system. Thus the absence of an effective labour market means that women’s lives are remaindered to the informal economy and the social support sector. The tension between the unofficial public and private and the formal public and private is mediated by the women themselves.
Depicting the absence of one public (the market) and the presence of the other (the state) oversimplifies the relationship women have to the public and private. Although sustaining and accessible jobs are not readily available, the private market does play a large role in their lives, primarily through consumption. One of the ways it does so, for example, is through housing rental. Because the income assistance regulations set a specific maximum monetary value on monthly shelter disbursements, housing becomes a fluid asset in comparison. Aligning the value of the tenure with the disbursement means that various margins exist, within which women negotiate for income advantage. The ostensibly “individual” and “private” relationship between a tenant and landlord, which forms one (spatialized) foundation of the private, is actually a situation of negotiation and tension in the context of public provision. Seen another way shelter allowances fund a publicly funded but privately delivered housing system, yielding power to the landlord without guaranteeing provision. Three parties are at play in this dynamic: the citizen, the market, and the state. This means that the rental situation is not private in that the citizen is not at arms length from the state in terms of their living accommodations; in the context of private provision, they are dependent on both the market and the state. The conundrum for the renter arises, though, out of the performance conditions placed on them by government regulation, which also sets their rental allowances. As a result, they cannot control or protest the insufficiency of their housing allowances because it is part of the regulatory tool that is used to organize their flow of income based on conditions of compliance. In this sense, they are hampered participants in the public realm of the private market.

Private, in this lexicon, should culturally signify that which is not under survey of the ministry staff. However, demanding that economic activity is public provides a cause for invasion of the home. Because of what women must do to survive, they bring economic activity
into their living spaces, including their bodies. As a result, the private relations of parenting and the private space of bodily functions, such as eating and sleeping, become part of the public domain, and government agents begin to have authority to enter and intrude into what are called private spaces to observe women. The observation for one issue invites observations of others, as Arlita found when she called the ambulance, which resulted in attendance from social workers because the violent assault took place in her house, which subsequently led to a child protection investigation due to a perceived lack of food in her cupboards. In addition, as women give up the privacy of a bedroom or sleeping space so they can afford to house their children, they themselves blur the boundary between public and private, and risk this surveillance, whether from child protection authorities or economic support authorities. This brings the eye of the public to their parenting practices under very stressful circumstances. While the entrance of public surveillance is sometimes very helpful because it triggers resources or enables supports like child care subsidies, Carla, Arlita, Anne, and Laura experienced the entrance of surveillance into private life as a feared eye because it could also result in child removal. Thus, in the scale of the private home, government regulatory systems intrude to structure relations, set goals and targets, and interfere with the women’s authority and governance as parents. The “helping” relations of extended family are also almost prohibited in the structured relations, which regulate the opportunity for financial support or sharing as a potential violation of income generation rules which demand exclusive self-sufficiency or dependency on government. In the context of reconfiguring the private, women simultaneously lose their autonomy. However, the intrusion of

68 While women may sell sex for food, just as they may go without eating, thus using their bodies for temporary economic gain. Consuming the body by not eating is similar to the outcome of sex work, where the “house” of the body becomes an asset that can be controlled for benefit.

69 See, for example, Tait’s (2003) discussion of the way government agents exert control over the body of an Aboriginal woman who was deemed unfit to parent, seizing her infant in utero and taking it into care as soon as it was born.
public authority into private space indicates the value of spaces which permit women to manage their lives and maintain their parenting and life-goal dreams.

There are several consequences of the organization of public and private. One is that women appear in the various fragmented public realms, and they must shape-shift in order to maintain access to benefits. Thus the women, in order to protect the children who are dependent on them, or to preserve their own health and well-being, must accurately assess each of these publics and appear as the correct kind of citizen or public member in each venue in order to maintain benefits. This was very clear in Carla’s experience as she worked to obtain formula, fresh vegetables, milk, and diapers. At each turn, her eligibility for supports from social agencies was determined by characteristics such as the age of her daughter, whether she was a registered Aboriginal person, or whether she had special health needs. At the instrumental level, this required the claims-making work of filling in applications, petitioning staff, or presenting the self with authenticating paperwork, which might include a doctor’s letter to confirm health needs or making a declaration of Aboriginal ancestry. At a structural level, this required a performance within a field of expectations. The performances methodologically indicate the ways in which women are constrained from being themselves; they indicate the field of constraints defined by eligibility criteria within and beyond formal Income Assistance regulations but set within the field of the public realm of support. If one condition of social citizenship is the opportunity to receive benefits, then a very nuanced view emerges of how exclusion operates to dampen the actual expression of self as these women perform within various publics and privates.

The consequences of the division of public and private are not only in the sense of constraints of freedom; there are material and instrumental consequences as well. As women are constrained, they lose the ability to maintain those small spaces for survival. For example, Arlita
had to give up her substance use treatment to return home because the income assistance system would not continue to fund her social housing unit as well as the shelter costs of her residential treatment stay. Returning home early, before her program was complete, put her at risk of recidivism. If she were to reengage in substance use she would risk not being able to regain her children. Such a separation would have repeated her own family history, where she and her siblings were removed from her parents, ostensibly because of abuse and substance use. Her experience is not atypical; the interruption of the intergenerational flow of parenting is cited as a large factor in the loss of culture by Aboriginal authors and political advocates (Ball, 2004; McDonald & Ladd, 2000). The regulatory system ignores the kind of childhood history that Arlita had, which is not atypical for Aboriginal women. Given that this is a relatively common experience for Aboriginal individuals (being removed from their homes and placed in foster care and having had parents with significant challenges), the omission or rejection of dependency and parenting from income assistance regulatory goals amplifies the risk for women who are indigenous or have other structural disadvantages. While these effects are hard for individual women, the effect for a class of individuals impels further structural disadvantage and is the mechanism of further oppression. This point has been clearly articulated by African American scholars who critique the interaction of judicial policy, income assistance regulation, and other systems in the United States (Drucker, 2003; Henderson, 2006; Stevenson Jr., 1994). The interaction of historical disadvantage arising from colonialism, racism, or other systemic disadvantages with the public avoidance of responsibility intensifies or at least maintains the intensity of effect. Thus disadvantage is replicated in the division of private from public responsibility.

70 She was required to participate in random urine testing by authorities.
Although the structural constraints seem to narrow the possibilities for women in an unending or unyielding set of constraints, it is not true that there was no way out. The exits, though, illuminate still more about the way the organisation of public and private structures possibilities. Of the three participants who were able to exit welfare during the time of the study, Molly was the most successful. She was also the only one who, during her time on income assistance, was also able to maintain a traditional notion of public/private boundaries. Her extended family could support her, and so she participated in supporting them by providing free child care. Although she made home handicrafts for sale, she had very little income assistance ministry involvement, nor did she need child care subsidies or much formal social support, although she did attend a single mothers’ support group. Interestingly, she said that the lone mothers’ group made her feel uncomfortable because most of the women were not like her; they were living middle-class lives, had recently divorced, and were mid-aged. When the Income Assistance staff directed her to work training programs, she accessed supports from the immigrant support centre, and so was mixed with clients who were not necessarily receiving income assistance but were retraining for new careers, learning English, or orienting themselves culturally to Canada. Molly was thus able to maintain a middle-class notion of the separation of public and private.

There was a personal cost for Molly of maintaining the public/private boundary, though, and this suggests that while she was able to exit, her exit does not support a notion that the structural division of public and private will work for some and not others. While Molly avoided the intrusion of public into her private space and was able to utilize the help of her family, she lost the camaraderie of those like her. It was only when she entered the social housing complex with other immigrant women that her living circumstances began to be ordered in a way that she
could manage and control them without dependency on her extended family or the state. Molly thus lost a sense of freedoms and supports, even though she was successful in the instrumental task of transitioning into the formal economy. Molly was able to manage by trading dependency on the state directly for dependency on family. For those women who did not have a cushion of extended family, the transition could not be made without tremendous personal cost. These costs were beginning to occur for Gemma, for example, who in spite of having used a former volunteering-for-credits program to enrol in college, learn a skill, and remove herself from income assistance, was becoming fatigued with the need to care for her special needs son. At the end of the study she was considering cutting back on her hours, and was thinking nostalgically of the time she had while she was on welfare to just be with her children. Molly’s escape thus highlights the importance of a certain set of assets that can be characterized as middle class, even though she herself was an immigrant and therefore falls into a population that faces disadvantage.

The experience of both Molly and Gemma suggests that the public and private for those with marginal existences – of dire poverty, of having children to support, of being in receipt of income assistance, and of being Aboriginal – means that the public and private realm is qualitatively different than it is for those who have a working-class or middle-class existence. It also profiles the way that the focus of income assistance policy goals is the transition from the condition of being in state support to the legitimate income-earning and tax-paying classes. This is not simply a task of getting a job; it requires recipients to transition through a reconfiguration from a public and private, where the private holds activities which are designated as public, and from economic activity in an informal market, into a system that the income assistance system uses as its standard, where the private world is not needed as a resource, and the public world of
the market supplies the majority of needs. Before this transition happens, though, the legitimated structure of public and private interacts at various points with the actual world women live and struggle within.

The confluence of poverty and regulation means that women struggle, not only with their own needs, but to manage the appearance of compliance with the public and private structures. By virtue of being unlikely to find or maintain a sustainable lifestyle within the market system before their children turn three years old, women occupied a place that is outside of both publics, the market and the state. Through this, gender is implicated as a marker of being an outsider through the situation of lone parenting. Curiously, the field of the home, which is marked as the legitimate venue of motherhood or parenting, is also beyond the scope of lone parents who depend on state support to maintain the home. The issue is more than occupation, though; because women neither pay taxes nor sustain themselves in the formal market, lone mothers are excluded from both the realm of the legitimized home because they cannot physically obtain it, and from legitimization as workers, because they cannot maintain dual engagement in home and market. As nonparticipants, they are not members; they are excluded. What remains is the informal market, which they manage in ways that are underground to the formal market, either economically or as social capital, as discussed in chapter 5, but the informal market has few protections. This suggests that the remaindered space of the not-public is redefined as a new private, and a space particularly shaped by gendered poverty.

71 They are unlikely to be able to sustain themselves unless they can make a wage that affords them the fee for infant and toddler care, which in 2005 was reported at $650-$750 per month (CBC News online). Earnings from a full-time minimum wage job is about $900 per month, so to cover more than rent and child care, the wages earned would need to be about three times as much as minimum, equivalent to a union or a low professional salary.
8.2 The Spatialized Dimensions of Resistance

The tension between the use of public and private extends into the physical terrain of their existence, linking actual spaces of home and neighbourhood to survival and resistance. Seeing the interstice between the public and private as a dynamic space of generative agency is similar to Lefebvre’s (2003) conceptualization of the interstice as the space between public and private where the creative city could flourish, where the unregulated operated, and therefore where the new emerged as an instantiation of imagination. Using Lefebvre’s concept of the space between provides a way to map the material manifestation of the struggle the women engaged in. Mapping the tension also provides a way of seeing the scope and scale of agency and how these women’s lives are being transmogrified by the reforms that were introduced.

The way that the boundary between public and private was contested in the interaction between public policy and individual agency has implications for the spatial organization of public and private. For example, if women are engaged in consuming their own bodies by going without, or renting out rooms to raise money for rent, the physical space of the home and body is resignified and reoccupied. By virtue of doing this, women cannot retreat to the so-called private, where, according to traditional ideals, they are to be engaged in activities of raising children, nurturing the body, and doing other functions of social reproduction. Their actions contest ideas about the privacy of the body, home space, and home functions and displace the boundary between the physical spaces of public and private. In addition, the shifting boundary moves between scales of interaction, suggesting that the spaces of private home and neighbourhood are interactively shaped by the activities women are engaging in. The spatialization of their activities also points to ways in which women are included and excluded in the social and physical
cityscape. Beyond the symbolic restructuring of citizenship privilege, the alterations of privilege speak to a metropolitan scale of effect within neoliberal regimes.

The ideological separation of public from private space was constantly generating a physical impact in these women’s lives, in ways as simple as the search for child care. The search for child care, for example, had spatial implications which are easy to see. Natasha’s boyfriend travelled 45 minutes by bus to look after her son in the evening, providing just one example of the way child care extends the functions of parenting outside the home. Parenting responsibilities are spatially and socially distributed in the process of meeting this one need. Spatially distributing practices which parents are responsible for challenge the physicalized notion that the private space is endlessly plastic, or expandable without incursion into the public space. It also highlights the confluence of social constructions of private responsibility.

The expectation of segregation of private from public has historical roots in the origins of suburbia at the beginning of the industrial revolution (Fishman, 1987). Fishman described how, when labouring was removed from cottage-industry settings in the home to large factories, the spatial locations of the functions of home were separated from labour. The effect of this transformation was the segregation of time and person in the form of who was considered to be legitimately labouring and who was engaged in the private functions of home. Time was marked by the passage of people from labouring sites to what were considered nonlabouring sites of the home. Natasha’s search for child care outside the home is a reflection of this spatial segregation of labouring from “domestic” chores, which are associated with not-work, as so many feminist scholars have documented (Brodie, 2003; Cameron, 2006; Luxton, 1980). While the specific

---

72 See Cox Covington (2003) for a discussion of the spatial mismatch between supply and demand of child care. Cox argues that this mismatch is intensified for inner-city and rural African Americans in the US; more child care is available in more affluent neighbourhoods, making child care relatively inaccessible where lower-income working parents need it.
drivers may have changed since the 18th century, the physical division of public economic activity from domestic noneconomic activity is still apparent in the template used in city zoning and in the expectations of income assistance policies. Women on income assistance must manage this spatial division even while their activities of survival span both domestic and economic, public and private realms.

The activities of survival invite the incursion of surveillance into the home. Generating cash means first of all that the internal or private domains of the home and the body are both subject to taxation, not necessarily in the sense that Revenue Canada is interested in, but in the sense that any income is subject to 100% deduction from the income assistance cheque. As a result, income-generating or benefit-generating activities become the “business” of welfare, which exposes the home as a potential space of sedition. Although this work is entrepreneurial and shows great initiative, it is not the goal of welfare back-to-work policy, and it is revealed to contravene the spirit of promoting what becomes the de facto definition of work: labour outside the home. For the women, the home becomes resignified as a place of entrepreneurship, a place that expresses and protects the entrepreneurial spirit of women. The spatial segregation of work and home is made ironic because, while women are busy, they are required to take programs outside of the home that are oriented towards encouraging their labour as employees, again outside the home. The division or recognition reinforces the illegitimacy of making money in the home or through the body. Not only does it constitute a discouragement against being resourceful, it also locates these intimate spaces as illegitimate.

If women use the home as a cloak with which to conceal income generation, then it is equally true that government agents treat the home as a suspicious and nonlegitimate ground. They know they must justify intrusion, given that the home is recognized as the “private”
domain, but since the regulations force survival activities beyond what is permitted, the home is perpetually suspected as a screen. The opacity effected by the screen of privacy, though, meant that their suspicions could not be directly voiced without admitting complicity in a system that does not supply sufficient resources. The actual voiced accusation, then, was of idleness; a protest that attempted to jab against the opacity of the private by taking the offensive and targeting the work ethic. Accusing women of idleness, though, suggests a concern with the kind of productivity that is typically associated with public realms. While women countered by overtly protesting that the home was innocent, they also maintained the opacity, using rules that designate the space as private, or boundaried from the public. Fishman (1987) noted that in the historical context of the movement to what became suburbia, the home was associated with pastoral innocence, which was also associated with an elevation of the feminine as spiritually sacrosanct. The tension in this case carries with it the specifically sexualized and spiritual overtones of motherhood, which add to the complexity of the shield. The accusation of idleness reveals that, in the contemporary context, the identity of lone parent is positioned as “unnatural” by virtue of how it disturbs the public/private divide.

The resignification of home not only has implications for understanding public and private as part of a gendered occupation of the city; the way the spaces of home and public are signified also has consequences for the private functions of parenting and women’s abilities to authoritatively manage their lives. Part of imagining the home as private is imagining it as solely occupied by a nuclear family. Even the idea that these women have such a thing as a home is a fiction, though. The combination of a lack of market supply and the need to use housing to raise or meet income demands meant, for example, that Natasha had a couch in a living room and a closet for her son’s bedroom, and that Laura shared a two-bedroom apartment with her teen
children and their partners and children, and her boyfriend and his children, which he had
custody of part time. The spatial organization of living situations impacts their parenting:

I’m living in a one-bedroom with a roommate and it’s very tricky because I made my son
a bedroom out of like, four closets that overlook the front door. Right? There’s no
window there, and his bed is against the wall and he’s, ‘You know, mom, I wish I could
stretch. I wanna big bed.’ . . . I think it’s very tricky because as far as him growing up, the
adults will go away and close the door . . . he needs to be allowed to have the same thing
because most of the apartment is grown-up area. (Natasha, Rnd 3, 56)

The private space of home is not a refuge nor a “naturally” sacrosanct space, but a place
of public activity into which Natasha must fit her “private” responsibilities of family care. Like
the concept of work, parenting is revealed here to occur in a physical terrain; it is not a
despatialized activity. Parenting is also impacted beyond instrumental problems of task
management. For example, Natasha is distressed because she feels (a) that she cannot exercise
her parenting in the manner she wants to because she must consider other people and families,
and (b) that this is not good for her child. While the first issue is an instrumental interference
grounded in an inability to exercise her own agency, the second issue reflects on the way
Natasha perceives the efficacy of her own judgement. Her own standards of what is good for her
child are made impossible by the Income Assistance policies, and this absolution of
responsibility on the public part means that she knows she is both alone and not recognized. Her
parenting, and her perception of public valuation of her parenting, becomes a secondary victim
of poverty in the sense that her ability to exercise her duties as she sees fit is undermined by the
situation of not having enough money, which then makes her dependent in the manner
configured by the policies. The spatialized nature of actual parenting practice is not addressed in
the policy regulations, which focus exclusively on engagement with the economy. Natasha is a pawn in a push and pull of responsibility between the two publics of the formal economy and government support.

The cross-utilization of the home space as both an economic resource and a place of parenting and living generated a dual burden of operation. Spaces were signified in multiple ways, and the signification of those spaces was itself a testing ground. As a result, the women valued those spaces which they could afford on their own beyond just the individual privacy they offered. When women had spaces they could control, they could focus on organizing their daily functions so that they had time and space for other things, and so that their children could fit into the routines they needed to maintain in order to locate food, hunt for work, or maintain involvement in mandatory programs. The need to have space for what are considered domestic functions made Cynthia’s ruin of a house, or Jeanie’s too-small basement suite, much better than Natasha’s shared apartment or Laura’s multiple kin and boarder situation, even though those situations were affordable with the income assistance shelter allotment.

The spatial extensiveness of managing parenting and living needs beyond the space of the home required an intensity of services in a particular place, including social housing and community services. As Ruddick (1996) and Dear and Wolch (1987) found, the availability of services concentrates a particular set of people with needs for that kind of support. They termed the spatial concentration of services and the congregation of people who ensued “service-dependent neighbourhoods.” Ruddick suggested that these neighbourhoods not only provided support, but helped to generate identity for the people who congregated there. For these lone mothers, who needed low-income apartments, social supports, and resources within walking distance, East Vancouver was part of a functional, spatially defined economy, which particularly
suited them. It was not an accident that N’k, who tried to move away, went back to East Vancouver where she said she felt a sense of freedom, or that Natasha, who desperately wanted to leave, was repeatedly drawn back and finally said that it was better to be where she had friends because they helped each other. Natalie was distressed when she was forcibly moved because none of the low-cost stores she relied on, that would sell a half measure of butter and so on, were available within walking distance. The location of living matched the permeable boundaries of home, so that neighbourhood became an extension of what is generally considered domestic living.

However, these neighbourhoods were not uniformly positive for the women. Anne, who was trying to maintain sobriety, was frustrated that the shelters that would accept her were located in the Downtown Eastside, in the spaces of open drug use and sex trade work which she was trying to avoid. Public spaces came to signify home, and were places of occupation for functions that were outside the economy as well as outside the walls of home. Both kinds of activities meant that public spaces were not merely innocent spaces, they were also spaces of occupation and, potentially, surveillance, as the women who could not maintain boundaries of the private home brought their parenting under surveillance of agency staff and general members of the public. In Anne’s case, agency staff could observe her behaviour on the streets; there was no communal living space within or outside the shelter where she could be alone. While the shelters did support her sobriety, her only complete privacy was behind the secure doors of the private room of a public shelter. Anne was caught in a public-public situation where privacy was elusive, but Mary Jane experienced a different kind of invasion when she was accosted by an irate customer in a grocery store over her parenting practices. She protests to the interviewer that she has no choice but to bring the children to the store; she is not able to confine her parenting
duties to home because she has no child care. She has neither the requisite supporting family nor the funds for child care, and so her parenting practices occur in a public (market) space. She is exposed to this abuse, which is really an abuse triggered by the customer’s expectation that parenting functions should be tidily kept in the home.

Avoiding surveillance could be accomplished by those who could maintain the physical reflection of the public-private divide. Molly, as discussed above, was able to avoid active surveillance as a result of not needing supports. By bypassing résumé preparation programs, she avoided experiencing the stigma of attending programs as an identified “needy” client on income assistance, as Carla could not. Being able to avoid spaces that were identified as those for “needy” clients and not needing those spaces because of her family’s support helped Molly maintain the boundary of public and private along typical class lines. While Molly still experienced suboptimal housing and a shortage of things needed for living, she did not need to extrude from the private boundaries of the home space to find child care, obtain food or medical supplies, or find support. For the other women, the spaces of survival extruded beyond social expectations of boundaries to create both positive and negative effects.

In the struggle to survive, the confusion of public and private social and regulatory spaces is manifested in physical dimensions. Women live with the confusion of the boundaries, which confounds, challenges, and creates the public and private division of space. While the development of an ethos of community is positive, the ensuing exposure to surveillance due to the mixing of physical boundaries with social boundaries can be negative. Between these two, women must manoeuvre very adroitly to sustain themselves, elude negative surveillance, affirm their own good parenting practices, and affirm their assessment of themselves as good parents.
8.3 Revisiting the Performance of Resistance and Agency

Separating activity from the necessity of meeting immediate need suggests that awareness is required as well as agency. So far in this chapter, women’s agency has been used as an analytical lens with which to explore and describe the structures of constraint. However, the research questions were focussed on structure as well as agency. The overall research question asked how neoliberal welfare reform “moulded, constrained, and directed future life possibilities” (Q1), while the subquestions focussed on how the constraints of material poverty interacted with income assistance policies to affect women’s agency (Q1.a) and how lone mothers interrogate, resist, and subvert the gaps and limitations of income assistance policies (Q1.b). From the perspective of an inquiry into agency, the structural constraints materialize in the moments of discordance (Lefebvre, 2003) that indicate tension between need, responsibility for children, regulatory imperatives, and self-apprehension. These challenges offer the opportunity to answer the question of how women “interrogate, resist, and subvert.”

When the research question is framed with “how,” it points to a response that focusses on process. In chapter 5, the struggle for material survival was described, detailing how women managed. This is similar to what Lister (2004) described as one of four agencies: the agency of “getting by.” Without a critical perspective, “how” can become a focus on coping, as Williams, Popay, and Oakley (1999) might term it. In chapter 6, which focussed on dreaming and the way dreaming is constrained, the analysis explored the meaning of the struggle, a more hermeneutic question that is somewhat linked to Lister’s agency of “getting on.” Dreaming links the agentic struggle for survival to the ability to have and hold dreams. The next question, though, is how and whether the agency women exercise qualifies as resistance and whether it offers any effect or change to the world or for the women personally. Determining whether the activities women
are engaged in qualify as resistance is important both for understanding what the potential is for women, as a class of citizens and as individuals, to exercise their democratic rights and, perhaps, to change the collective treatment of citizens like them within or by the polity, and for understanding the scope of their freedom and the equity of income assistance policies.

As reviewed in chapter 2, intentionality is one defining characteristic of resistance, while another is effectiveness (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004). However, Hollander and Einwohner (2004) dispute that resistance must be organized, overt, or necessarily publicly political, attributes that originally described resistance when it was conceptualized within a political economy frame. The activities of the women in this study fit definitions of resistance that include more covert actions, such as those described by Scott (1985) as well as those in many subsequent studies (Brody, 2006; Fleming & Spicer, 2003; Prasad & Prasad, 2000). Within these studies, intentionality may or may not be consciously articulated, an issue that is important in theorizing whether the activities of the lone mothers in this study can be called resistance. The first type of action, for instance, “scrabbling for small things,” which was described in chapter 5, was about making space/time to gain a little relief from surviving. If the women trade babysitting, they could have the time to volunteer, an activity that might generate resources and save them from expending their scarce funds, thus buying a small space of freedom from the necessity to hunt for food. However, while this activity might subvert the intention of the income assistance policies, in the sense that women were not reporting a benefit and were not engaged solely in a job search, to classify their actions as resistance the women must communicate an intention of resistance. However, intention may be difficult to discern if it is not overtly stated (Seijo, 2005). The challenges of attributing intentionality raise questions about audience and interpretation of signals, particularly in the face of questions about agency and authorship.
In addition to the need to examine intentionality, the criterion of effectiveness raises questions about whether the scope and scale of the impact of women’s activities of survival are sufficient to qualify their actions as resistance. However, this is not a simple question. Studies that were reviewed in chapter 4 pointed to the need for greater complexity in considering what constituted the object of resistance, and therefore the complexity of what might be considered effectiveness. For example, the study by Gupta (2001), which looked at the resistance of tenant farmers in India, highlighted the importance of global economics as a “third actor” in what is typically considered a binary relationship of power and resistance. Haney’s (1994) study of changing family norms in post-soviet Hungary revealed the way resistance to change was enacted by enforcing traditional gender norms in the context of market liberalization after the fall of the former Soviet Union. In neither case was a regime, by itself, or the perpetrators of state or economic power entirely or solely responsible as the object of resistance, as they were in Scott’s (1985) study. The broadening of contexts makes theorizing resistance more complex. If the object of resistance was reshaping norms, for example, or performing identity, as the cleaners in the Bangkok mall did (Brody, 2006), what might “effectiveness” be? When applied to the focus on survival of the women in this study, and in comparison to other studies of resistance, a picture emerges that suggests women are exerting a force of resistance in the direction of preserving their abilities to parent and to choose the timing and direction of their futures. As described above in chapter 6 in the discussion of dreaming, resistance might be a choice to pursue a path of personal or community healing or health, or a path to taking on a career of interest chosen by them. It may also be focused on affirming an identity, such as Andrea’s vision of living out her father’s dream of moving to the coast. These possibilities suggest that the objects of resistance are those forces which constrain dreaming and the instrumental efforts towards survival.
Without a conscious intentionality, the type of agency described here would constitute a “sleeping” or subsurface potential for resistance. The absence of intentionality would cast doubt on the potential for organized political resistance, or perhaps even for the more limited threshold of instrumental change, either individually or collectively. However, although there was not an indication of an organized collective action of women on welfare, the women in the study did provide evidence of conscious resistance.

I don’t know what they think. I know that they must think that single moms are like a burden or something, but we are raising children that are just as valuable as anybody else’s kids that’s married or (has) higher education or whatever. We’re all trying our best in this world right, and not everybody, you know . . . I think that there’s not enough credit going out to single parents always. We do try. (Gemma, Rnd 3, 309)

Even Gemma, who professed not to know too much about politics, could easily point to experiences that indicated that the new programs were making it harder and recall instances under the new regime that made her feel worthless or like a devalued citizen. The women could not only articulate their intention, but they could link their ideas to practices of avoidance or other kinds of actions that they utilized in their daily lives. They consciously hid these actions from their workers and, also, to some extent, from us as interviewers. This means that whether their actions were overtly political or not, the women were knowingly linking action to a context or infrastructure in which they were relatively powerless.

The women in this study also made calculated steps to thwart policies and find spaces in which to make policies and opportunities work for them. This intention was not only with respect to the Income Assistance system; it extended to the public social support sector, indicating that this sector could also represent an object of resistance. When Arlita resold jeans she got from a
women’s support agency and, similarly, sold things on the boulevard without reporting her earnings, she was asserting resistance to the state’s management of her economic livelihood. These ordinary small acts indicate the creation and operation of an informal economy which is purposefully hidden from the public eye, something which generates an idea of a collectivity of resistance when it becomes part of the regular activity within the community. Thus the actions of the women in the study, while not uniformly or always consciously enacted for the purpose of resisting, nor always enacted with others, carried in them the meaning of opposition and resistance. This idea of subverting the policy intentions of established regulations was publicly available for interpretation or “reading” in the wider community, which constitutes a politicized intention, if not a political act in the organized, formal sense.

An important part of exploring resistance, beyond intentionality and effectiveness, is to note the specific kinds of acts that constitute resistance, as was evident in the studies reviewed in chapter 4. Like the cleaners Brody (2006) studied in a Bangkok mall, who engaged in surreptitious meetings, finding spaces to gossip in spite of their supervisor’s surveillance, the women in this study found places and friends with whom to reinforce their own dreams and sense of identity. This view of women’s “gossip” or talk as resistance brings the verbal expressions of contempt for political leaders, so well expressed by Anne and Mary Jane, into the realm of survival resistance, although it also raises questions about how this type of resistance serves them. Another of the Bangkok cleaners’ activities, also seen here, is that they “escaped” surveillance by moving into neighbourhoods where they felt they would have sympathy. Like the women in this study, the Bangkok cleaners brought their families into or close by the spaces they worked in. They marked the spaces of their neighbourhood with the meaning of home, referencing, for the cleaners, their rural roots and their longing for children left behind. In doing
so, they resisted the spatial occlusion of the mall, which attempted to subsume their identities. Similarly, in this study women repurposed spaces and used private spaces as meeting grounds in which to assert lives that were forbidden or occluded. Like the Bangkok cleaners, who resisted the equation of urban with devaluation of rural/ethnic as lower status, the women in this study resisted the communication of market engagement as the only lifestyle to live or the only legitimate means of defining themselves. Specific acts of resistance thus included things like sharing and exchanging child care, going to the park and enjoying oneself, renting out rooms in one’s home, and subverting training programs by participating without the intention of moving on to a job search. In making these acts, the women preserved their pride, worked to maintain their own sense of community, and resisted assimilation into the behaviour of the policy norms. This suggests that while the acts reviewed in previous chapters could be classified as acts of resistance, the object of resistance was not just the policies themselves, specific regulations like employment plans, but the expectation of compliance which was embedded in the support systems. Also, like the tenant farmers that Gupta studies or the Bangkok mall cleaners, a “third” player emerges: the changing force of global economics which impacts the availability of jobs in the local economy.

Concealing their resistance, though, also meant that women hid their agency, and this put the lone mothers in a double bind; if they appeared unagentic, it put them at risk of being penalized in a system that favoured citizen “activation.” This meant that they were penalized for lack of performance; resistance could therefore be to the mandate of performance. Unlike some of the other examples of resistance, there was an expectation of agency that belied the publicly proclaimed boundary of noninterference. The transgression of the public boundarying was indicated by the penalties that were attached to noncompliance with expectations. The primary
penalty of noncompliance could be as large as a lifetime ban from collecting income assistance, but a chain reaction was triggered by the threat of the lifetime ban. If a woman could not obtain funds, she might not be able to pay rent and therefore might then be unable to keep her shelter. This threat carried with it the bigger one of perhaps losing her children. This loss occurred for Anne. As she struggled to maintain sobriety, her failings led her to be unable to retain her status as a parent, and after being reclassified as a single employable person, she was unable to maintain the kind of housing necessary to meet the social services expectations for adequate family residence. Thus the need to hide resistance was critical. Resistance needed to occur outside of the public eye or it could invite intrusion and penalty. This meant that enacting resistance needed to be subtle, because the appearance or performance of compliance was necessary.

The question explored in this section was whether or how women’s agency did or did not constitute resistance. In accordance with the definitions set out by Hollander and Einwohner (2004), the agency of women in this study not only constitutes resistance, but it is also made up of specific acts that respond to the particular context. These women’s actions were not similar or identical to those of people in other movements, whether it was the foot-dragging of Malay peasants or the gender norming of housewives in post-Soviet Hungary (Haney, 1994; Scott, 1985). What does emerge out of this study is a picture of embattled motherhood and of women squeezed in the middle between poverty, global economics, and a state infrastructure that refuses to recognize the “private” responsibilities of within-family care. While neither the resistance nor the conditions are specific to the body of women, the circumstances of lone parenthood, which are more likely for women, combined with disadvantages experienced through systemic gender differences in benefits and privilege, make both the experience and the resistance particularly
gendered. A history of additional or other disadvantages experienced by Aboriginal women, immigrant women, and others who face particular challenges also means that resistance is additionally about preserving the right to be included in the benefits of the polity in the full sense of who one is.

8.4 Reframing the Definition of Lone Parenting

Focusing on the context of the lives of lone mothers on income assistance recontextualizes the meaning of being a lone parent. As seen through the lens of activity aimed towards economic survival and dreaming, to be a lone parent is not, in either the physical or the social sense, to be alone or without support. Being a lone parent does mean that accountability for children is publicly designated to one parent. In this sense the public regulatory system frames individuals as sole parents and erases context, a neutral action in the context of naming, but one that carries with it a set of implications that generate complexities for women on welfare. Parents in receipt of income assistance are additionally alone in the sense that they individually carry the burden of meeting income assistance regulatory requirements to work. Lone parents are thus doubly negatively defined or signified through policy as not being engaged in the formal economy and as being solely responsible for their children. As Gillespie (2006) describes in a review of child protection in Alberta, the eye of the state frames parents as solely responsible and also wholly dependent on the state. This contradictory definition creates a no-win situation for parents.

The framing, or labelling, of dependency, erases the context of support and the structuring state labelling system, not only for the greater public, but also in the context of what lone parents are permitted to describe or petition the state for. The control over legitimation exacts a performance from the women; as they present themselves to government agents, they
must hide the informal economy they generate for survival and sustenance, as well as any complications that arise from failures of their efforts. Thus government can be seen to demand a performance of fidelity in which women must erase visible evidence of non-state supports, including, typically, their community of other women who are lone parents. They must do this in order to present as good clients and therefore receive the benefits of government disbursement. The effects of these regulations set the lie to the neoliberal rhetoric of choice. Rather than choice, the women had very few avenues for working within the government aid system, being prohibited from many options of pursuing or generating support, whether in private (market) contexts or government-funded programs, and yet also prohibited from seeking alternatives in the sense that if those alternatives failed, and the formal recognized system was inadequate, they could not then argue for further need or assistance. Neither could they seek redress for injustices in the informal system, even though they were dependent on the informal system for their survival.

Another consequence of the permeable boundary between public and private is the public identification of lone parents as an “at risk” group. While epidemiologists and statisticians will point out that correlation of risk factors with lone parenthood is not an indication of causality, women in the study told about attending parenting classes, or, like Jeanie, being involved as a model parent for other at-risk parents. The policy approach to lone parent families seems to assume that educating or encouraging parents to parent better will ameliorate risk. At the same time, though, there is an absence of support to assist women with the kind of struggles represented by the model of scrabbling for resources. Struggling in dire need, under fear of surveillance and the anxiety of trying to comply, generates both stress inside the family and the opportunity for further surveillance, as the women in this study attest. Close surveillance may,
combined with an apprehension of lack of public support, increase anxiety. Such anxiety may be, in part, why Jeanie chooses to spend most of her days at a community centre where staff know and support her. She can be affirmed as a good parent; she chooses the conditions of her surveillance. Thus along with dependency, women are saddled with being publicly framed as “at risk”, an appearance they must manage to prove they are not.

Two implications for further inquiry arise from the policy reframing of the identity of lone mothers. The first continues the ongoing critique of the gendered effects of neoliberal welfare reforms. The second is the opportunity to further explore the meaning and potential of resistance, in particular, the potential for collective resistance leading to political change. In response to the first issue, the occlusion of the gendered experience of women is consistent with the analysis others have made of changes occurring at a macro scale (Breitkreuz, 2005; Brodie, 2002b). The findings also echo other empirical studies, which have found the double burdens of caring for others to be increasing while women manage their own survival (Luxton, 2006; Baker Collins, Neysmith, Porter, & Reitsma-Street, 2009; Weigt, 2006). These findings confirm the narrowing of public spaces for women to publicly articulate a woman-centred experience of the world (Gartside, 2007; Neysmith & Reitsma-Street, 2005). In addition, given that the BC reforms seem to preference a traditional employment structure and that the label of social investment strategies is optimistic, or euphemistic, the question is how or whether the type of women’s agency described by Clarke (2005) or Skevik (2005) is affecting individual or economic transformation. The findings here indicate that individual agency is increasingly limited, not enabled, by the structural changes implemented in BC. In contrast to the rhetoric of the neoliberal movement, and in agreement with other critiques (Lister, 1997; Millar & Ridge, 2006), the findings do reveal agency through the ways in which women negotiate the complex
barriers to surviving and go about exercising some control over their individual lives. These actions do indicate contrary directions of change, that an informal economy is growing, but also that a neighbourhood of community ethos is growing while an oppositional identity is also being sustained. It is not clear what effect this will have on future generations, but the tension between policy imperatives and women’s resistance suggests a dynamic and transformative field of possibilities arising out of the reforms.

Looking at the effect on women and gender relations in society, the question arises of whether citizens are being equally affected and, if there is inequality, what it signifies (Dobrowolsky & Lister, 2005; Jenson & Saint-Martin, 2003; Pulkingham, Fuller & Kershaw, 2010). It is important to point out that the alterations to citizenship are not necessarily specific to the embodied experience of being a woman, a position which would be essentialist. Rather, the alterations are typical of the structured position of gender, a point that Pearce (1990) argued when she suggested that the War on Poverty could not end the feminization of poverty. Critique that has focussed on the intersection of disadvantage and structural change has explored various dimensions that are relevant to these findings. As described in previous chapters, there are particular impacts for women with young children who are also impoverished and receiving state benefits. Combining this with critiques of the potential effects of social investment policies on women suggests that closer attention should be paid to the particular strategies and outcomes or their impact on citizenship, as others have argued (Jenson, 2008). In the case of the BC welfare reforms, the scope and scale of citizenship seems to be curtailed in several ways. First, as pointed out earlier, the state is intruding on the private lives of citizens. This shifts the boundaries, in particular for women and families. The state, in this sense, grows larger, while freedoms grow smaller, even though this is the reverse of state rhetoric. The citizen, in this case the
impoverished parent of young children, is trusted less, becomes a citizen not deserving of the privileges and freedoms accorded others, in particular because of her parenting, as the quote from Gemma (above) suggests. While citizenship is premised on notions of the individual, this situation suggests a more tangled notion of citizenship that includes the responsibilities people have for each other. Citizenship benefits are revealed to travel through the care that parents give to children, for example, so that insufficiently supporting parents denies or endangers children. Adults who are caring for children cannot be treated as merely or only as individuals. One alternative would be to retain the firm boundary between provider (state) and citizen (person) by expanding the citizen to include the corporate entity of the family, a notion that is supported by the current treatment of corporations as legal persons. Another is to consider some citizens as providers, as different from other citizens because of their obligation to provide. Only in this way, by recognizing inequality of functions, can equity be maintained within a situation in which women, as parents, have little choice.

8.4.1 Survivance in the Interstice

One of the potential sources for societal-level change may lie with the experience of gender. As has been discussed, women exercise resistance in the efforts to survive and to thrive. However, the literature on survivance suggests that a conscious sense of collectivity may serve to sustain a collective identity and prepare a latent potential for social change. According to Bélanger (2000), survivance is characterized by a conscious self-referencing and persistent assertion of oppositional identity based on communal cultural existence. The assertion of rights is made not just to one’s own self, but in relation to the survival of the culture, whether in diaspora or physically concentrated. Authors within indigenous survivance movements look forward to the survival of identity and a future of political legitimacy, if not sovereignty.
(Isernhagen, 1999; Stromberg, 2006), while writings on African American women’s experiences, which are starting to refer to the concept of survivance, focus on the creation and maintenance of community partially through women’s work of raising children, raising racialized pride, and caring for and within community.

The context of neoliberal reforms suggests that the conditions which give rise to survivance movements may be present. In looking at the neoliberal welfare reforms and their effects on the gendered experience of raising children, it appears that the exertion of policy is attempting to effect an erasure. While the experience of raising children is not directly disallowed, all the contextual supports are. Women are not permitted to argue for needs with a premise that they need to care for children, nor are they permitted to argue that child care subsidy rates are grossly insufficient and that child care is unavailable, nor can a woman argue that the income assistance supplements are inadequate to feed herself and her family, nor is it permissible to resist directives to search for minimum wage jobs, and so on. To argue or engage in noncompliance is to invite surveillance, possible suspension of benefits, and the naturalized consequence of the possible removal of children. The agents of the state have freedoms, in fact, rights, to intervene in the context of family collapse which may be an outcome of policies made by the state. In the context of the denial of the right to argue for the conditions for survival, the answer to the question of whether the conditions for a survivance movement have emerged appears to be yes.

The question of whether a survivance movement has emerged may be most easily answered in the affirmative for Aboriginal women. The Aboriginal women in the study were very aware of the risk to their own and their families’ welfare given their own histories of generations of experience under colonial rule, and they worked to counter negative experiences.
For example, Arlita and N’k, who both had been fostered, were involved in cultural regeneration activities such as dancing and performance, activities which they saw as being important for their communities. In Arlita’s case, her engagement connected her to the urban Aboriginal diaspora (Franklin, 2001), while for N’k, her activities connected her to her specific culture and clan. They expressed, in various ways, the need to resist the imposition of ideals which were not their own by valuing their own mothering and focussing on personal healing. Laura expressed similar aspirations as she anticipated being involved in a class-action court case against her former residential school. Healing and cultural regeneration was a central focus of these women’s dreaming, and they looked forward to a time when their children would enjoy society in a way that had been denied their parents’ generation.

The ways in which Aboriginal women enacted their survivance included cultural activities, such as dancing and festivals, or workshops and spiritual activities, but Baker (2005) also describes Aboriginal women’s storytelling as a tool of survivance. Whether in oral or written form, storytelling as Baker describes it is about creating a particular vision and reference to a healthy and vibrant future, as well as referencing a historical era in which women occupied positions of relative power and moral persuasion. The women in this study did not, in a specific kind of articulation, tell the kinds of cultural stories Baker writes about, but the work of telling the interviewers their personal stories may constitute a kind of restorying of self and collectivity.

Arlita’s practices are of the type that Kirmayer, Brass and Tait (2000) term “pan-Aboriginal,” referring to an approach to healing which grounds individuals in their identity but operates outside of the context of a specific community or cultural heritage. Fanon’s (1961/1967) critique of pan-Africanism may apply; he argued that there was no “general” Africanism, only specific national and tribal experiences, and that efforts to pay homage to Africanism were doomed to fail in the sense that the term was meaningless except as a fulfillment of “Othering.” However, Fanon was arguing against pan-Africanism as a an icon for political call to action, and in this case, individuals are using a general cultural turn to revive identity. This is what Chandler, Lalonde, Sokol, & Hallett (2003) call a healing restorying of identity which was fractured through colonial practices.
Cynthia, for example, first reluctantly identified as Métis in the recruitment phase, then admitted to being Aboriginal, then began to talk in terms of her mother’s specific band as she moved to start the process of a status claim, and finally said that it “kind of bugged her” that her daughters’ father did not identify as First Nation. Cynthia’s journey represents a repositioning of her identity and claim to the world, as well as a growing assertiveness about her urban Aboriginal identity. Anne, the woman who had been street engaged and who was from a family that had been urban for many generations, also pointed to several public projects she had been involved in that represented the articulation of Aboriginal experiences in the city. Thus while the women were from diverse Aboriginal cultures and had individually distinct experiences, there seemed to be consciousness of a more common experience of being an Aboriginal woman in the city.

Beyond the specific experiences and potential for an urban Aboriginal survivance movement, though, there is a question about whether a collective oppositional vision of identity is being created. A focus on mothering and gender provides a different contextual reference from either the indigenous or the francophone movement. There is precedent for the type of gender-based collective identity which might represent a survivance movement in the development of the “milk league” by impoverished women of inner-city Lima, Peru, many of whom are also indigenous (Boesten, 2003). However, that example references a translation into a political movement of what was originally a mother-identified movement specific to the Latin American context. The African American experience described as other-mothering offers a gender-referenced survivance model, referenced to the activities of individual women raising children with a sense of racial pride and a commitment to community (Hill Collins, 1994). In both cases, the movement’s development is premised on the daily tasks of living and parenting, including the work of provisioning for children, supervising, and so on. These activities may be the parallel
to those that Scott (1985) discussed, constituting a resistance aimed not at class division so much as the particularly gendered experience of differentiated parenting roles and the consequences arising from them; in other words, a gender-based resistance.

In this study, if the everyday experiences of mothering formed resistance, they may also inform a survivance movement. However, in the Indigenous case, a gender-referenced version of survivance activity is argued to arise from the particular gendered division of labour in historical cultures (Anderson, 2000). A critical piece of the raising of that activity to the level of survivance is the work of articulate thinkers and leaders who, like Hill Collins or Anderson, give meaning to women’s efforts and their role in the greater cultural and political movements. While a common sense of culture or racialized pride may not exist between all the diverse women in this study, their talk with their interviewers could be seen as collective restorying of the experience of women who, like themselves, are also struggling with the difficult circumstances of living with income assistance. In particular, the stories that were offered as part of the lingua franca about policy injustices, such as those that painted the political leaders as uncaring, are part of a collective framework of understanding that even women like Gemma refers to when she says she “doesn’t know much.” Storytelling also is an instance in which the women represent themselves to us, recognizing us as knowing individuals in the process of holding us as audience. Baker (2005) looks to Aboriginal women’s storytelling as a particularly gendered form of survivance. The retelling of the stories of experiences on welfare, and their willing participation in this storying, suggests that the women in this study similarly participate in an effort to bolster the morale of others like themselves and to affirm the right of women like themselves to have decent lives, both characteristics of survivance. What is lacking is a public forum in which these
stories begin to make a difference in changing structural circumstances of power, but they do bolster and affirm a sense of resistance.

8.5 Transformations of Gender Exclusion

It would be ironic if one of the principal outcomes of neoliberal reform is a constraining of agency when its public characterization is a removal of government from citizens’ lives and a removal of constraints on agency. However, feminist critiques have focussed on the way social investment and neoliberal welfare reform approaches may not address the unequal starting place that accrues from systemic gender inequality (Jenson, 2008; Brodie, 2002a). The closer examination of these BC welfare reforms in chapter 3, however, reveals that beyond increasing gender inequities, which may result from preferences given to traditional forms of employment, the programmatic stipulations are themselves disempowering in a gendered, systemic way because of the way they deny family responsibilities. The impacts of the regulations shift from benign neglect to active interference when participation in résumé preparation is demanded or short-term training denied. However, neglect by underfunding child care while not attending to the lack of supply, and ignoring important issues like health problems while demanding performance shifts, generates further disadvantage. This shift begins to explain why staff in the follow-up groups in this study reported that women seem to be struggling harder under these reforms.

The way that constraints on gender identity are changing with the imposition of neoliberal reforms may be more than a quantitative shift. Fraser and Gordon (1997) described structural transitions of paternalist patterns, from feudal systems to the chattel and ownership system of the pre-Victorian era, to the industrial labouring era. The restructuring of public and private may be shifting gender relations into a new situation through the emergence of a dual
economy (formal and informal). The configuration of neoliberal welfare reform has in this case occurred without strong supports for family and without addressing gender inequities. As a result, women are operating in what appear to be increasingly marginal circumstances, which may signal a new kind of insecurity. The women in this study operate beyond the law, in a situation where they are at once transgressive and dependent on transgression for their survival. To maintain their ability to survive, they must make their transgressions invisible. That some women are better able to do this than others renders the agency of survival a wily agency. The implications for the operation of dreaming in the interstice are important to attend to because the content of dreams indicates what is lacking, while the struggle to enact those dreams indicates how the narrowing of the interstice may indicate a diminishing possibility of freedoms.

The impacts of welfare reforms on female lone parents which have been reviewed here, consistent with critiques of the European social investment models, cast doubt on the actual utility of reforms as far as the expressed policy goals were stated. In addition, the specific review of BC as a case study suggests that, although social investment rhetoric is occasionally used to rationalize programs, the focus in BC seems to be on using mid-century employability ideals focussed on full-time daytime employment at union wages or better. This type of employment is not available to most of the women in this study due to their lack of training or child care. Social investment, if it could be considered as investment in human resource capital, is oriented towards traditional resource- or service sector employment where a union assured a mainly male workforce of a living wage. Not only are those sectors heavily in decline, but women may never be able to fulfill those roles easily because women still tend to have primary responsibility for child care. Welfare policy is revealed through the struggles these women have to be out of step with contemporary economic predictions for the future of formally recognized work, betraying
one aspect of the “social investment” model, relevance. However, in BC the approach is also revealed as being ignorant of women’s needs by treating all welfare clients as “universal” ideal types: childless and without responsibility. In concert with the intersection with other disadvantages, this suggests an evolution of continued stratification of disadvantage, if not a deepening of social exclusion along gender lines.

The question that will be explored in the next chapter, in the context of theories of planning, is whether or how these findings may be informed by theories of change utilized in planning, and how social planners might respond to the needs of lone parents, in particular, female lone parents.
CHAPTER 9 – DISCUSSION: SOCIAL PLANNING RESPONSES

In this chapter, I review the four research questions posed at the beginning. I summarize the theoretical and practice implications of the way women resist and interrogate income assistance policies and the conditions of poverty, and the consequences of this resistance for the way they occupy the urban space. I argue that their invisibility as urban denizens has impacts beyond individual economic needs or social inclusion, and that planning for a vital urban space should consider and incorporate the effects of their agency in creating a life for themselves. In contrast to the potential and actual agency of the women presented here, social planning, as it is currently organized, presents a service-oriented paradigm that responds to gaps created by policies set by higher levels of government. As outlined in the last three chapters, the way women use urban space for living suggests that their struggles to achieve their dreams and scrabble for resources occur in a social and physical interstice between public and private. Social planning could utilize the interstices to improve the quality of life by facilitating opportunities for individuals to meet their goals. Changing the planning practice paradigm could involve little more than applying current physical spatial land use planning as a social planning tool, but this would require a gender sensitivity or gender lens to “see” the way this particular family form occupies and uses urban space.

The findings are oriented towards discovering what possibilities lie in the urban social planning framework, or what Friedmann (2003) calls theory focussed on the information planners need, or substantive knowledge for planning. As discussed in chapter 1, social planning frameworks lack substantive content related to the totality of the challenges facing these women, raising questions, if substantive knowledge is absent, whether theory of planning practice is adequate to meet the challenge. The practice of social planning in the city of Vancouver reflects
various service orientations through supportive housing, food banks, recreation planning, special populations engagements (youth, immigrants, seniors, etc.), and healthy lifestyle improvements. This miscellany of service objectives, even if designed and delivered to meet needs, may also indicate an inadequate practice paradigm. To the extent that a service orientation is atheoretical, it mitigates against a creative city focus and is a poor foundation for systemic change. If the efforts of women to enact their dreams in the interstice are taken as a starting point, then the formulation of social planning must include questions about how the social planning framework of the city can stimulate or provide new opportunities. Stated another way, how can the everyday choices of citizens be expanded to enable the growth and development or uptake of particularly creative ways of using space?

9.1 The Effects of BC Reforms on Future Life Possibilities

The overarching research question asks how BC neoliberal welfare reform affects the lives of female-headed lone parent families and the futures they want.

9.1.2 Research Question No. 1

1. How does the current restructuring of state welfare systems, as evidenced in changes in income assistance policies, mould, constrain and direct the future life possibilities for lone mothers and their children?

To investigate this question, some highlights of the BC welfare reform were explored to set the historical context and introduce the scale of change, and then the responses and struggles of women were viewed through analysis of their specific contexts and experiences. This view “up” from micro analysis has the strength of grounding the analysis of policy in the direct experience of individuals. However, as outlined in chapter 3, analysis of the welfare reform in BC reveals that one use is as an economic policy and political lever, couched in a rhetoric of prosperity
making. The analysis of the effects on the women in the study, though, challenges notions that the reforms have helped contribute to economic prosperity. The women’s struggles indicate a potential deepening along margins of disadvantage, such as gender, Aboriginal history, and ability. The policy reforms obviously constrain women’s material circumstances; but the struggle to survive also constrains women’s dreams. The process of struggling details a clearer understanding of what poverty is like; how futures are constrained, and not just the immediate present. The necessity of identity performance also reveals the way the object of policy, or the terrain of struggle, seems to be shifting from one of material struggle to a struggle for inclusion through identity, in the manner outlined by Butler (1999). Class issues become one of performativity; those who can perform as if they are middle class, like Molly, can be assured of the tools necessary to participate in the economy. The analysis of individual everyday lives confirms the macro level conclusions.

The policy analysis indicates that the BC reforms appear to be focussed on transitions to full-time labouring employment. This would suggest that the reforms do not follow a “Third Way” model of emphasizing social investment or preparing to move into future economies, such as the knowledge economy. Instead, by denying training opportunities and reducing third sector supports, the policies appear to anticipate transitions to the type of mid-twentieth-century full time employment, of regular day jobs with benefits, which were typically held by men who were supporting families on a single wage. The struggles of the women in the study highlight the way working opportunities for the women are undermined because of the lack of childcare. Training which the women in the study accessed was oriented toward retail sales, hospitality industry or caring support duties. Women had trouble accessing training for non-traditional jobs such as construction work, or even limited computer training to take on slightly more skilled
administrative work. Meanwhile, the reduction in rates and the low levels of support kept lone parents scrambling. A gender lens might distinguish the differential effects for those who are caring for children from those who are not; and a class-based lens might additionally investigate how people who are impoverished could develop skills for the knowledge economy. In spite of these trends, the process of scrabbling for resources indicates that it is not a monolithically oppressive situation. The opportunity for change does not come from the policy, though, but from the women’s creativity.

9.1.2 Characterizing the Effects of BC Welfare Reforms on Lone Mothers

One way to disaggregate the effects of the reforms is to compare current disadvantage with potential future disadvantage. As Edin and Kefalus (2005) found, women whose prospects were for serial minimum wage jobs had no incentive to stay in the job market; there was no loss to stepping in or stepping out, as there would be for professionals. Similarly, in BC the risks to future disadvantage appear to be that, for women who already have poor prospects in the labour market, the revisions in policy inhibit the ability to obtain education or training that would ensure employment that could sustain a family. The implication is not that women are necessarily at risk, but that the poorer earning potential of women in general, combined with barriers to increasing skills, perpetuate systemic disadvantage. Women with low human capital resources may find it difficult to transition from income supports to employment because they cannot attain a minimum level of support in the marketplace. The welfare wall appeared particularly difficult for women who did not have networks of family or friends that could support them. Thus one characteristic of the reforms is that the new regulations, which prohibit the retention of earnings, restrict training, reduce third sector supports, and undermine the provision of child care, appear to make it more difficult for the women to support themselves and their families.
Looking at the process of scrabbling for resources, described in figure 1, also makes it apparent that women are working hard, all the time, to balance between taking care of home and children, and taking care of self; between affirming a sense of self, and resisting policies which were counterproductive. Failing could mean risking the ability to retain one’s children. The fragile sense of balance indicates that the reforms, while not causing failure directly, decrease the resiliency of lone mothers by putting their systems of sustenance at risk. Those women who can continue to manage appear to be ones with more resources; women who had crisis, personal difficulties, or disabilities, appeared to not be able to keep their families together. Beyond creating stressed parents, this suggests that the impacts extended to the children.

The picture that emerges is of embattled motherhood. While a comparative study would need to be done with men to see if lone fathers were struggling in the same way, this study indicates that women are struggling to make a secure future for themselves and their children. More importantly, the particular dreams that women have are embattled, indicating a loss of choice and flexibility. Welfare reforms did not dampen dreams; but the reforms did make having the space to dream much more difficult. Women snatched time to keep their dreams alive, though, as Laura showed by taking her children to the park and Molly demonstrated by taking her child to a corporate space where there was a play gym, women worked hard to find ways to relax while making a good home for their children. Thus one of the characteristics of the reforms in BC was that they made dreaming more difficult, including that of having a good family life.

The difficulty of enacting dreams, and the stringency of regulations, required the ability to appear to be in compliance. Women both used identification as a “needy person” to obtain resources, and also simultaneously rejected the label. Molly was reprimanded for asking to take training before her child was three; Mary Jane received an admonishment about women on
welfare from the assistant at her elected representative’s constituency office. Women were forced to appear compliant in order to maintain their benefits, access programs, and participate in training in compliance with their employment plans. The nature of the demands suggest rehabilitation more than support, and the lack of any other options suggests a coercive environment, not one of support. Nevertheless, the women also exercised agency, fighting back by resisting work training that did not work for them; in the three cases where women exited welfare, by temporarily removing themselves from the case rolls.

The effect on the women suggests that the neoliberal welfare reforms in BC are reshaping citizen relations by exerting a demand for performance of self. Citizenship as performance indicates a lack of freedom to be oneself; and in this case of looking at the contexts and lives of lone mothers, the lack of freedom suggests that motherhood, or perhaps parenthood, is under siege. The pattern of shaping, though, suggests an affirmation of the kinds of identity shifting women have engaged in for millennia to obtain benefits through husbands, family or community. The indication is that the welfare reforms did not have the effect of liberating women, but of further retrenching ways of enacting gendered oppressions.

9.1.3 Urban Aboriginal Women in the City

The IAP study provided a relatively unique opportunity to communicate about the experiences of urban aboriginal families. While statistically as well as anecdotally, the urban population is known to be highly diverse, the small sample of Aboriginal women in this study represented this diversity well. Among this group of Aboriginal women, who ranged in age from their early twenties to over 50, there were three who had been raised as foster children in the state protection system, five who could call specific reserve communities home, two who were urban Aboriginal women from families that had been in the city for multiple generations. Some
of these women were very involved in cultural activities, and some were not. The list continues, but it demonstrates that this population is diverse, even while they have in common many of the elements that continue to create a unique trajectory for Aboriginal people in Canada, such as the legacy of residential schooling, laws which stripped women of band membership when they married non-status men, and the legacy of education ceilings which were imposed with a penalty of loss of official federal status for those who obtained post-secondary degrees. Against this backdrop, confirming the diversity of urban Aboriginal experiences provides some valuable insight into the similarities and differences with the non-Aboriginal population, confirming, in this case, the same scrabbling for resources.

The data of the Aboriginal women’s life experiences were considered along with the non-Aboriginal women’s stories to develop a collective analysis of how women were faring on welfare. This approach provided a strong foundation for the methodologies used, because the grounded theory relies on contrast to confirm findings. Thus the fact that Aboriginal women held dreams, too, confirmed the importance of dreaming to women living with extreme poverty. At the same time, some of the dreams the Aboriginal women held were unique to the histories they had as Aboriginal people. For example, Laura, who was dreading but also anticipating joining in on a class action lawsuit against a residential school she had attended as a child, hoped to eventually return to her community and serve as a counsellor, helping young people who had been affected by the legacy of residential school abuse. In cases like that, the dream for community healing or self-healing took precedence over any immediate struggle to get a job or not have a job. Laura, for instance, had a long work history, and could have gone back to work. She was struggling, though, to heal herself and ground her parenting in good habits. In this context, the expectations to work were less relevant. While Laura experienced the same
pressures of poverty as others, her primary focus was not on welfare or the privations of poverty, but on overcoming the colonial past.

The struggles of Aboriginal women like Laura indicate ways in which the colonial past is still very present. Welfare reform risks re-inscribing poverty and “welfare colonialism” on these women’s lives, recreating new poverty cycles by preventing them from gaining self-sufficiency or skills, or by risking their family cohesion. As Fiske (1995) notes, there is complexity in the experiences of the women. They are not wholly disadvantaged, given that they are choosing to live in the city, and yet they continue to experience the burden of welfare reform, a conundrum that impacts their children and recreates some of the context the women are attempting to flee.

9.1.4 Recommendations for Family Research

As I discussed in chapter 2, very little work has been done to address the confluence of family form, parenting tasks, and welfare reform. The findings from this study, in conjunction with the work of the IAP, provide evidence that managing parenting and material necessity in the context of welfare reform creates an impossible conundrum for lone parents (Gurstein and Vilches, 2009; Gurstein et al., 2008). The way welfare reforms were implemented assumes dependence on extended family, and as the IAP research showed, those who have little support, or who support others, fare differently than those who have support (Gurstein & Vilches, 2009). This is consistent with findings by Neysmith et al (2010), that women support an extended network of family and friends, in addition to children, if they have them, and that erosion of supports hurts not only individuals but also frays the networks which are the fabric of society.

The findings presented here further show that the process of engaging in constant scrabbling for resources, balancing the making of home with caring for self, and trying to keep the dreams alive, represents a fragile ecosystem which is vulnerable to failure. The focus on
agency demonstrates that the failure is not necessarily through lack of agency, but through lack of ability to maintain a dream, whether for healing, of selfhood, or for family. Dreaming, though, occurs in the context of constant work to locate safe childcare, of finding ways to take children to affordable recreation, such as parks, of going to community events, of not being able to afford books or computer equipment, of needing to sell toys for food. Beyond indicating need, the findings suggest the need to reconceptualise the tasks of parenting, and to challenge the current policy categories which, on the one hand, treat failures in parenting as individual psycho-social problems, and on the other hand, ignore parenting responsibilities in having only income assistance classifications that are related to labour market readiness (expected to work, person with disability, etc.).

There are two implications for further research on families, welfare and stress. The first follows the suggestion by Skevik (2005) that if lone parents are the most sensitive family form, they may be the first to indicate stresses that other family forms are experiencing as well. If lone parents are struggling to dream their way out, then two-parent households may be compensating for the absence of help from extended families by relying on each other to stand in for whole networks of help. Evidence of gender imbalance in domestic tasks (Elson, 2005) would suggest that there are particular effects for women, but also that the couple may be highly stressed as well, vulnerable to smooth functioning of employment, health or well-being in order to maintain equilibrium.

Second, the findings from this study show that some income assistance recipients with extended families have the resources necessary to move effectively toward achieving their dreams. If this was found to be true generally, it would add to other studies that suggest that welfare reform has a middle class bias. A middle-class bias may not meet the needs generated by
the circumstances of most of the women in this study, but in addition, the expectations may set up future failure for all women by assuming a context of support which does not exist by definition of being a woman on welfare. This was most evident in the story of Anne as she struggled to prepare a résumé and get a job after having worked on the streets for 17 years. While ecological approaches to studying family vulnerability are not new (Goelman, Pivik, & Guhn, 2011), further research should be done on the differences between families which may be created by different resources available to different classes. (Although the warning Portes (1998) gives in respect to social capital still stands; less well off classes do not necessarily have impoverished supports.) Investigating the resources utilized by women, as documented here, could support the informed development of an approach to supporting impoverished families such as is found in the capabilities approach.

The struggles of these women to cover responsibilities of parenting, and meet material needs and policy expectations, suggests that the conditions of income assistance are constructed in expectation that the head of household is able to access supports from somewhere other than the public sphere. Women in this study accessed a complex web of supports, including from formal third sector organizations as well as informally through friends. Support from formal organizations was often exchange for fitting the profile of a person in need, while support from family and friends often occurred as barter or exchange, although as sharing of leisure or assets. Changes in the structure of the other sectors thus becomes important to consider when trying to understand the repercussions of welfare reform. There is a need for further research into the way third sector and informal supports are affected by neoliberal welfare reform.

The way the tasks of social reproduction and income generation are combined in the person of a lone parent has implications for understanding the societal context of family life. As
reviewed in chapter 2, census trends confirm that lone parent families now consistently form 20% of families with children, and that across time a significant portion of children are being raised in lone parent families (Ambert, 2006). Against this background, the lack of understanding of the effect of the inability to balance parenting with meeting material needs on the dynamics of relationship between parent and children is concerning, and the effects on social inclusion are not known. Although this study focussed on the women’s experiences, many of the women in this study spoke constantly about a variety of concerns such as keeping their children from being drawn into drugs or gang related activities like carrying parcels, being exposed to intravenous needle usage paraphernalia, or going downtown to hang out where a variety of illicit activities were going on. These women’s concerns reflect an older meaning of the word discipline as guidance toward raising their children to be good citizens, not just about constraining behaviour and keeping children safe or stimulating their developmental growth. The process of “Dreaming a Way Out” discussed above (see figure 2), indicates that the main constraint on scrabbling for resources is the concern to parent, including by providing materially, but also by keeping children secure, offering them hope through opportunities, health in the sense of a positive self-image, and a sense of pride in identity with the past. The nature of these tasks or dreams indicates that the risk of failing has societal outcomes. Unlike the culture of poverty thesis (see Lewis, 1970), there is no “culture of poverty” or “underclass.” Rather, there is a strong and consistent concern with community and the future such as that outlined by Hill Collins (1994) in writing about other-mothering, or as reflected in some writing by or about Aboriginal experiences (Baker, 2005; Anderson, 2000; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).

Concern for public benefit redefines the tasks of parenting as ones that are important for the future of collectivities; of societies. When the findings of scrabbling for resources, making
space for dreaming, and dreaming a way out are examined in this way, the poverty and stress of unsupportive income policies can be seen as propagating further social division, and undermining the work of parents in their role of reproducing moral citizens. While the tendency is to regard moral good as a soft public good, the Ottawa Charter and other international agreements emphasize the importance of citizen engagement for the functioning of a healthy polity (Clow, 2004). Enumerating the tasks of parenting as they relate to the development of citizenship is an important step in recasting welfare reform in terms of the social effects it may have as a mechanism of state reproduction.

These three implications: the potential impact on future generations, the potential for growing social exclusion, and the necessity of broadening the definition of parenting which is considered in policy and academic work, only hints at some ways the findings could be extended. The most important finding is that neoliberal reforms are deepening income poverty for lone parents, and may be having a magnified effect because of the marginalization of women.

In the next sections, the implications will be looked at more closely in terms of what they mean for the concepts of living in place, and the interaction of agency and place, which is a key question in planning.

9.2 The Effects of Place and Policy on Agency

The second research question focussed on the way material conditions of place interacted with policy to constrain women’s agency.

Research Question No. 2

2. How do the context of place and the constraints of material conditions interact with income assistance policies to affect lone mothers’ agency and resistance to create a future they want for themselves and their children?
In contrast to the first question, which focussed on the impacts of neoliberal welfare reform on the future life possibilities of women and children, this question focusses on agency. Three frameworks for understanding agency were reviewed for this study. The most directly relevant to women on welfare was Lister’s (2004) four agencies: getting by, getting on, getting back and getting out. In addition, Hollander and Einwohner’s (2004) meta-review of resistance identified two properties of resistance, efficacy and intentionality, as well as additional dimensions of these qualities. Scott (1985) provided examples of “weapons of the weak” particular to the context of Malay peasants. Contemporary extensions of Scott’s work point to ways in which resistance may be symbolic, performative, and more than just bidirectional. For example, when seen in the context of globalization, resistance may effectively utilize broader scales of power to elude polarized struggle (Gupta, 2001), while oppression may also be seen as byproduct of struggles at broader scales (Brody, 2006). Lastly, the concept of survivance for parenting for persons of colour, in francophone and in indigenous literature extends the scope of objectives for resistance to include ironic reflexivity as a means, and collective survival as an object (Baumgartner, 2006; Bélanger, 2000; King, 2003; Vizenor & Lee, 1999).

In addition to the kinds of objectives of agency Lister outlined, the women in this study also engaged in performance of identity to meet the expectations of policy directives. Women consciously used identity to fit through category “gates” in order to qualify for benefits. Looking more closely at agency and the characteristics of agency – it could be seen simply as the inventiveness of meeting needs such as when Arlita took her belongings to the boulevard to sell. Agency in service of longer term goals often also appeared, though, as a reflexive, identity-engaged effort. For example, when Natasha, wanted to move to the country to raise her child in what she saw as a healthier environment, she utilized a notion of self in place that motivated her
desires and efforts. In contrast, Lister’s four agencies are centred on axes of survival, relating to economic objectives of survival, opposition to control through dependency, and freedom from income supports.

While the agencies reviewed here shaped and utilized the public presentation of self as a means as well as for material ends, agency expressed through performance was also self-affirming. Mary Jane, for example, affirmed her identity as a mother when she protested her abuse by the welfare office security personnel, the elected representative’s constituency office, and the impatient retail store customer. This was an important focus of agency in the context of a constant public erasure of the value of her efforts to parent. In making this point to the interviewer, her telling of the story had a double reflexive. She was acting in response to perceived shaping of her identity, and then enacting that again for the interviewer. In this way, agency oriented towards self-identity is an instance of resistance as well as capacity building. It preserves the self as a foundation for further action. When agency is oriented towards identity-affirmation it also serves to implement specific personal dreams. For example, when Carla protested being labelled “a needy” person by her training educator, she was resisting the occlusion of her identity and making support for herself to finish her schooling. If performance of identity is a “weapon of the weak” it is also indicative of a tension that is not merely material, but also structured towards objectives that are broader than immediate survival.

The women’s agency was indicative of intelligent strategy for achieving aims. However, as De Certeau (1984) noted, there is a difference between tactical agency and strategic agency. Strategic agency is understood as that which includes an agenda and reshapes circumstances and opportunities; tactical agency is about meeting needs, but does not necessarily change circumstances. Following this distinction, many of the actions of the women might fall under the
definition of tactical agency. The effectiveness of their agency in achieving broader aims was limited by their material conditions and the policy constraints. Key tactical agencies might be those listed in chapter 5, such as making debt, bartering and trading, building relationships for support, and selling assets. Actions that are self-affirming, symbolic, and future oriented serve the kinds of strategic aims that De Certeau originally outlined. The process of dreaming a way out outlined here, including preserving time to care for their family, may offer the opportunity to effect social change.

In addition to tactical and strategic objectives which are self-serving, resistance offers another type of end. In Scott’s (1985) study, resistance offered a way to elude the occlusion of identity and surrender of willpower. Lister included “getting back” as one of four agencies. Solomon (2003) described something similar, noting how African American women used resistance to separate their compliance with welfare rules from their autonomy as learners, to resist racial typing, and to maintain dignity in mandated work retraining programs. In this study, “weapons of the weak,” or tools of resistance, might include performance of identity to evade or meet regulations, material self-serving agencies which were out of compliance with rules, self-advocacy, and caring acts directed at family and neighbourhood. For example, if the extremely limited support granted to these parents was an indication that parenting was under attack, then the persistent actions of the women toward maintaining their roles as parents, the cohesion of the families, and the retention of their children, could be said to be resistance. Resistance, in this sense, interrogated the policies by offering an alternate way of being, and by moving out of compliance, continues to provoke a search for what works. For the women themselves, common ways to out-manoeuvre policies provides a *lingua franca* which reinforces an identity of
resistance and a collective awareness. In this sense, resistance is an end in itself, as well as a
means to an objective.

Another object of resistance could be the maintenance of collective survival, or
survivance. As discussed above, survivance is about maintaining the potential for current or
delayed political change by maintaining collective identity (Bélanger, 2000; Stromberg, 2006).
However, survivance implies an overt awareness of a collective identity, if not among everyone,
at least among elite cultural leaders. Sometimes the actions of women in the study fit the criteria
of survivance. Anne, for example, espoused a rhetoric of resistance because she identified
welfare as a provocateur against women like herself, as a sex trade worker and mother. Some of
the actions of the Aboriginal women like Arlita or N’k could also fit the criteria of survivance, as
they engaged in cultural activities based on their understanding that they have been alienated by
historical societal attitudes, regulations and laws. However, when considering all the women in
the study and whether they could articulate a collective identity, it is not as clear that their
actions qualified as a gender-, parent- or class-related resistance. The clearest relationship may
be a common consciousness of being beleaguered parents, but even in this case, it is not clear
that the women identified a strong collective ideal, which is one of the characteristics of
survivance.

The concept of parenthood as a perceived threatened category needs further exploration,
though there is plenty of evidence – from falling birth rates to economic struggles—that parents
are under stress and are marginalized. However, the way those who are parenting perceive this
and how they respond would inform further understanding about the social impacts of parenting
and the perceived implications for society and future generations. The question for further
research on identification of parenting as a category of marginalization would also explore whether there is potential for class- or gender-based change.

This review of agency and resistance confirms and challenges Hollander and Einwohner’s (2004) classifications, while also raising questions about the way Lister typed agencies (2004). In looking at the research question of whether or how agency affects place or material constraints of poverty and vice versa, the issues raised here suggest it is useful to categorize agency both by outcome as well as by means and context. Outcomes include personal material ends, strategic ends which are not necessarily material, and sometimes collective ends. Resistance itself can be a goal because it serves to reinforce oppositional identity and thus make space for individual dreams or possibly cultural or collective dreams. Thus agency, in the form of resistance and survivance, to the extent it is present, can be a goal as well as a means. The scope, or context, of agency also varies; the way women attempt to balance social reproduction with income generation shows that they are not just engaged in an oppositional struggle with income assistance policies. The way women evade some policy objectives indicates that women recognize a broader contextual struggle of policy with globally changing objectives. Thus agency and resistance are constrained by income assistance and policies, but they are also assisting to “interrogate” income assistance policies and the contextual conditions of the women’s poverty.

The tools or techniques of scrabbling for resources, when contrasted to performativity, indicate that while poverty is about survival, welfare reform is shifting support away from material relief to a contest over identity. If qualifying for state supported benefits and privileges defines social inclusion, it is one step further to consider that the object of welfare reform may not be primarily oriented towards individual economic support, but instead be citizen-defining (Caragata, 2008; Dobrowolsky & Lister, 2005; Good-Gingrich, 2008; Reutter et al., 2009). The
deployment of techniques of identity-shaping to qualify for benefits confirms the advocates’ impressions that material struggles are less central to the objectives of policy reform. If their impressions are true, it would complete a circular evolution of poverty relief policy, from social engineering philosophies of the nineteenth century, through the charitable social work, to first wave feminist advocacy, to the economically “muscular” material policy of the mid-twentieth century, into the identity politics of resistance of the late twentieth century. The indications from the agency of women in this study are that income assistance policies appear to be returning to a positioning of the poor as “other,” not based on character, which is other-defined, but based on the appearance of a narrowly defined agency. If so, social exclusion remains, but is moderated through performativity, coincident with the evolution of consumer society which employs affect as a commodity to enhance the sale of goods and services.

If one of the consequences of a re-employment of agency is social exclusion, then the repositioning and new demands of agency also make managing the public private divide more difficult. The practical implication is that the barrier to becoming self-sufficient is the ability to manage both familial care and financial self-support. The challenge appears to be a particular burden for lone parents. Individual agency, and agency in respect to the traditionally feminine roles of caring, is at once erased and renamed. As this study indicates, the women must both erase their need to care for family in order to qualify for benefits, and erase their agency. Defining the agency of women on welfare is thus all about resistance; it far exceeds the economic definitions put forward by Lister.

9.2.2 Considering the Interaction of Place and Gender

The second part of research question no. 2 is focussed on how place affects women’s agency, especially in interaction with material and policy constraints. The hard scrabbling for
resources described in chapter 5 not only represents agency, but represents the routes of survival, indicating the traces of the impoverished on the cityscape. Activities that the women engaged in marked connections between resources as well as the utilization of space. Space was not just a location of activity; it was itself a resource, shortening the distance between need and supply, as well as supplying a place for various private and public functions. As Dear and Wolch (1987; 1993) also described, place can become specific to an identity by virtue of the concentration of resources, so that being in that space can then confer identity. Part of agency was a choice in how space was utilized and the meaning women gave to spaces.

Place was not just a location of activity, but also a resource which the women helped make. The women in this study referred to East Vancouver as a place of freedom, a place where neighbours helped each other and as a place that they could afford. As Natasha made friends with a woman on the street, found a roommate to share living costs, and advocated at her local child care centre for better attention to public safety, she helped create the kind of community that met her needs. Olivia, too, made her housing project safer by taking in children after school and being an “other mother” in the sense that Hill Collins described. Agency, in this sense is affected by the interaction of poverty, which creates a need that drives women to places they can afford, but then also orients them to resolve problems that are endemic to such places. Agency is expressed through the material need of poverty, but towards the future in the sense of creating a place and space to raise future generations. In creating a hospitable place, the women created a place in which they could begin to enact their dreams. East Vancouver and the particular places these women lived could be characterized as communities of hope (Baum, 1997), marked by wanting in the sense of desire, as well as want in the sense of need.
Although the question about place is focused on how women’s agency is affected by place and material circumstances, their agency also affects place and creates opportunity. The fact that the women had to walk everywhere, for example, meant that there was a concentration of resources that served them and became their neighbourhood. Their poverty manifested through their physical actions in the constant effort of searching for food, including by walking, taking the family to communal meals, cultivating relations with third sector organization staff, bartering or selling to gain cash, and utilizing formal and informal help with child care so as to be able to take advantage of cost savings like buying bulk. These physical activities tied neighbourhood resources together. Locations and facilities such as community buildings which housed social support services, food banks, or school drop depots for food were part of the space of neighbourhood which enabled their lives. Paths and sidewalks of the city were also physical resources: the roadways of these most impoverished citizens. When Cynthia walks to a friend’s place to drop off her child so that she can walk to the bulk grocery store and buy staples, and taxi home, she ties together the local grocery store, nearness of her friend’s house, and the shared exchange of child care through physical routes and proximate locations. This creates and sustains a physical network which is, in turn, also socially sustaining.

In practical terms, the routes/roots of the women’s activities create opportunities for intervention along nodes and paths. Bus passes for the parents would change the way they travel, in accessing food, for example, and save them time. If the lone parents are imagined as moving from food source to food source, expanding access to include a wider variety of food sources offers a way of increasing choice. One of the barriers is long distances, as measured by walking. A neighbourhood centric approach therefore makes sense, but not for the reasons that it makes sense to the middle class. The neighbourhood centric approach is not just a green approach, or
appealing in terms of density and reducing transportation. For the class of people who have no means but walking, supporting neighbourhood third sector and low-cost markets is part of supporting quality of life. Food desert measures, which are counted in terms of access to market outlets, need to be expanded for this sector of the population to include hot lunch programs at schools, communal meals, organic food production, food drop-offs or depots, community food cupboards, food banks and low cost markets as well as bulk grocery stores.

The challenges push planners to think beyond acceptance of the public-private divide to understand the way that social reproduction efforts are supported by and interact with the market. There is a long-standing association, well understood by retailers, of the way finances flow through private households and result in expenditures. This flow-through is exploited through marketing and promotion, and it creates a bubbling vitality. For this impoverished sector, supports are still being obtained, but it occurs at a different scale and through a multiplicity of public third sector as well as private small-business and large-business sources. Why should this matter? Beyond a humanitarian concern, the third sector is not beyond economics. The Food Bank is a wholesaling warehouse that takes surplus goods; food banks have long operated with corporate donations, including as a redistribution system for national agricultural surplus. Recognizing the food distribution system occurring at the local level offers opportunities to recognize green or environmentally sustainable practices, and could potentially offer “carbon credits” of interest to the public or private sector. Secondly, there are unrecognized opportunities that revisioned policies could capitalize upon. Molly’s tale of enjoying a cup of coffee at a corporate food retailer that has a playground is part of a need for public, family-friendly space. Recreation centres could offer food fairs that also combine play centres and family-friendly spaces with food retail outlets. Although many of these centres already offer free coffee bars or
snack centres run on a non-profit basis, the combination of opportunity suggests that it is not only the purview of the for-profit free-market sector to offer the kind of experience Molly sought. Such experiences speak to inclusion of low-income families, but also suggest opportunities that middle-income families – who also require child-friendly experiences – might also appreciate.

Place does constrain women’s agency, in the sense that what is not available in spaces which are reachable by foot are out of the purview of the women in this study. The list of what is beyond reach includes training programs, jobs, the single mothers’ food bank, and sometimes advocacy offices. Being limited to a proximate location also makes the experience of place more intense, as women’s comments about their housing situations indicate. However, the women also contributed to the shaping of place by forming routes of resourcing. These routes provide a potential means of intervention.

9.3 The Implications of Interrogating Poverty Policy

The third research question focussed on how women interrogate policy constraints, which in this study was taken to mean the way that their agency and resistance informs a new conceptualization of their circumstances, both for them and for us, the students of their lives. A further aspect of this question focusses on whether and how impoverished lone mothers exploit fracture lines – the gaps and limitations – between policies and need.

**Research Question No. 3**

How do lone mothers interrogate, resist and subvert the gaps and limitations of income assistance policies affecting their lives and the lives of their children?

The grounded theory analysis revealed processes lone mothers used to make space for dreaming by utilizing the screen between public expectations and private activities to their
advantage. The performance of identity was one of the main tools they used to negotiate and maintain small spaces for time to dream. In this way, performance was a means of resistance that complemented the tactics they used to achieve practical goals such as obtaining enough resources for survival. Women had to use tactics, such as bartering and selling assets, but if they focussed too much on these survival tactics, even out of necessity, they might not gain the space needed for dreaming. When women could dream as well as marshal sufficient resources to sustain them, they were able to take steps towards their imagined futures, in spite of a problematic support system. This process describes poverty through a functional lens, adding to the definitions of poverty described in chapter 2.

The sustained effort of the women indicates the degree of their need, though, while the kinds of work the women did indicate the range of resources that give women access to opportunity. If, as described in chapter 2, poverty relief is based on the income paradigm of providing sufficient finances to purchase resources in the private market, then the conclusion here would be that the lone parents receive insufficient support. If poverty relief was measured or marked by an outcome such as having sufficient nutrition, though, then poverty is marked by the opportunities which women may take up to obtain a sufficient meal. The findings of the economic activity among the women in this study do reveal a gap between income assistance provision and need which the policies utterly fail to realize. However, these economic activities also indicate possibilities beyond financial provision.

An alternative to the income paradigm, discussed in chapter 2, is the capabilities model. While this has not been applied in the Western developed-nation context, the findings, which indicate economic activity at the margins of the formal and informal spheres, may have similarities with those in international contexts which are beyond economic engagement in the
mainstream. As with international movements that recognize the economic activities of the very poor, a new imagination is needed that recognizes agency and innovative ways that people work to meet their needs, such as has been envisioned by the Bank of Grameen or the on-line micro-lending organization, Kiva. The challenge, as Scott (1998) reminds us, is that the bureaucratic “gaze” can have a universalizing effect. The view, or “gaze,” can only shift if the manner of approaching the situation changes from a universalistic apprehension and treatment of all poor as identical to a much more nuanced and interactive view that permits opportunity for exchange of ideas. Shifting away from an absolute measure to an opportunity based system though, raises the question of whether only the impoverished should be able to access an interactive relationship of support.

The participants in this study had access to social services support which addressed issues to do with mental health, child safety, and other issues like family violence, and even at this time, these were often not restricted to those receiving income supports. Given that this bifurcation of support and income already exists, it may be that the bureaucratic structure is already structurally prepared to shift the measures it is using. A more fluid approach might incorporate an annual minimum income administered as a tax credit, while offering a menu of laddered options for support and enterprise. A minimum tax credit, or other proposals for a minimum guaranteed annual income, offers the opportunity to welfare recipients to ladder off income assistance more gently because they would have both earned income and tax credit income flowing simultaneously before an adjustment is made. Changing the scale of disbursements from the micro-managed monthly or weekly calculation to an annual allocation, even if disbursed monthly, also means that the challenge of bureaucratically induced cash flow variations is lifted. Changes like income generation or maintenance payments would not cut cash
flow by 200%, as seen in Gemma’s case. Adopting an annual calculation would free budget for government and time for compliance from individual recipients. This is not to say that a case system should not also be employed; there were individuals in the study who needed a case manager to assist them with various personal problems, but there were also those who did not need social supports and would have preferred career planning supports and nothing else. In addition, financial crisis could be avoided if a tax credit system recognized extra costs, such as the high rental market in Vancouver. Adjustments could be made so that extra earnings did not reduce the tax credit until the rent expense fell below a certain percentage of total expenditures, thus partially addressing what is called extreme housing need.

If changes in income supports were made at the provincial level, it would also be beneficial to be more explicit about the regional economic tool that social assistance is, as explored in the BC case study chapter. Prosperity in one province may be threatening to another because of potential labour market flows. This suggests two practice and policy implications, as well as some reflection on the way conditions in Canada make applications of neoliberal or third way reform distinct from elsewhere. The opportunity for regional competiveness and the experimentation instigated at the provincial level in BC suggests that some thought should be given to how the nation, as a whole, positions the labour force in respect to extra-national economic competition. While national control is always a Canadian issue in the context of its constitutional structure of extreme federalism, the findings on material need suggest that surging forward to compete with nations that are trying to raise their standard of living by performing industrial era work in factory settings has serious implications for economic and social inclusion. The findings on the changing nature of the public and private divide also imply that two economies are evolving, an informal and a formal. Continuing to use welfare policy to address
global competitiveness may drive the generation of two separate spheres of economic activity; one locally bounded and informal, and the other internationally responsive. It may behoove local and provincial governments to spend more time considering how the populace can be sustained by economic policies focussed on both types of sectors.

Secondly, if the income measure is not the best tool for addressing and facilitating change, then the national government may have an important role to play in facilitating the development of new poverty measures. The government of the U.K. recently announced a shift to using the quality of life index to track the impacts of their recent decision to address fiscal deficits by cutting spending by 30%. Other national governments will need to follow suit in terms of debt reduction. Canada is in an enviable position of being able to choose to implement a quality of life measure if it wants to and it could do so at a time when other national governments are repositioning themselves. There are strategic reasons to take this path in Canada. Such a move would offer opportunities to shift the relationship between senior levels of government and local levels of government.

9.4 Imagining Social Planning Responses

As outlined in the introductory chapter, this inquiry challenges the lack of theorizing about social planning. In addition, the deepening entrenchment of poverty arising out of the growing income divide and the relatively high rate of poverty among female lone parent households provides an opportunity to rethink not just how substantive knowledge might provide for a more informed response, but also to reflect on the implications for how social planning is done and theorized. Thinking about local issues such as the ways women scrabble for resources, make space for dreaming, and conceptualize their dreams provides information to help inform

74 At the time of thesis submission, the US government was voting on a massive debt reduction package which will require a decade of severe spending cuts.
social planning objectives. However, the findings also imply coordination of planning, given that income assistance policy is set at a more senior level of government. The theoretical issue is the apparent disorganization of social planning theory in response to the problem of deepening poverty in the developed nation context.

**9.4.1 Research Question No. 4**

What are the implications for social planning and policy reform of understanding lone mothers’ resistance and agency in efforts of creating a future they want for themselves and their children?

**9.4.2 Planning Practice Implications**

Exploring how theorization of social planning could provide frameworks for incorporating the marginalized in civic life challenges the assumptions of hierarchy built into bureaucratic systems of Western developed nations. The inquiry here focusses on women’s agency – and in particular, resistance – as a potential site of social change as well as a potential interaction with mainstream planning practice objectives and processes. The first set of research questions were focussed on generating the kind of substantive theory, what Friedmann (2003) called theory for planning. Knowing how lone parents scraabbles to survive, the resources they use, and the ways they engage community spaces provides the kind of information that could assist local planners in meeting the needs of this population. Traditional land use planning tools, which are used to make cities user-friendly for commuters, to create recreation spaces, and to create aesthetically pleasing leisure spaces, could also be used to accommodate the activities of this important family form, which as noted comprise about 15% of all Canadian families, or 20% of those with children, at any one time. In particular, understanding that lone parents who cannot afford sufficient housing use parks as important living spaces could impact, for example, the city
of Vancouver’s current initiative to create more wilderness space in parks. Although as discussed, gender lens have limitations, using gender in a policy review might focus on how initiatives affects parenting of impoverished lone parent families in East Vancouver.

There are also, implications for theory about planning, (i.e. theory about planning writ large). The triumvirate of performativity, straitened circumstances and planning practice has the potential to generate a framework that incorporates the tension between resistance, attraction and articulation. Articulation in this sense refers to the instantiation of realization that Lefebvre (2003) outlined as the creative work within the interstice. Planning to meet performativity in the interstice would, in this case, aim to recognize women like these lone parents in the in-between place between material conditions and policy constraints, where they are creating their futures. This kind of planning would be closer to capacity development than service delivery.

If service delivery is characterized as a framework that is driven by the imperative to anticipate citizens’ needs, a capacity development approach operates with a theory-informed vision of what could be achieved and works to provide the opportunity for multiple outcomes. To enable capacity, planning practice would also have to attend to the way the public and private are being altered by the changing family form, emerging policy orientations or premises, and base level absences of sufficiency. The implication is that planners would need to balance between recognizing civic for capacity development, supporting the public sense of being a belonging member of civic life, and enabling the agentic striving to meet material needs. If the outcomes of a capacity development approach were oriented towards social inclusion, economic inclusion, and spatial inclusion, the approach would respond to the challenges faced by the women in this study. However, the goals would have to be clearly articulated, and attention paid to the co-negotiation of goals with the participants or citizens. This approach would enable the kind of
capabilities framework used with impoverished communities internationally to assist communities to help themselves.

Working with a capacity development or capabilities framework does not mean that the planner is absent of power, or overcomes the problem of service delivery. On the contrary, in this situation the planner operates in and through power, not unlike the way that Forester (1989) recognized the way power infused the dialogical relations between citizen and planner. The recognition of power, bureaucratic constraint and invested interest could be addressed through negotiation in “arenas of dialogue” as Healey described in collaborative planning (1997), with some important differences. While collaborative planning is conceptualized as occurring between public and private institutional structures – with the planner operating as a facilitator – one of the differences is that in this situation the invested players are not private parties. They are third sector agents deploying government objectives, or actual representatives of other levels of government. The collaborative planning group also ideally includes clients/citizens who are recipients of support. The participants are the direct clients of the parties, as well as being consumers of the possible plans. However, planners can still be facilitators because they are vested with the tools for making place-based experiences possible, and they are not the regulators of privilege or benefit.

In focussing on planning practice rather than policy, the local and spatial aspects of women’s experiences gain prominence. Thus lone parents’ agency is not just framed in response to difficulties, but can also be seen for the creative use of space. Potential planning responses differ from town and country planning in that the object of practice focusses on the spatial array of socially located functions, rather than the arrangement of structures or transportation routes. The goal is to reach humans and construct interaction. The parallel that is being made with town
and country planning brings policy to a community embedded, spatialized approach. In addition, a planning approach focusses on outcomes that not only benefit individuals, but also have potential for creating interaction in community, and generating community places that enable responses to poverty policy. Planning can thus also be part of a bulwark to neoliberal policy, in the sense that if neoliberal welfare reform is oriented toward global competitiveness, then planning is oriented towards the local and spatially embedded.

**9.4.3 The Dark Side of Planning: New Post-colonialisms?**

The potential to reinscribe a new “welfare colonialism” suggests the potential risk of not attending to the opportunity to plan for inclusion is what Yiftachel (1998) calls the “dark side of planning.” Yiftachel argues that territorial, procedural, socioeconomic, and cultural, dimensions may interact to influence inclusion and exclusion, and while he is referring to the Israeli state as his example, the processes of treating lone mothers, and particularly Aboriginal lone mothers, as invisible is a process that replicates exclusion. The implication for practice is that without attention to creating inclusion, the marginalization which has been part of the history of relations with Aboriginal people will continue to be exercised in the city. Lefebvre’s (1991) arguments about the “right to the city” apply; as the presence of Aboriginal women in this study indicates, Aboriginal people have been part of urban life for generations, or, rather, indigenous villages and crossroads are the original birthplaces of many contemporary cities.

Considering the potential for exclusionary practices supports the idea that the theorization of social planning be premised on its potential power as a tool for inclusion. Without deliberate attention to marginalization, social planning practices are at risk of rewriting the poverty and invisibility of Aboriginal people in the city, as well as of other identities that are marked in various ways. If planning can be therapeutic (Sandercock, 2003), then social planning can be
intentionally organized to consider the multi-dimensional impacts of planning activities, so that multiple scales are addressed or potentially addressed together. Given the findings in this study, social planning needs to deliberately consider attention to inclusion of lone mothers, because lone parent female-headed families are guardians of a significant number of children. This is a particularly important issue for the Aboriginal population.

9.4.4 Planning for Gender in Place for Lone Mothers

One of the implicit foci in research question no. 4 is whether a gender-sensitive vision of social planning is required or would be beneficial. As the findings are based upon the stories of lone mothers, they are unique to these women’s perspectives. Further comparative research would be necessary to appreciate how the experiences of lone fathers or lone grandparents differ. The women’s dreams reflect the multiple planes, or dimensions of what their particular experience has been and could be. One of the most important is the creation of future lives, in both the individual sense of family and child rearing, as well as in a collective sense. Their dreams and barriers are embedded and specific to their experience as women in the broader socio-economic contexts of disadvantage, marginalization or post-colonialism. Thus while it cannot be said that the experience of being a lone parent or having dreams is specific to women, or these women, the way out and the barriers are specific to the broader context.

Looking closer at the dreams themselves, they are attempts to balance caring for self, dependent children or/and others, and community against current material support and future income generation. This does reflect the peculiar burden of women, recently revisited by Elson (2002) in commenting on the MDG goals and global economics “from the kitchen.” The way parents balance social reproduction and income generation tasks suggests that parenting orients parents toward a long term, multi-generational vision. However, the policy frames as they are
currently structured are overtly opposed to this long term vision. To comply with the necessity of sustaining themselves, the women must orient toward the short term goals even though they know these short term goals will not sustain their needs or their dreams, which are about the overall benefit to themselves and their families. As Edin and Kefalas (2005) suggest in their study of marriage and work, low-income women find the economic regulations of income support in the U.S. meaningless because the future cost of staying out of the market is the same as going in; for women destined to serial low-income work, or labour, the wages are not lucrative enough, nor are future earnings losses an issue for careers that do not increase in value. Even if the economic conundrum of poor future earnings were resolved, the nature of the dreams like cultural healing or personal identity development would not be met entirely. The policy insistence on immediate employment is revealed as narrowly focussed on a fairly unproductive margin in both the sense of undermining social reproduction and income generation. Taking an economic view, then, a gender lens would look at how these lone parents are positioned by the policies and find that for low income earners who have few family supports, significant health challenges, or dreams for community healing, the income support policies are particularly undermining.

When the policy constraints are contrasted to the dreaming, the unfreedom of the neoliberal terms are revealed. Rather than liberating citizens to have the lives they choose, which might occur under a different policy frame, the BC reforms force these mothers to struggle with material insufficiency. In so doing, lone parents must orient themselves toward scrabbling for survival even, through necessity, in preference to working. What is revealed through the scrabbling, though, suggests a particularly place-based opportunity for intervention in a way that could support freedoms. It would thus comprise a particularly female-friendly policy approach,
even if it was inclusive of all parents, including multi-generational parents, or all low-income parents, employed or not. As the women move between neighbourhood locations attempting to find resources – and public spaces in which they can live their lives – there are numerous opportunities to support their agentic attempts to meet their needs.

Not only would a gender friendly planning approach acknowledge and provide place to be inclusive of this class of citizen, it would also increase the opportunity for these families to contribute creatively to the urban place. This is not much different than the early urban design planning (Spain, 1995, 2005) or the social planning of the Hull House collective (Hull House, 1970), which was responding to dire urban poverty in an era of intense industrialization. Today in Vancouver, the neighbourhood houses and the Aboriginal Mother Centre (AMC) attempt to do the same, but on extremely limited funds. Hayden (1980) looked at the way planning zones could facilitate communal child care, shared meals, collective food production and shared housework. These activities are already occurring in places women live, so as Hayden points out, it is a matter of recognizing them. Attending to the spatial distribution of family activity, as if it was something that took time and mattered, might assist impoverished parents to move beyond their straitened circumstances without raising individual rates or providing direct financial benefit at all. Very specific studies in urban geography indicate gendered “topographies of citizenship,” but seldom occur in the field of income policy studies, preventing a link to an understanding of how the impoverished female lone parents are shaped by or use space (Fenster, 2005; Lykogianni, 2008; Staeheli & Nagel, 2006).

9.5 Conclusion: Conceptualizing Planning Practice as Work in the Interstice

The findings reveal two axes of tension that offer opportunities for revisioning the way social planning responds to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal impoverished female headed lone
parent families in the city. The first tension arises out of the material needs and policies which are given insufficient support, but then denied as unmet needs. The second tension is between the need to provide care to children as well as to obtain the necessities of life for them, and again, the impossibility of meeting these two needs is denied. As lone parents work toward managing the material tensions, they operate in a vacuum created between the official rhetoric and the material need. Women must publicly defer to rhetoric while they also privately struggle to make ends meet. Effective denial of the double jeopardy women face is itself a problem which creates the need for performance even as the performance masks hidden dreams. Social planners have the opportunity to ameliorate the tensions by changing the spatial circumstances in which women manage, even if income assistance policy is not controlled at the local level.

This research reveals that the case of BC neoliberal welfare reform appears to be regressive in its de facto preference of full time adequately salaried work. It does not follow a social investment model, and has increased the welfare wall. The struggles of the women, while they may not be unique to being female, occur within a socio-historical context which is patterned with privilege for male gender. The neoliberal reforms reinforce this privileging by ignoring the tension between managing social reproduction and income support needs. The outcome is particularly at odds with Aboriginal women’s dreams for collective healing, but the women’s dreams generally express a desire for a future that is multi-generational, identity based, and reinforcing of multiple senses of belonging. There is an opportunity for social planning practice to meet these needs by enabling opportunities “in the interstice” between public and private needs and barriers.


Ball, J. (2004). *Early Childhood Care and Development Programs as Hook and Hub: Promising Practices in First Nations Communities*. Victoria, BC: Early Childhood Development Intercultural Partnerships Programs, School of Child and Youth Care, University of Victoria.


Bernard, A. (1945). *La renaissance acadienne au XXe siècle* Quebec, QC: Comité de la Survivance Francaise, Université Laval.


References


Chouinard, V., & Crook, V. (2005). ‘Because they have all the power and I have none’: State restructuring of income and employment supports and disabled women’s lives in Ontario, Canada. Disability and Society, 20(1), 19-32.


References


References


References


Marker, M. (2004). 'It was two different time of the day, but in the same place,' Coast Salish high school experience in the 1970's. *BC Studies, 144*(Winter), 91-113.


References


References


References


### Appendix A: CHILD Projects

#### Table 8 List of CHILD Projects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Study</th>
<th>Lead Investigator</th>
<th>Community Partners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cluster 1: Policy Studies in Early Childhood Development</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Child Care Policy Project</td>
<td>Dr. Hillel Goelman, Educational Psychology, UBC</td>
<td>Carol Young, City of Vancouver Social Planning Department; Diane Liscumb, Westcoast Child Care Resource and Referral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dr. Paul Kershaw, HELP, Faculty of Graduate Studies, UBC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Income Assistance Study</td>
<td>Dr. Penny Gurstein, Community and Regional Planning, UBC</td>
<td>Michael Goldberg, Research Director, Social Planning and Research Council of BC; Seth Klein, Executive Director, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives in BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dr. Jane Pulkingham, Sociology and Anthropology, SFU</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cluster 2: Early Childhood Development in Indigenous Communities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Aboriginal HIPPY Documentation Project</td>
<td>Dr. Lucy Le Mare, Education, SFU</td>
<td>Three on-reserve Indigenous communities; Tammy Harkey, HIPPY Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Indigenous CHILD Project</td>
<td>Dr. Jessica Ball, Child and Youth Care, U.Vic</td>
<td>Four on-reserve Indigenous communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cluster 3: Early Identification and Screening Studies</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Community-based Screening Study</td>
<td>Dr. Susan Dahinton, Nursing, UBC</td>
<td>Public Health Nurses in Chilliwack, BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dr. Laurie Ford, Educational Psychology, UBC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Infant Neuromotor Study</td>
<td>Dr. Virginia Hayes, Nursing, UVic</td>
<td>Dana Brynelson, Infant Development Program of BC;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dr. Susan Harris, Rehabilitation Sciences, UBC</td>
<td>Diane Cameron, BC Centre for Ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dr. C. Backman, Rehabilitation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

75 Sources: CHILD administrative documents; Goelman, Pivik, & Guhn (2011), pp. 4-5.
76 Human Early Learning Project, UBC.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Study</th>
<th>Lead Investigator</th>
<th>Community Partners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Developmental Pathways Study</td>
<td>Dr. Anne Synnes, Neonatology, UBC Dr. J. Hoube, Developmental Pediatrics, UBC</td>
<td>Dana Brynelson, Infant Development Program of BC; Diane Cameron, BC Centre for Ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cluster 4: Early Childhood Intervention Programs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Outdoor Criteria Study</td>
<td>Dr. Susan Herrington, School of Landscape Architecture, UBC</td>
<td>Social Planning Department, City of Vancouver; BC Council for Families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Parent Counselling Study</td>
<td>Dr. Mary Russell, School of Social Work and Family Studies</td>
<td>Family Services of Vancouver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Safe Spaces Study</td>
<td>Dr. Kim Schonert-Reichl, Educational Psychology, UBC</td>
<td>Diane Liscumb, Westcoast Child Care Resource and Referral</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dear ________________:

We are looking for research participants for a study on how income assistance changes are affecting single parent mothers with young children. The information on how to participate is on the poster we have enclosed. We are happy to explain more about the study if you call.

Some details:

We is a team of researchers from three universities and two community agencies that do advocacy – the Social Planning and Research Council (SPARC BC) and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA). All of the researchers have experience working on low income, family or aboriginal people’s issues.

The Y downtown has generously offered to help distribute our posters to people like you who have attended some of their single mother or women’s programs. The research team has not kept any of your addresses, as we want to ensure your privacy. The Y is not sponsoring this research, but they have worked with some members of the research team in the past and the advocacy agencies are known to them.

The study has been approved by the human subjects research ethics boards of the University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University and the University of Northern British Columbia.

Why is it important?

It is important to track the impact of income assistance changes and provide research to show how cutbacks are affecting people.

If you know someone who might be interested, please pass the poster on. We can mail you more posters if you want to pass them out or put them up in your neighbourhood.

Thank you!
INCOME ASSISTANCE STUDY

Research Participants Wanted!

Are you a single mother?

➢ are you on income assistance?

➢ and is your youngest (or only) child 2 - 6 years old?

Would you like to receive $50 for a 2 - 3 hr interview?

If so... Contact Silvia at (contact removed) for more information.

Research purpose: Interviews will explore how changes in social policies such as income assistance, child care subsidies, legal aid and minimum wages are affecting low-income mothers.

Information from the interviews will be kept strictly confidential. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time.

This study will go on for three years; you will be asked to be interviewed 2 times a year for 3 years.

The outcome of the study will be useful to organizations that address the needs of low-income people.
Appendix C: IAP Screening Questions

(Asked by phone)

1. Are you currently on income assistance?
   a. Is that from the provincial govt. (prompt: or federal (band))?  
   b. How long have you been on income assistance? 
   c. What is your classification? Are you a single employable? Are you classified as a person with multiple barriers or do you receive the disability amount? 
   d. How long have you been classified that way? 

2. How many children do you have living with you? 
   a. Are they counted as your dependents by Income Assistance? 

3. What are their ages? 
   a. Was that their age(s) as of April 1st? 

4. Do you identify yourself as Aboriginal? 
   a. How so? (prompt: First Nations, Métis, Inuit, Status?) 

5. Have you ever lived in northwestern BC – in the Bulkley Valley or the Nechako area? 
   a. How long did you live there? At what age? 

6. Do you know any other single mums who have lived in that part of BC who might fit for this study and be interested in participating in this study?
Appendix D: IAP Interview Guide and Final Questions

IAP – Final Interview Questions

Part 1 - Changes

1. Catch up – changes since last time

Part 2 – Reflections on the past

2. This is the last interview….
   a. looking back over the last 3 years, when we first started interviewing you,
   b. what do you see as the biggest changes in your life today compared to 3 years ago?
      i. Probe / prompt
         challenges / opportunities / strengths

Part 3 – The Future

3. Thinking about the future, what would you like to see happen in the next 2 to 3 years for yourself and your children?

Part 4 – Feedback on the study

4. I’d like to ask some questions about being involved in the study….
   a. Did being involved in the study affect you in any way?
   b. would you do it again?
   c. would you recommend doing it to a friend?

Part 5 – Future contact?

5. In the future we might put together a book including different kind of reflections on this study. If we do that, it might be interesting to add a where they are now chapter giving an update. Would it be okay to contact you in the future? I would be the person who would do that, and you could say at the time if you felt like you wanted to participate.

Thank you
MAIN QUESTION: I am really interested in learning from you about your experience of living on Income Assistance. Maybe we can start by you telling me about the daily routine of one day in your life in the last week?

**RELATED TOPICS**
- I notice you didn't talk about ... [themes]. Can you tell me how you...[themes]?
- You know, you mentioned how difficult it was to… Can you talk about how you manage this?

**TRANSITIONS AND CHANGE**
- Has it always been this way or has something changed?
- How has it changed?

**ELABORATION**
- Can you tell me more about...?
- Is there anything else you can tell me about ... [this issue]?
- Is this like most days or is it really different than most days?
- How do you feel about this?

**CHANGING THE TOPIC**
- Recall something that the interviewee volunteered earlier and explore it
- Focus on the kids: This might be a good time to stop and talk about the kids. What is [kid’s name] routine? How do they spend their time?
- Explore other themes e.g., Where do you…? How long have you... What is it like...?

**CRISIS**
Is there SOMEONE WHO MIGHT BE ABLE TO HELP you do that/get...? Refer back to the REFERRAL information package
The major topics for the focus group include:

1. In what ways, if any, have the needs/challenges of Aboriginal clients on income assistance coming to your organizations changed over the past four years?

2. Over the past four years, has this affected the way your organization has been able to provide support, and in what ways?

3. What changes, if any, have you noticed in the extent to which violence has increased or decreased in the lives of single parent mothers you serve?

4. In what ways, if any, does volunteering at your organization assist single parent mothers on income assistance?
   - In what ways if any does volunteer work benefit your agency?
   - What are the key reasons for using more volunteer labour (agency needs, IA person needs?
   - How does volunteering in your agency benefit single mothers on income assistance? Does such volunteering help facilitate paid employment?
Appendix F: City of Vancouver and Recruitment Area

Figure 4 City of Vancouver, Showing Neighbourhoods

Note: This map shows the approximate location of participants at the start of the IAP study. Social housing units represent all publicly funded, cooperatives, and privately provided social housing units including shelters, seniors housing, and culturally specific units.

Figure 5 IAP Recruitment Area, East Vancouver, Showing Social Housing Units

Source: Adapted from City of Vancouver, Community Services Centre, Housing Group Version 2.0.0.2 (2011) Last modified 05 May 2011 06:13:02 by City of Vancouver.

Source: Adapted from VanMap (2004). City of Vancouver.
The recruitment area was focussed on the northeast quadrant of the City of Vancouver, between (a) the eastern boundary of the city (adjoining the municipality of Burnaby), (b) the industrial waterfront of Burrard Inlet on the north, (c) the east-west dividing line of Main Street, and (d) approximately the middle of the city following 29th or 33rd avenues to make a continuous line. The recruitment area neighbourhoods included (1) the historic downtown, located in the Strathcona neighbourhood adjacent to the historic Chinatown, (2) Grandview-Woodlands, including the former headquarters of the Catholic diocese, much social housing, and the former portside, and (3) Hastings-Sunrise, including the city fairgrounds, racetrack, and hockey arena, and to the south, parts of (4) Mount Pleasant, (5) Renfrew-Collingwood, (6) Kensington-Cedar Cottage, and (7) Riley Park-Little Mountain. A century ago these areas were home to the working class populations in the light and heavy industry and light manufacturing around the port. In the centre of the city, the Mount Pleasant neighbourhood, was formerly part of the light industry such as breweries and tanneries which utilized the creeks draining into the lagoon of False Creek. These neighbourhoods also ring the rail yards, which although much diminished, still represent the terminus which served the industry and port activities in this area.

To set the context, the city of Vancouver is part of the greater regional entity of Metro Vancouver. Vancouver is bounded on three sides by water; To the north, it is separated from the municipalities of North Vancouver and West Vancouver by Burrard Inlet and English Bay, respectively. To the south, it is separated from the City of Richmond by the North arm of the Fraser River. To the West, the City is limited by the Strait of Georgia, which is boundaried by the University Endowment Lands and Pacific Spirit Regional Park, on the endowment lands. To the East, the City of Vancouver adjoins the City of Burnaby.
Appendix G: IAP Analytic Objectives

October 2003

To better understand the environment in which families with young children on income assistance live in BC.

The main objective is to supplement and contextualize existing quantitative and qualitative data about income assistance by documenting the impact of income assistance policy changes in BC since 2001 on the daily lives of lone mothers with preschool children and how lone mothers manage and negotiate these transitions and changes over time. In particular the objectives are to:

- Understand how geographic location, particularly as it factors in the urban/rural and north/south divide, influences how women experience and respond to IA changes in BC.

- Understand how cultural location, particularly as it factors in the aboriginal/non-aboriginal, on-reserve/off-reserve and status and non-status divide, influences how women experience and respond to IA changes in BC.

- Explore what BC income assistance policy changes, and the responses that these changes invoke from women, reveal about the evolution of social expectations and attitudes towards motherhood.

- Understand how skills, training, education and social networks mediate the impacts of income assistance policy changes on the lived experiences of lone mothers.

- Observe how interviewees’ interpretations of BC income assistance policy changes develop over time (and the relationship between their interpretation and their explanations of their lived experiences).

- Examine the concept of hegemony and counter-hegemony by examining the influence of neoliberal ideology in shaping the ideas, expectations and attitudes of BC IA recipients regarding social services and assistance.
### Appendix H: IAP Interview Transcript Codes

#### Table 9 IAP Interview Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Scope Note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Aboriginality, Current Policy and Context</td>
<td>Only if directly related to Aboriginal policies. Do NOT co-code with code constructions of race, ethnicity, and culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Aspirations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Care Provided to Others</td>
<td>Does not include pets. Does include emotional care.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Child Care</td>
<td>Also co-code with non-IA informal support or non-IA formal support if particular caregiver is named/mentioned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Children</td>
<td>All children, biologically and kin relation, including those in care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Constructions of Race, Ethnicity, &amp; Culture</td>
<td>Include reference to difficulties with language also include reference to how things might be different in their country of origin. include references - to immigration - to racial identify of others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. EAW</td>
<td>Direct mention of employment assistance worker (agency of worker)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. (Employment Assistance Worker)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Employment</td>
<td>Any work that brings in money (that is not volunteering) Includes discussion of selling items for money.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Family of Origin and Childhood Experiences</td>
<td>Includes references to experiences in residential school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Fathers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Food</td>
<td>Coded broadly to include references to cooking for extended family, for example.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Getting Around</td>
<td>Any mode of transportation or movement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Health, Mothers</td>
<td>Include references to - pregnancy - to being edgy (stress, mental health) Does NOT include references to doctor’s appointment used as an example and is not a reference to own health per se.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Scope Note</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 15. Home (formerly Housing) | Does NOT include  
- historic references to home when participant was child.  
Re mention of landlord, neighbours highlighted here:  
- Did not co-code as social network unless was also indicative of a stronger, more enduring relationship. |
| 16. IA | General references to IA/welfare |
| 17. IA Policy Changes | Does not include:  
- References to things that participants are currently required to do (e.g. go to the office 1/month to pick up cheque)  
- references to current IA rates  
- shifts in amts. re housing and support  
- ref to changes in Fed. policy |
| 18. Identity | e.g. single moms, people on IA as women |
| 19. Locality | Include references to any services such as child care, etc. that are close by or far. |
| 20. Misc. | Only used a few times |
| 21. Mothering | includes references  
- to behaviour during pregnancy  
- parenting programs (e.g. Nobody’s Perfect) (coded w/ non-IA formal support).  
- pregnancy  
- to removal of children by MCFD – double code w/ surveillance  
- to applying for benefits after the death of children’s father |
| 22. Non-IA Formal (formerly also included non-IA Informal Support) | Includes references  
- to her brother-in-law caring for her children as CIHR* (also co-coded w/ non-IA informal support)  
- to BC Housing.  
* CIHR: Child in Home of Relative. |
| 23. Non-IA Informal Support (separated out of #16A) | Includes references  
- to sharing rent and bills with live-in boyfriend  
- to living on her husband’s income. |
| 24. Outside the law | Includes references  
- to experiences of crime perpetrated on them  
- to jail (e.g. was in jail or I don’t have a criminal record) |
<p>| 25. Presence or Absence of Agency | Includes references to dropping training program because it is not meeting needs |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Scope Note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 26. Religion/Spirituality | Includes references  
- to a sign  
- to churches or services at churches (co-coded w/non-IA formal support)  
- to dead brother’s spirit. |
| 27. Social Deprivation | Inability to buy something because of lack of money.  
- references to not having enough money  
- references like barely surviving  
- mother thinks she’s living below standard  
- discussion of bill collectors  
- discussion of not being able to afford summer children’s programme  
Includes reference to child claiming illegal activity so he/she can do/buy things that they couldn’t in the past |
| 28. Social Networks | references to  
- wanting to be with others, not to be isolated |
| 29. Surveillance | Include references  
- to children being removed by MCFD.  
- to needing housing before getting children returned from MCFD  
- to MCFD removing children/double coded with mothering  
- idea of being ‘controlled like puppets  
- to being put on mid month payment program if asks for too many crisis grants.  
- to discussion of being asked by MCFD about her friend’s children as a form of monitoring |
| 30. Training/Education/Work Experience | - could code w/ aspirations?  
- double code w/ employment? w/ work experience vs. employment?  
- programs dealing w/ securing employment or education / skills development  
- Does not include references to the participant’s children’s education/training |
| 31. Violence | includes references  
- to sexual abuse (of husband’s children and own)  
- to ex-boyfriend harassment |
| 32. Volunteering | includes past volunteering |
## Appendix I: IAP Focus Group Codes

### Table 10 IAP Focus Group Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group Code</th>
<th>Scope Note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. capacity building</td>
<td>Incorporating clients so building capacity of clients. Lack of ability to do capacity building, withdrawal from capacity building, or move to capacity building from service delivery focus (future looking). Not community development nor service focus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. client needs</td>
<td>Usually in context of increasing need, increasing exhaustion. Also needs for therapeutic services that cannot be satisfied because of other needs, like material needs, that must be met first. Need for material support. Also need of children and youth for support (direct mentions only, not inferred by coder). Need of parents for support in dealing with children. Need of men for support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. environment changes</td>
<td>Changing circumstances that agencies must deal with. Also ideological shifts in policy environments and society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- e.g. FG1 - 597; inability of community to support the agencies, to volunteer, or to contribute by providing a supportive context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- FG1 - 194 - increasing unhealthiness in community/neighbourhood (co-coded with locality) e.g. sleeping at the rec centre, addictions, street violence. Changing community conditions, e.g. more homeless, more violence on the streets. Fewer parents available to work with staff, less child care available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. family, policy effects</td>
<td>Due to changing policies, child effects on parents (e.g. youth violence towards mothers); also intergenerational effects (whole family becoming de-housed, younger children not getting quality support, young pregnancy). This is from the viewpoint of the provider - what they perceive to be happening.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. funding</td>
<td>Sources of funding, changes in funding, philanthropy, need to do fundraising, restrictions on funding, both private and public sector sources and methods by which funding comes (rfp process, philanthropy, sponsorship, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. history &amp; trust</td>
<td>Specifically in relation to client trust of agencies and services, often comes up in terms of Aboriginal peoples’ relations, but also ethnic minority comfort with accessing services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. job - policy impacts</td>
<td>Policy impacts on capacity to do job, either through changing client needs, changing funding or program deliverables. These issues impact the job description or capacity to do the job as outlined.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. job duties</td>
<td>References to what the job entails, what the purpose is. e.g. teacher’s job in the school. What is expected, often paired with policy impacts on job or changing conditions of job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group Code</td>
<td>Scope Note</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. lateral org relations</td>
<td>Relationships with organizations in the same sphere of activity, who deal with the same clients, or which affect the clients. Can be governmental (e.g. EAW) or non-profit or for-profit. The context of organizational relations. other services that clients could use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. mandate</td>
<td>Changes, conflict with what used to be done or what should be done. The need to develop new supports to meet new needs/ mandate conflicts. Is about flexibility in mandate - mandate needing to change, ability to change, need to change, inability to change. Mission or program being stretched or affirmed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 11. org. consequences | Generally refers to own organizations (speaker's org) but also to sector and other laterally connected organizations.  
- e.g. FG1 - 924-927 - reference to schools being impacted by increasing poverty of youth - impacts on local colleges. (client need)  
- e.g. FG1 - 391-894 - program instability due to other factors (not funding) |
| 12. organization impacts | policy impacts on the organization, ability to fulfill its mandate. Changes in the organization (often co-coded with the cause). |
| 13. program delivery & mgmt | managing, stabilizing, planning, anticipating. Fixing and rebalancing program. Strategizing. Making decisions. Dealing with pressures to expand, trying to provide more or different service. |
| 14. program stability / instability |  
- e.g. FG1 - 611 - increasing homelessness repelling ordinary clients who don't want to come to the facility anymore. |
<p>| 15. recruitment | Staff and volunteer recruitment, including work interns, practicum students. Staff suitability. Difficulty matching changing job requirements with staff qualifications. Changing training conditions and changing qualification processes leading to different qualities in credentialed applicants. |
| 16. society, policy impacts | Domino effects, gender effects, ideological or cultural shifts. E.g. the push to go to work results in women taking low-paying jobs, the jobs aren’t permanent, the women can’t survive, and they end up going to or returning to sex trade work. This increases the violence towards them, increases violence in the family, and shows up in the schools with children. |
| 17. staff impacts | Reactions and impacts on staff as individuals. Emotional reactions - uncertainty, anger, etc. Discouragement. Low morale. not knowing what to do. Drawing on own resources, volunteering. Quitting or going elsewhere. Not being satisfied. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group Code</th>
<th>Scope Note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18. witnessing</td>
<td>Being aware of: watching changes, being a watchkeeper in the community. Understanding clients’ difficulties when it appears no-one else does. Listening and bearing witness. Documenting. Shifting govt. priorities. This is used when reflexivity is invoked - does not apply to simple statements e.g “I observed.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. work conditions</td>
<td>Conditions of the job environment. Often in context of change, references to safety, violence in the environment, job requirements (but not job descriptions - job requirement in the sense of required to serve clients who may be violent), lack of resources for the work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix J: Development of Dissertation Codes (Grounded Theory Analysis)

For those who are interested in the details of the coding process, I outline the process and considerations used in coding for the GTM analysis.

Two stages of coding were done a year apart. I started with open coding of select transcripts, then refined these into groups of categories, and then further developed the categories into linked concepts (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I started with detailed line-by-line coding and generated 444 codes. This stage of coding captured the breadth of the IAP questions and reflected material issues, such as codes about children’s bedtimes, mealtimes, and seeking employment. At this stage, three levels of meaning emerged in the coding: (1) material issues; (2) opinions or judgements expressed by the women about their experiences (e.g. comparison – others making money); and (3) assessments by me, as the coder, of what was happening at a more theoretical level (e.g. disciplining the mother). This first phase of coding familiarized me with some detailed differences between the cases, which led me to decide to use narrative analysis to focus on each woman’s specific trajectory. Thus, after this initial start, I stopped GT coding to review and revise the background literature review and expanded the theoretical lens. Revisiting the literature on agency, resistance, and finding literature on survivance alerted me to issues such as intentionality, outcome, and the sources of power.

Almost a year after the first phase of grounded theory coding, I started again, but focussed more closely on answering the research questions, looking for evidence of agency and contextual conditions. When I had a substantial number of codes generated, I began to assemble them using the network function in the Atlas-ti software. The network function is designed to specify hierarchical relationships between codes, and is helpful in constructing a deductively derived framework, answering questions such as, “x part of y, equivalent to y, or subordinate to
I used only the visual aspect of the network function, though, to create electronic tabletops and to group, sort and move around the individual codes. I did not assign hierarchical relationships because I was more interested in continuing to explore the meaning of the phenomena. As I reviewed codes and organized the networks, I also merged redundant codes. Each of the code groups on the network tabletop were assigned to what are called families in Atlas-ti. There were a total of 99 families at the end of the process, each representing a set of codes and positioned in relation to other families on a network map. Not all codes were organized. Following the grounded theory premise of sampling until it seems that new theoretical insights are exhausted (saturating categories), I aggregated in vivo codes only until it seemed I would not gain much by continuing I reviewed main types of codes (I had organized them by descriptive topic, such as housing or income assistance so that I could locate the 1000+ codes) to make sure that I had not missed main topics of coding. I named the network maps and then created what are called super-families in Atlas-ti, again without specifying hierarchical relationships. I continued to resort these codes as I loaded codes into networks, creating groupings or families and aggregating families into super-codes.

The process is similar to the steps Strauss and Corbin (1998) detailed in their description of the movement from codes to categories to axial coding, and finally, to concepts. The concept level would be similar to the super-family level of work I did using Atlas-ti, though I did not follow the more specific format given by Strauss and Corbin (1998) because of the limitations of the software. The software is advantageous because it permits a quick hyperlinked movement from codes to original transcript text and also upward to aggregate categories. This capacity allows for a continuous auditing of progress and assists in checking the nature of the coding as it progresses, as well as locating specific quotes when writing. However, when I had 23 high-level
Appendix J: Dissertation GT Analysis Development

concepts, I printed them out onto 4x6 cards and switched to using these to do physical sorts for further analysis. Each card listed the sub-codes (families) which made up the super-code, as well as a descriptive scope note or memo as it would be called in GTM. I worked with these super-codes for 2 to 3 months while I began to develop a concept of a core process. I did not develop properties or dimensions of the categories, which is a possibility in GTM (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Although developing properties and dimensions helps to indicate direction of action (for example, stronger priority), this level of detail seemed superfluous given the aims of using the two methodologies together. I did, however, continue to work toward a process theory by pasting the 4x6 cards onto boards and drawing conceptual diagrams of the connections between super-families. This developed into what is termed a basic social process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), but instead of stopping there, I recontextualized the findings in light of the narrative analysis. The result is a presentation of process within socio-historical context and life history.

In this dissertation analysis, the theoretical development was confirmed through resampling the data to test for opposite or possible alternate explanations. At various times I returned to coding to further refine my understanding or to test whether the codes fit the data in other transcripts. This confirmatory process is used in GTM to assess saturation, which occurs when no new codes are developed or when the new codes do not challenge the existing analysis. In this case, because the data was already extant, I could not return to the participants to explore

---

79 While some analysts advocate the ease of management which software tools provide, and favour their use for analysis, others believe that handwriting and physical sorting, plus hand colour coding, stimulates creative analysis better.
80 Searching for alternate explanations is termed negative sampling in grounded theory, or searching for negative cases (Glaser, 1978). In the narrative tradition, Lukka and Modell (2010) describe a similar process of confirming or disconfirming extant theories by using the logic that if there is one instance of X, then Y cannot be true.
evolving analysis. However, the quantity of data permitted resampling, which supports iterative evolution of theory (Glaser, 1994; Payne & Payne, 2004). In addition, I returned to some of the original codes which I had discarded, to explore whether they continued to fit the evolving analysis, so I was able to reflect on my original interpretations after I had done more analysis. This example shows the hierarchical building toward concepts from in vivo codes.
### Table 11 Example of Hierarchical Organization of Dissertation Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept codes</th>
<th>24 super codes or categories</th>
<th>99 axial codes</th>
<th>1700 in vivo codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being under siege</td>
<td>Being Pursued</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dreaming</td>
<td>Dreaming</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making space</td>
<td>Instrumental Work / Doing Things</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transitions Planning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preserving Freedom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scrabbling for small things</td>
<td>Running out</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scrabbling for Small Things</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performing the role</td>
<td>Using SPLIM(^{81}) to Explain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defending</td>
<td>Battling SPLIM trope</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wearing Armour</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Defending against belittlement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the body</td>
<td>Bodily Self as Base</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-Discipline as Parenting Development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining hearth and home</td>
<td>Keeping the routine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Taking care of children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valuing Mothering</td>
<td>Feeling proud</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Valuing Mothering</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reinforcing Identity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with lack</td>
<td>Dealing with Lack</td>
<td>Dealing with lack</td>
<td>- housing no yard - utilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- utilities appliances types</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feeling Flattened</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Getting Desperate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking the Nickel</td>
<td>Limiting Risk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Taking the Nickel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shortcut to the future</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{81}\) During analysis, the acronym SPLIM was used to refer to Single Parent Low-Income Mothers. This became a code.
Appendix K: Development of Narrative Analysis

While texts may be read for the format or structure of stories (Bruner, 2004), I looked for the meaning the women ascribed to their own events and the context in which they mentioned these significant events (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In my approach, I read for phases and pivotal points in the women’s lives from their point of views. Many of these pivotal moments were in the women’s pasts, even in previous generations, but some were anticipated. A good example of a future event is given by Laura when she talked about her impending involvement in a class action lawsuit against the residential school she had attended as a child. A more regular type of future event, though, might be the anticipated start of school for the youngest child and the associated freedom from childcare. As in Laura’s recounting, the future has roots in the past, and so her anticipation also reveals those past events that shape her life and give her life trajectory.

When reading story lines, it is important to make decisions about how other characters appear (Clough, 2002). I chose to mute the appearance of other characters, partly to maintain confidentiality, but also to maintain a focus on the women’s relationship to policy and power. There were, however, many people in these women’s lives, from their children to their current partners, parents, and extended family, fathers of their children, neighbours and roommates, landladies, friends, and childcare givers. These people became supporting actors. I was more puzzled by how to analyze what Sermijn, Devlieger and Loots (2008) call the rhizomatic nature of stories and identity, in which one piece may be mentioned in juxtaposition to another without necessarily being linearly connected. The result was a feeling of multiple competing story lines in changing perspectives and voices. While the IAP team was focused on policy changes, many other stories were occurring as well. In the end, exploring the various story lines helped to
distinguish what mattered to the women, as well as to focus the subsequent grounded theory analysis on the relationship between welfare reform and agency. The other story lines became relevant to this dissertation in so far as they were important to the main story line of responding to poverty and welfare.

I started by reading the transcripts of three participants. I chose the cases because they represented contrasts to each other, though in some ways each case also typified issues for lone mothers, like being a younger mother. The close reading was a way to focus on the difference between popular and scientific characterizations and their own individual circumstances and personalities. The cases were:

1. Vancouver-raised Aboriginal woman with three children. One child has a disability and the mother has a disability. (VA7 – Cynthia / Interviewer – Silvia Vilches)
2. A non-Aboriginal, Vancouver-raised woman who had post-secondary education and several young children. (Mary Jane / Interviewer – Sylvia Fuller)
3. A non-Aboriginal younger mother, raised in Metro Vancouver by a lone parent. This mother dropped out after 3 interviews, but she was a good example of one of our participants who faced either substance use and/or mental health challenges. She had less education than the other two and was struggling to retain custody of one child. (Natasha / Interviewer – Penny Gurstein)

After reading the full length of transcripts for Natasha, as well as the case summaries, I made a detailed chart of her unique trajectory (see portions, below) and the pivotal moments in her life as she saw it. I then wrote a narrative summary (see excerpts below). Following this “training” in narrative reading, I then read the case summaries and transcripts for Mary Jane and skimmed the transcripts for Cynthia (I already had close familiarity with Cynthia’s). Because two of these
women had been interviewed by other interviewers, I also used my reading to challenge assumptions I developed out of the close familiarity with the six women I had interviewed.

In addition, I read the case summaries for Andrea (interviewer Penny Gurstein), Olivia (interviewer Penny Gurstein), and Carla (interviewer Jane Pulkingham). Andrea was an older mother in this group, between 35 and 40 years of age, with two children. Carla and Olivia both identified as Aboriginal. Carla had lived in an on-reserve community and identified as First Nation, while Olivia, an older mother, self-identified as Indian. Olivia might fit the contemporary definition of Métis, though, as she had grown up with her mother and foster parents in north-central Saskatchewan, and spoke the Cree-French Métis language of Michif. Carla was one of the youngest mothers in the group and had one child, whereas Olivia was the oldest mother in the group and was finishing raising a second family. Later, I also read Laura’s case summaries as well (interviewer Sylvia Fuller).

The following are excerpts (anonymized, some details changed, and abbreviated) for Natasha.

Table 12 Example of Narrative Analysis: Life Events Timeline for Natasha

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housing Tenure</th>
<th>Event / recall</th>
<th>Analytical note</th>
<th>Age / timeline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3:110) I remember as a little girl, I went from pigtails and picking clovers for the bunny rabbits to a black bandanna and big black boots and saying, ‘No way, Mom.’</td>
<td>Loss of innocence; sudden transition through puberty</td>
<td>11 yrs of age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>father left mother when her younger sibling was in late elementary school</td>
<td>Change of life structure</td>
<td>Older than 12 yrs of age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mother as lone parent; some income assistance, father pursued mother through courts; participant helped with younger siblings</td>
<td>Change of family structure; hostile relations between parents; financial difficulty in family</td>
<td>Early teens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dropped out of school</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mid-teens</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Housing Tenure</strong></th>
<th><strong>Event / recall</strong></th>
<th><strong>Analytical note</strong></th>
<th><strong>Age / timeline</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Move 1</td>
<td>Moved away from home to town in the interior of the province</td>
<td>Separation from family; fleeing? Recalls this time with fondness in a good place in the country.</td>
<td>Mid-teens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enrolled in school part time while living on her own</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mid-teens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move 2</td>
<td>Moved back mother’s home</td>
<td></td>
<td>End of teens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resumed full time schooling; obtained GED</td>
<td>Natasha intends to move forward with her life – continues to build towards expected achievements</td>
<td>Approximately 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move 3</td>
<td>(1:469) Met significant other (later to be father of child)</td>
<td>Partnering; finding comfort and home again; becoming adult?</td>
<td>Early 20s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pregnancy</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mid-twenties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move 4</td>
<td>Moved in with her mother</td>
<td>Support from extended family but lack of support from significant other.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move 5</td>
<td>Moved in with significant other with infant. Living in suburban municipality (semi-rural)</td>
<td>Promise of support, home life – becoming a parent, being partnered. Dreams of good family life.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1:370) Father of child failed to provide; rejected role of fatherhood. Income Assistance application. Child under 1.</td>
<td>Failure of support. As she tells this – a moving moment that ‘explains’ her current circumstance.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move 6</td>
<td>Abandons residence shared with father of child and moves to East Vancouver. Baby approximately 1 year old.</td>
<td>Move to independence, but also failure of dream. She goes over this lightly. Is it a defeat?</td>
<td>Approximately 25 yrs of age.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move 7</td>
<td>Own apartment, too expensive for IA, too small</td>
<td>A happy recollection, though at the time she was frustrated her son did not have his own room.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move 8</td>
<td>Mother organizes her to move back home; they disagree, she leaves for East Van and finds a friend she can stay with temporarily.</td>
<td>Destabilization. This was a pivotal unlucky intervention. Her mother is needing help to care for an elderly relative.</td>
<td>Child is almost 3 years of age. Was impending employability status worrying her?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Housing Tenure</strong></td>
<td><strong>Event / recall</strong></td>
<td><strong>Analytical note</strong></td>
<td><strong>Age / timeline</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move 10 Couch surfing</td>
<td>Moved into girlfriend's place (1:72) I stayed on her couch for the last 3 weeks, and then...Well, at 3 weeks, I’m starting to lose my brain. I want my little boy to have a place of his own, and he’s asking me, you know, ‘Where’s [my] bed?’ and stuff like that. And I said, ‘Well, it’s at grandma’s house right now.’ And it’s; not only am I starting to go stir crazy and lose my brain, I can’t imagine how this is affecting him if I’m as stressed out as I am. I’m an adult, and he’s a 3-year-old, so it’s got to be - Whew!</td>
<td>Instability is very stressful. This has now become a long series of short term living arrangements which represent various kinds of failures – relationship, financial, extended family support.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move 11 Move 12</td>
<td>Rents own apartment. (1:96) The first morning we wake up there is, ‘Wow, Mommy. Is this our own house? [I] love it.’ ..Gosh, ...it’s facing west, which gets a ton of sun in the afternoon, which we love, but it’s like a furnace in there. And my little boy’s happy, so what else matters, right?</td>
<td>Rent is $550, but space is very small. Moves shortly after into slightly larger unit in the same building for $640.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Natasha is classified as employable. She has two years to obtain work before her benefits will be cut off.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move 13</td>
<td>Moves back in with mother for financial reasons.</td>
<td>Mother’s needs are again interfering with Natasha’s life stability. Natasha tries very hard to get a sustaining job during this time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3:134) Work is looking more and more like, well less like a means to an end and more like a means to get by, you know. And I think I’m getting by right now, and I will, I mean I should</td>
<td>Getting despondent – nothing is going according to plan, can’t make enough money. Child care very difficult.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing Tenure</td>
<td>Event / recall</td>
<td>Analytical note</td>
<td>Age / timeline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move 14</td>
<td>(3:214) Well, it ended because they started to give me, instead of three, four days a week, which wasn’t full time, ...It was very hard.... Even if it was only one day a week, it was just like, I’m, I’m busting my ass to get out here and I’m making, you know, $150 for every two weeks in this.</td>
<td>Natasha was not able to manage child care even though her boyfriend travelled across the city (45 minutes each way) to care for her son. The work she was able to obtain was little more than minimum wage and did not receive full time hours as promised.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3:124) My mom gets very frustrated. She’s looking after her full time and I went and tried to give her a hand and that went well, you know. But doing it day after day after day after day is very...</td>
<td>Sub-plot: Natasha’s extended family is in crisis. Her mother needs income so that she can care for the grandmother, who has developed a moderate level of senility. Natasha’s father remains aloof, her male siblings give some money from time to time but the mother appears not to expect them to help.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move 15</td>
<td>Four months later has moved away from mother’s and is sharing with a roommate in East Vancouver. (3:182) “I’m living in a one-bedroom with a roommate and it’s very tricky because I made my son a bedroom out of like, four closets that overlook the front door. Right? There’s no window there and his bed is against the wall and he’s like, ‘You know, mom, I wish I could stretch. I wanna big bed.’”</td>
<td>Stability continues to elude her and various shared living situations are eroding her ability to parent. She complains about her son regressing in toilet training. The interviewer notes signs of panic and instability.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move 16</td>
<td>(3:52) You know, I really, I really don't even just, even if I was living with a roommate, which I am doing right now, it - I still wouldn’t be able to afford anything bigger for him.</td>
<td>Feeling upset and depressed over inability to provide a good life for her son.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Appendix K: Development of Narrative Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housing Tenure</th>
<th>Event / recall</th>
<th>Analytical note</th>
<th>Age / timeline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1:439) There's two ways I can go about it to keep getting the income that I am from them...One is to pay for daycare and the other... She knew I wouldn't like that option because he's in a facility where I don't know where he's at, I don't know anybody, and whatever, I'm somewhere else, but I'm not actually making any money, it's just courses.</td>
<td>N sees no way out – without being able to manage child care, she cannot sustain a job. If she does not get a job, she will be cut off welfare. Her EAW offers a combined program/child care position so she can explore her options, but Natasha feels worried about having one agency have that much control over her life.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Natasha moved and failed to respond to further attempts to contact her. Discontinued after T3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Child approximately 5 years of age.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Descriptive notes**

1. Natasha became increasingly destabilized through traumatic family events (divorce, failure of father of child to accept family responsibilities, need of mother for help in caring for great grandmother, absence of help from siblings or father).

2. Natasha tries very hard to maintain a normative life – obtains her high school GED, works from the time she is 15, tries to maintain her own household, tries to establish a family life, tries to help her mother, tries to manage financially.

3. The context is extremely challenging. The only bright spot is the 2nd boyfriend, who her son calls ‘Dad’. This boyfriend is continuously there for her. Sharing his apartment with her, providing child care, spending time with her in ways that accommodate her family duties (e.g. renting movies to watch at home).

**Analytic Note (excerpt)**

Natasha tries desperately to leave the urban environment of East Vancouver that she considers unhealthy. Her attempts to leave are met with failure. Moving in with her mother...
repeatedly, she encounters rejection and cannot tolerate conditions placed on her by her mother, even though she wants the benefits of the more prosperous home and neighbourhood. Her mother’s house with a yard and basement full of her child’s toys represents her ideal home life. In this meandering, she contrasts three things: the body, health behaviour, and hard work/fun.