“I'M NOT SITTING ON THE COUCH EATING BONBONS!”:
WOMEN'S TRANSITIONS FROM WELFARE TO PAID WORK AND EDUCATION

by

Cynthia Lee Andruske

B A. Simon Fraser University, 1986
M.A., The University of British Columbia, 1993

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Department of Educational Studies

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

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ABSTRACT
Starting from the everyday as problematic, this research explores how women navigated structures in their everyday lives as they attempted to make transitions from welfare to paid work and education. Through welfare and training policy documents, policymakers define, identify, and shape women's needs. However, what policymakers perceive as needs are often different than women's actual lived needs. To meet their needs and make transitions, women on welfare acted as oppositional agents to navigate structures they encountered by using their support networks and by engaging in self-directed or informal learning projects. By operating as creative social actors, these women are political agents — citizen activists seeking a better life for themselves and their communities — not dependents of the system.

Using the life history methodology to understand women's transitional processes from welfare, this study focuses on 23 participants for the period 1998 to 2001 in the communities of Chilliwack and Abbotsford in British Columbia, Canada. Analysis of the women's starting point, mid-point, and "end-point" interviews yielded a number of discoveries. First of all, despite what government wants and policy documents state, just getting a job is not the answer. When a number of women went directly from welfare to paid work, a few were fired for "no reason"; others were "pushed out"; and some encountered resistance in the non-traditional areas of "doing a man's job." Despite attempting to fit into the workplace by learning the "rules of the game" and having the necessary cultural, social, and symbolic capital to establish relationships, these women did not appear to fit based on class, gender, education, and other qualities. However, other women seemed to be exceptions, and they were able to retain their jobs as they had mentors lend them support in their paid work after welfare. Secondly, women enrolling in college or university directly from welfare seemed to have a smoother transition from welfare to work as they benefited from mentoring and a better understanding of the rules of the game. Furthermore, when they graduated with diplomas or degrees, they appeared to have more success in retaining their jobs based on their experiences through education. All the women in the study had an educational thread running throughout their transitions. They attended pre-employment programs, workshops and seminars, or college and continuing education courses. Finally, initially, some women
appeared to stay on welfare. However, upon closer examination, these women chose to do so until they could move from welfare to Disability to acquire more resources to meet their health needs. Once their health issues were controlled, they began planning to leave welfare for education or moving to other choices.

All the women strategized how to make transitions to navigate structures to meet their needs. Before leaving welfare, women consciously decided to do so. To make changes, women felt they needed to take time for themselves to reflect, plan, and ensure their survival, health, and children’s needs were taken into account. At the same time, the women would construct support networks comprised of friends, family, welfare workers, trainers, politicians, and others to help them gain entry to social spaces and acquire resources. Furthermore, the women engaged in self-directed or informal learning projects, such as gathering information, attending programs, doing research, and learning more about themselves, their rights, opportunities, and entitlements. By using support networks and self-directed learning projects, the women made choices, albeit constrained or bound by structures they encountered, to make opportunities and live their unlived potentialities. This often occurred in opposition to government’s underlying assumption that a citizen is a paid, taxpaying worker outside the home, not a mother performing unpaid caring work in the household.

Through their decision-making, the women operated as creative and strategic agents to take control of their lives. Furthermore, as social actors, the 23 women shared these “lessons around the kitchen table,” their knowledge and learning projects, and enacted alternate living social policy in their communities. Thus, they pushed the definition of citizenship to include women on welfare as creators of culture and writers of social policy through their actions.
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This dissertation is dedicated to

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Advancing/Advocacy
Tumbleweed
Cactus
Ali
Almond
Vivianne
Kate Franschild

1999
Ann
Heather
Diana
Taylor
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION: WHY WOMEN'S TRANSITIONS FROM WELFARE?

It's important for people to understand there are women trying to make a better life for themselves that are single or single moms. They're stuck. The system does not always work for them. [They] should be recognized for their efforts instead of being given a rough time.

Scout

This dissertation examines the struggles of 23 women to make transitions from welfare to paid work and education in two British Columbia communities. Although paid work was the women's ultimate goal, they chose other pathways leading to employment, such as education, training, and volunteer work. An additional focus was to explore how the women navigated structures in their everyday lives that may have bound their choices and opportunities as they attempted to meet their needs while leaving welfare.

To contextualize my research, this chapter presents an overview of work and citizenship in relation to women on welfare and policies during the 1990s. Furthermore, the questions guiding the research and the sites are introduced. Another focus is to make public the women's stories. By participating in my research, the women believe their experiences could help provide information needed for changing provincial welfare policy. Through this dissertation, the women want policymakers to know they do seek to leave welfare, but on their terms: they are not just "sitting on the couch eating bonbons!" As Tumbleweed stated:

I've overcome a lot of obstacles. It would give me great satisfaction to help other women because it is very difficult. If they know what's coming, you can prepare for it, not that it's going to be any easier.

Personal Motivation and Introduction to the Puzzle

My Introduction to Welfare

My first introduction to welfare occurred when I, as a single woman, immigrated to Canada. I was very surprised to be told at the border that if I were granted landed immigrant status, government expected I would never go on welfare. I thought this an odd statement. At that time, I did not even know what welfare was, for I had grown up in Venezuela where no such
support existed for the disadvantaged. The second reference to welfare in my life occurred when I was in the process of leaving a long-term relationship. My therapist said, “Well, if everything else fails, you can resort to welfare.” This comment puzzled me at the time. However, it made more sense as my dissertation progressed. The third occasion I heard about welfare, this time indirectly, transpired when I was teaching adult basic education at a community college in the Fraser Valley. I discovered quite a few of my students were receiving social assistance. Again, I had no real knowledge of their daily experiences — only that the program assistant always seemed to be engaged in private conversations with them in an attempt to help the women. As the instructor, I did not believe I should pry into their lives. However, I did begin to wonder why some of my students, particularly bright, motivated women, would drop out a few days, a week, or even a month before completing their courses. For an educator, this is hard to fathom. However, this piqued my curiosity as I realized I did not have the whole story about my students’ inability or unwillingness to complete a semester. Therefore, at the back of my mind, I always wondered: “What is the whole story? Why aren’t women completing their education?”

Some Answers
I discovered some answers when I made a mistaken phone call to a women’s pre-employment program that resulted in me teaching women on welfare. For 4 years, 1 day a week for 3-month intervals, I taught upgrading and study skills to help prepare women for college entrance, general brush up, or the General Equivalency Diploma (GED). This experience led me to begin to understand why some women may not complete academic courses. The more I worked with the women, the more curious I became as to how women make transitions from welfare to education and paid work. Additionally, the more I interacted with women on welfare, the more fascinated I became with the skills and knowledge they possessed for navigating micro and macro social relationships and institutions impinging on their lives.

Based on my experiences teaching women in the pre-employment program, I believe women on welfare should be included in planning programs and policies directly affecting their lives and lived needs. As I talked to the women, I became convinced their stories needed to be made visible and heard by those charged with helping them, such as program training staff,
educators, government agents, and, even more importantly, policymakers. Despite the best intentions of these experts as they identify and construct women’s needs, they would benefit most by hearing directly from women about the impact policies and programs have on women’s lives. Thus, many of my conversations with women from the pre-employment program provided background information for this research. These discussions contextualized how women were viewed as workers and citizens as discussed throughout this thesis.

The Context: Women’s Work and Citizenship
The “Good” Citizen as Paid Worker
Since the end of World War II, a redefinition has occurred in Canada in the “ideals of universal, publicly provided services and social citizenship” supplied by the state (Brodie, 1996a, p. 131). Now, as defined, the “good citizen” is based on market-oriented values of “self-reliance, efficiency, and competition” and the willingness “to work longer and harder in order to become more self-reliant” (p. 131). Consequently, self-reliance as independence shifted the focus to paid waged labour outside the home, thus, valuing a particular type of family and worker: the gendered household headed by a paid male wage earner (Fraser & Gordon, 1994, p. 316). Unpaid work, usually women’s caring work, became relegated to the private domain while paid labour was associated with the public sphere. Thus, “The work of caring for others, overwhelmingly the work of women, is typically regarded as a private responsibility” (Evans, 1997, p. 91). Consequently, “Income claims on the state are problematically gendered for women” (p. 91), for they were defined as dependent on men for their well being. Women’s citizenship is gendered. It “is shaped by women’s roles as mothers, carers and paid workers and is constricted by the ideology and reality of women’s economic dependency” (Lister, 1990, p. 446).

Gendered Work: Mothers or Workers
According to Brodie (1996a), by redefining women, particularly women on welfare, as employable workers, government attempts to obscure the gendered division of labour and to degender women (p. 133). A key problem of women’s economic disadvantage is this gendered division of labour (Evans, 1996, p. 108), for it imbues a woman’s social citizenship with patriarchy. Thus, “The tradition in income security has been to treat women as either
'mothers' or 'workers'" (p. 108). Consequently, a fit mother and a deserving mother are redefined as an employable, independent, and working mother (Brodie, 1996a; 1996b). Furthermore, an undeserving mother is viewed as culpable and responsible for her "bad," not "sensible," or "right" choice to remain on welfare (Kelly, 2000; Solinger, 1999). If a person is jobless, it is the individual's issue, not a structural problem (Brodie, 1996a, p. 133). Moreover, if women are receiving welfare, they are labelled as bad for their dependency, and they are morally and psychologically suspect (Fraser & Gordon, 1994, p. 320).

**Treatment: Programs for Work**

If a single mother is on welfare, she is viewed as a drain on the public social system. Because she is on welfare, she appears to be getting something for nothing (Fraser & Gordon, 1994, p. 322). Since women are expected to work and be self-supporting, government may target them for "treatments such as retraining and counselling or creating disincentives to break their habit in the form of workfare, or more restrictive and declining benefits" (Brodie, 1996a, p. 135). Thus, government seeks to help women become full citizens by encouraging or mandating them to leave welfare often through programs so they might acquire the necessary skills to find employment. Consequently, "The function of social-welfare policy, then, is not to provide the poor with a minimum standard of living but, instead, to break dependency by putting recipients back into the labour force" (p. 134).

**The Consequence: Low Wage Work**

Once a woman leaves welfare, the type of employment is unimportant to government, for the goal is to move women off welfare roles. That a woman may have shifted to working poor and may be financially worse off in her quality of life is irrelevant (Edin & Lein, 1997; Harris, 1997; Riemer, 1997, 2001). Moreover, some women may be pushed out of these low paying jobs and revolve back to welfare (Edin & Lein, 1997; Harris, 1997; Riemer, 1997; 2001). On the other hand, although a woman's marketability, skills, and access to "good" jobs may not improve after government programs, employment counselling, or some training, they often do benefit a woman's self-esteem and boost her self-confidence. Additionally, a woman may have acquired some new insights about the labour market, education, herself, and community resources. However, accessing these may be difficult.
Policies Shaping Women’s Identities, Needs, Caring Work, and Citizenship

Making the transition from welfare to paid work is much more complicated than policies account for with their “one size fits all” and “just get a job, any job even if it’s low paying.” Also, current provincial policies generalize women’s everyday lived needs and underemphasize women’s commitment to their unpaid caring work even after their children enroll in first grade. Women’s transitions and policy designed to meet women’s needs become even more complex when examining how welfare and government employment policies identify, shape, and construct single mothers. They are portrayed as particular types of citizens: non-participants in the labour market, unpaid workers, non-taxpayers, unemployed individuals, and dependent. However, what women offer to society and the market through unpaid caring work needs to be included in citizenship (Kittay, 2001; Tronto, 2001) and women’s transitions from welfare. Furthermore, contributions of single women and mothers “taking stands on issues and active family and community participation, in addition to becoming an active creator of culture” need to be acknowledged as part of citizenship, not just paid labour (Horowitz, 1995, p. 228). Women’s social agency becomes part of their transitional process as they attempt to leave welfare in particular periods of provincial economic and political activity. Thus, policies, the economy, and the political climate shape women’s trajectories off welfare, so to further explore women’s transitions, these contexts within British Columbia during the 1990s need to be examined.

British Columbia: The Political and Economic Context

Streamlining the Economy: A New Workforce

Commencing in the early 1990s under the New Democratic Party (NDP), the BC government initiated policy measures to resolve its economic problems. BC politicians wanted to prepare to enter the twenty-first century as contenders in the developing international and technological markets. Similar to other Canadian provinces, BC began streamlining its economy by reducing deficits, unemployment, and, especially, welfare rolls. Concurrently, to meet these objectives, business demanded an educated, trained, skilled, and flexible workforce to satisfy the requirements of new technological innovations and globalization. This placed increasing importance on a workforce with highly developed human capital. Like the federal government, BC representatives maintained all citizens should join in these efforts, and

**The Answer: Education and Training for Welfare Recipients**

Since 1992, under then NDP Premier Mike Harcourt, in an effort to motivate individuals to join BC’s economic rebirth, government sought to provide greater access to education. It did this by creating more spaces in educational institutions, linking high schools to the workplace, retraining workers locally, and providing training, skills, and work experience to move welfare recipients into the workforce (BC Ministry of Skills, Training, & Labour, *Skills Now*, 1994). Government viewed welfare recipients, especially women, as skill deficient and dependent because they were not working outside the home (BC Ministry of Skills, Training, & Labour, *BC Benefits: Renewing Our Social Safety Net*, 1995; *Skills Now*, 1994). To resolve this, government sought to “fix them up” through training programs (Andruske, 1996). Government believed this would help women find well-paying jobs quickly. However, no deliberate review of women’s prior skills or education was done.

**Reclassification of Welfare Recipients as Unemployed Participants**

Following these initiatives, government reclassified welfare recipients in policy documents as “unemployed British Columbians” (*Skills Now*, 1994) leading to mandatory orientation sessions to enrol potential recipients in job search, career, training, or employment programs before they could apply for welfare benefits. These policy changes stemmed from a series of economic summits held between the provincial premier, business, labour, unions, and educators. Despite attempts by interest groups for equity, minorities, and disabled, women’s complicated, everyday lives were not taken into full consideration, especially women’s caring work and their need for non-existent provincial daycare. By 1996, welfare reforms culminated in the publication of *BC Benefits: Renewing Our Social Safety Net* (1995).

In late 1999, the newly restructured Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security recategorized welfare recipients from clients to “participants.” Although not always the case, “participant” implied welfare recipients had not been actively seeking work through job
searches or training programs to leave welfare. These policies will be discussed in Chapter 3.

**Purpose: Why Women’s Transitions?**

My experiences teaching women in a college and a pre-employment program coupled with policies resulting from the BC political and economic climate led me to explore women’s transitions from welfare. I was curious about women’s actual personal, educational, and occupational trajectories from welfare. As previously mentioned, many individuals and policymakers appear to think all women need is to get a job. Some believe this can happen quickly. Thus, I wanted to know from the women’s perspectives of their everyday realities what the process of leaving welfare was really like. I hoped to uncover and reveal their strategies for navigating micro or private and macro or public social spaces as creative agents, not as deficient victims, but as political act-ors for social justice in a democratic society. I hoped to discover how women make life transitions to paid work and education to avoid the “revolving door” trap of welfare often hidden within government programs or government’s agenda of “get a job, any job will do” (Harris, 1997, p. 139).

**Research Questions: Focused**

In an attempt to understand women’s transitions from welfare to paid work and education, I analyzed their life histories. The following questions guided my research.

- What transitions do women make from welfare?
- How do women navigate structures to make transitions from welfare?
- How do women on welfare become subjects and agents of their own lives?
- What tensions exist between policies and women’s needs as they attempt to leave welfare for paid work and education?

**Significance of Study**

**For the Women**

As with all research, I hoped my study would be significant especially for the 23 women and the academic community. Initially, a few of the women questioned my intentions: “Why should I help you? After all, are you not part of the establishment? You’ll be receiving a PhD on my back, but where does that leave me when you finish your research?” However, others
see their participation in my research as a means to act as a collective voice to call for social justice for women on welfare. This research also encourages critiquing government's intentions towards women on welfare and their citizenship entitlements. According to Rochelle:

Nobody talks about the major problems. Everybody stands around and talks about it, but me as just one woman, I have absolutely no power to do squat. They look at us, “Oh, that’s OK. We’ll just change the name of the minister and get a new ministry name. That’ll make it all better.” It’s nothing. It’s progressively gone downhill; we’re back to the ‘80s.

Other participants see this research as a way to dispel stereotypes about single mothers on welfare. Contrary to popular belief, women on social assistance are not dependent and lazy. As Heather pointed out: “Everybody thinks women on welfare are taking advantage of the system, dependent on it. We’re not. I didn’t plan on being a single mom. The real perspective is we struggle as much as everyone. I’d like to get off welfare.”

For the Academic Community
In addition to its significance for the women in my study, this research might be relevant for the academy. Drawing from Fox Piven (1998; 1999), Evans and Wekerle (1997) contend we must focus on women’s experiences with the welfare state. By exploring women’s lives, we may gain greater understanding of the role structures and policies play in how women leave welfare. We may even discover women on welfare are not waiting for policymakers to make changes, but they are challenging interpretations of their needs. They are doing this by contesting policies through the choices — albeit bound (Reimer, 2001) — that they make based on “lessons around the kitchen table” (Dodson, 2001, p. 188). These authors and other scholars state that investigating women’s lives and the welfare state will help uncover implicit assumptions about gender roles and women’s caring work through its services and policies (Kittay, 2001; Orloff, 2001; Tronto, 2001). This research may also help us examine the structures as social relationships and institutions women encounter and navigate in their attempts to transition from welfare.

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1 All the women selected pseudonyms to replace their names.
For the Canadian Context

The study will provide additional insights into the situation in Canada. Only within the last several years has Canadian research begun to appear: Bancroft and Vernon's (1995) longitudinal study on the BC and New Brunswick Self-Sufficiency Project; Callahan and Wharf's (1996) rethinking of child welfare in terms of women's citizenship; Butterwick's (1992; 1996) study on interpreting women's needs in job training programs; and Evans' (1996) feminist exploration of the work and welfare debate reform of welfare. By the end of 1999, more research by feminist authors Evans and Wekerle (1997) and Baker and Tippin (1999) on the welfare state, poverty, social assistance, and mothers' employability have emerged. Although the debate has begun, a dearth of information exists on women entering the workplace or education as they transition from social assistance.

For Assisting Women's Transitions

Ultimately, my hope is another dimension of the welfare to paid work and education debate will unfold through this research. By understanding women's construction of their life histories and experiences of transitions to education and paid work through time, policymakers, government, and program staff might be able to better assist women in their trajectories as they attempt to navigate educational and labour market structures. Moreover, women's description of their experiences will highlight their needs instead of those constructed by people in positions of power. My study may help point out that basic education and training programs are only first steps in a lengthy transitional process or "a long walk" as one woman described it. By looking at the women's perceptions of their strategies for navigating structures to leave welfare, we may begin to understand the possibilities for change. Additionally, I hope my research will contribute to the discourse by reminding policymakers, educators, program co-ordinators, employers, and others that we must not create more problems by "throwing away" those individuals appearing at first glance less disposed to "getting a job," for the process is not just a "quick fix" (Andruske, 1996).

Research Settings

Abbotsford and Chilliwack

To explore my research questions, I chose two communities within the Fraser Valley of
British Columbia: Chilliwack and Abbotsford. In addition to my familiarity with these communities because I have worked, studied, and lived in them, I chose these towns because they are unique. Both have been essentially closed communities until the early 1990s. Based on my observations and experiences, these communities are closed in the sense that outsiders are looked upon suspiciously unless they belong to a church or have well established social and community networks through family, business, and religion. With the influx of more people into Vancouver, residents are selling their homes and relocating to Abbotsford, resulting in a quickly expanding population. Chilliwack too has felt the influx of people moving into the area to retire and enjoy rural living. Both communities have large numbers of prisons providing employment to the community. Many inmates and their families settle in the area as well. Abbotsford is known as the religious capital of BC for its high concentration of churches per city block. In some circles, Chilliwack has been labelled the crime capital of Canada. More details will be provided in Chapter 4 about these two settings.

Navigating through the Dissertation

Since this dissertation is about transitions, I would like to point out even though my research has concluded, I continue to hear about the 23 women’s new transitions. Furthermore, since the Liberal government took power in 2001, many of the policies in effect during my research have been dismantled. Therefore, the reader needs to contextualize these women’s transitions within the time period of 1998 to 2001 when the New Democratic government was still in power. The following paragraphs highlight the journey through the dissertation.

In Chapter 2, to frame the research, I begin a review of the literature by examining paid work in the labour market and women’s caring work performed in the private: the home. Next, I present the concepts of citizenship, dependency, and choice and their relationship to social action and women on welfare. Then, I discuss Smith’s (1987) everyday as problematic to contextualize women’s experiences within their everyday lives. Next, I introduce Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of social practice to provide a framework for examining women’s everyday lives in relation to social relationships and spaces, forms of capital, and dispositions affecting women’s agency in navigating social fields. Finally, I conclude the chapter by discussing how self-directed learning can be a political, problem-posing strategy engendering critical reflection
for change when used to navigate social structures.

I begin Chapter 3 by discussing Fraser’s (1989) needs discourse. Next, I present some programs that seem to help individuals leave welfare. Then, I examine the evolution of welfare policy in British Columbia from 1990 until 2001. I chose these years because they cover the time period the women in my study were on welfare. Also, these years are important because under the NDP, welfare policy was revised for the first time in 30 years. The policies and programs set the structural and contextual backdrop for the 23 women’s transitional experiences. By critiquing policies, I illustrate how they shape women’s identities, construct their needs, and constrain or bound women’s opportunities and choices to leave welfare.

In Chapter 4, I explain my choice of the life history methodology. Following this, I discuss briefly the pilot study that informed the main research. Then, I proceed to describe the study, the 23 women, and the methods I used for collecting data. Additionally, I provide a description of Chillwack and Abbotsford and why I chose them as research sites. Finally, I discuss my role, explain the transparency of the research process, and conclude the chapter by presenting the limitations to my study.

Chapter 5 is the first chapter of three where I report findings emerging from the data analysis. In this chapter, I discuss the concept of transition. Next, I describe the women’s transitions from welfare to paid work and education. The analysis demonstrates that retaining a job is not as easy as policymakers would like us to believe. Some women may, in fact, be fired for no reason, pushed out, or encounter difficulties doing a man’s job. However, with the help of mentors, other women manage to keep their first jobs. Next, I illustrate how an educational theme ran throughout all the women’s lives. Then, I show how women shift to education, choose, and eventually graduate with diplomas and degrees while others are still on their educational paths. Finally, I discuss how some women appear to stay on welfare while they are, in fact, moving to Disability benefits and planning for education.

I highlight in Chapter 6 the needs women identified in making their transitions in relation to how government policies identified, shaped, and constructed their needs and opportunities.
Before they make changes, women must choose to do so. From my analysis, I discovered the women needed time for themselves and to reflect, the ability to survive, take care of their health, and ensure their children’s needs are met. To make choices, women learned about their rights as they acted as oppositional agents to determine their trajectories from welfare.

In Chapter 7, I explain how women strategized to navigate structures they encountered in their everyday lives. With the help of support networks and self-directed learning projects to gain entry into new social spaces, women negotiated structures that bound or constrained their choices. Lastly, I explore definitions of choice to illustrate its relationship to citizenship, “kitchen table social policy,” and social action of women on welfare.

In the concluding Chapter 8, I summarize my research findings about the 23 women’s transitions. Then, I highlight some discoveries about women’s needs, the relationship to policies, citizenship, choice, and social action. Following this, I make my recommendations for policymakers, women on welfare, and those working with women on social assistance. Finally, I conclude the chapter with suggestions for future research.

Originally presented as a preface, “Our Introductions” (Appendix A, p. 278), written exclusively by the 23 women participating in this study, portrays a unique view of the women’s everyday lives. They would like the reader to remember these introductions are like snapshots captured at one point at one moment during their trajectories. It is important for the reader to meet the women at the conclusion of my research. However, their introductions should be the beginning of our journey through the dissertation. I encourage the reader to get to know the women as I have over the past few years while I was part of their transitional processes and lives. I included the women’s recommendations to policymakers with their introductions to retain the power of their suggestions (See p. 301).

**Summary**

In this chapter, I have presented an overview of my research and the roadmap for the dissertation. In the next chapter, I will review the literature and framework that informed and guided my study.
CHAPTER TWO
PROBLEMATIZING PAID WORK AND CITIZENSHIP WITHIN EVERYDAY SOCIAL SPACES

She was just a poor welfare mom, and you must comply. This is a man’s world, and these are the rules, and we’re law.

Brown Bear

My research goal is to link women’s subjective everyday experiences of welfare to their strategic practices connected to socio-structural relations as reflected in academic discourse. To examine the complexity of women’s transitions from welfare, I draw on work, welfare theory, feminist theory, sociology of education, and learning theory literature. These provide bridges to link women’s daily experiences to the public community lifescape and to academic discourse. To explore women’s transitions, we must locate them through their everyday lived experiences within the private and public social spaces they inhabit and navigate. To do this, we must scrutinize how women’s unpaid caring work and citizenship are understood within the everyday as problematic as women strategize and learn to meet their needs.

Caring Work or Paid Work?

Undeserving versus Deserving

In Canada, social assistance benefits have been divided into dependents deserving benefits and undeserving dependents able to engage in paid work (Brodie, 1996a, p. 138). Society has not always viewed single mothers kindly, especially the unwed. Thus, government “helping” policies always weeded out the “deserving” from the “undeserving” through strict selection criteria (Evans, 1996; Blouin, 1989). Unlike their mothers, children, especially those living in poverty, generally, have been categorized as deserving. Canadian social welfare policy placed further restrictions on the category of deserving. No longer could temporarily or permanently displaced able-bodied individuals receive welfare without obligation to the government.

According to Brodie (1996a; 1996b) and Evans (1996), single mothers on welfare have become targeted as the problem of the welfare state. As Evans points out, “Public policy is reshaping social identities of single mothers and their capacity to make claims on the state by redefining them as a welfare problem — as undeserving, employable, and dependent. A ‘fit’
mother is now a working mother” (Evans as cited in Brodie 1996b, p. 18). Mothers have been redefined as employable; thus, they are undeserving of welfare and are now expected to participate in the paid labour force. To be considered deserving to receive benefits, individuals must engage in retraining or job search programs or top up their benefits with employment. Otherwise, despite other personal hardships, women are deemed undeserving (p. 138).

Stereotyping of Single Mothers
For Evans (1996), local and national economic changes have resulted in imbalances between wages for low paying jobs and monies received from welfare (Evans, 1996, p. 157). Remuneration from these jobs is often far below the money and benefits single mothers receive on welfare. Thus, single mothers often find surviving on a low paying job extremely difficult (p. 157). Consequently, welfare mothers are further divided: those bound for the labour market and those who are not (p. 160). Abramovitz (1996) points out that single mothers on welfare in the US are again stigmatized through a growing body of stereotypes:

- Welfare recipients don’t want to work; therefore, they are lazy and need government to mandate them to work.
- Families should consist of two parents — a mother and a father.
- If women have children out of wedlock or while they are on welfare, the women are morally deviant.
- Women on welfare have more children to get more money.
- Welfare mothers have a greater reproductive rate.
- A woman should be married and cared for by her husband and not by the state; therefore, welfare is assumed to break up families.
- Single parents are deemed to be bad or deviant parents.
- Making deadbeat dads pay always benefits women and children.
- Caretaking is not work unless done for pay.
- Low paying jobs are stepping stones to better paying jobs [and financial independence from welfare]. (pp. 29-46)

In Canada, these stereotypes are equally evident in the political and everyday discourses of society. Evans and Swift (2000) analyzed print media over the past 20 years within Canada to determine if these portrayals of single mothers changed over time or varied from one region to another. They found these images shifted over time. Their research illustrated that initially in the 1970s, single mothers were viewed as hapless or helpless victims of circumstances.
Therefore, government sought to help them with benefits and resources so they might overcome these situations (Evans & Swift, 2000, p. 88). By the mid-1990s, however, the dominant discourse depicted single mothers as threats to the well being of their children and to society; therefore, single mothers were a problem to be solved (p. 88). Finally, by the late 1990s, the inevitable, expected, and accepted outcome for single mothers was poverty (p. 88).

**Low Wages and the Gendered State**

The research of Waldfogel and Mayer (2000) supports the findings of Evans and Swift (2000). In their investigation on gender differences in the low-wage labour market, they discovered women have gained increased equality and wage parity in the workplace. Furthermore, more women, particularly married women with children, are now employed, especially in the United States (p. 193). Consequently, as this discourse extends to Canada, government rationale now is “If so many women found it possible to work and care for their children, there was no reason mothers on welfare should not do the same” (p. 193). This ignores differences in financial, childcare, and other responsibilities of single mothers.

Evans and Swift (2000) maintain that government rationale and the complexities of women’s unpaid labour have been completely ignored and omitted from the public dialogue. Thus,

This discourse allows little space for agency, and in both periods, there was little recognition of single mothers as a diverse group of women who use a variety of skills and considerable efforts to ensure the safety and security of their children and themselves. (Evans & Swift, 2000, p. 88)

Consequently, the problem has become family structure rather than the low wages women are paid and the human capital model of comparison. Moreover, the emphasis shifts to the growing numbers or “rising tide” of unemployed mothers on welfare (p. 89). This helps construct the single mother “problem” as seemingly enormous and never-ending and invites “moral panic”. The effect of these portrayals is to strengthen hegemonic discourses posing the proper role of the state not as support but as control, reshaping and repositioning ‘problematic’ social groups. (Evans & Swift, 2000, p. 89)

Thus, government policies reshape and reposition single mothers, particularly.

O'Connor, Orloff, and Shaver (1999), Butler and Seguino (1998); Edin and Lein (1997), Lister (1990), Dietz (1987), Hernes (1987), Sassoon (1987a; 1987b) and other scholars, the welfare state is a gendered state. Welfare and labour policy are based on a gendered model of human capital. This model emphasizes that the more individuals invest in education and training, the more job opportunities, higher wages, and continued access to education they will have (Blaug, 1976). Evans (1996) contends this “male model” ignores and disrupts discourse relating women’s poverty to labour market discrimination (p. 162). Evans further points out it does not explain why half of the number of single mothers live in poverty as compared to only one out of ten single fathers (p. 162). Despite this discrepancy, the current solution provided by British Columbian policymakers has been to have women enroll in pre-employment or training programs where they can learn “real skills for the real world” (Skills Now, 1994, p. 1), not for the world of caring. In sum, Government seems to assume women have no transferable skills derived from their caring labour or unpaid household work.

**Caring Work**

To apply for and collect welfare, all recipients, including single mothers, must be assessed for need and employability. This promotes stratification creating stigmatization and stereotyping based on need (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Many welfare policies still do not recognize the sexual division of labour, gendering of work, women’s unpaid work, and women’s contribution to social welfare through their caring work (Orloff, 1993; 2001). In the liberal welfare regime, the market is more important than gender (Dietz, 1987; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Orloff, 1993; 2001).

The market expands to encompass the provision of daycare (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Instead of accessible, safe, quality state daycare, women on welfare, although receiving a small subsidy, must seek daycare based on a user pay market model. Frequently, mothers on welfare are competing with employed women able to pay for expensive daycare spots. Women on welfare are often relegated to less expensive types of care, sometimes resulting in poorer quality. Furthermore, Orloff (1993; 2001) points out that women, unless they can afford to hire caregivers, are never able to dispense with their roles as primary care providers.
Thus, as primary caregivers, women usually opt for part-time work to ensure they are available for their children and households. Additionally, other duties, such as caring for aging parents and the sick, often fall to women. Consequently, women provide an immeasurable service to the state by performing these services. Moreover, decision-making regarding resource allocation within the family is similar to market distribution of resources (Orloff, 1993, p. 314). “The conceptualization of a ‘division of labor’ among states and markets must also include families as significant providers of welfare, and the unpaid caring and domestic work of women must be explicitly recognized” (p. 314).

If unpaid caring work remains excluded from the discourse, liberal welfare states will continue to stratify women’s needs and treat them as gendered dependents (Dietz, 1987; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Orloff, 1993; 2001). Increasingly, this has been the result of measuring the individual’s worth and independence in terms of access to men’s waged labour (Fraser & Gordon, 1994). Frequently, “Some women are tied to the welfare state as mothers, while others are tied to the state as wives” (Orloff, 1993, p. 316). The state requires women to demonstrate homemaking and care giving skills (Fraser & Gordon, 1994).

According to Fraser and Gordon, “Women have been transformed from partners to parasites” (p. 318). They are labeled as non-contributors. In general, the welfare state has begun to stratify its citizens according to dependence or independence. The government documents are heavy with references to women living in “dependency, dependent on the welfare system, and living dependently” (Andruske, 1997). This often ignores that many women on welfare may, in actuality, want to enter the paid labour force. In addition to the cash a job provides, these women experience a new sense of independence, pride, responsibility, and achievement to meet their needs and those of their children (Orloff; 2001; Sassoon, 1987a; 1987b). Working in the marketplace renews women’s self-esteem and improves their self-confidence as they acquire skills in organization and time management. Moreover, working for pay relieves women of the acquired stigma of welfare dependency. Most do not enjoy the labels attached to meager state benefits they receive. Also, women believe they are becoming good role models for their children while making a contribution in the workplace.
During the 1990s, mothers' household work was not valued as much as paid labour in the job market. However, if another person, generally a woman, is paid to care for another woman's children, cook, clean, and perform household tasks, then the work is valid and valued. This is because the woman coming into the home is paid. Even more importantly, she frees the mother to enter the waged work world and cares for the, now employed, mother's household. Even then, as Mink (1998b) points out,

Nurturing, loving, and comforting...shopping for bargains on a tight budget,...schlepping to the laundromat without a car, attending to a child’s...needs, cleaning, mending, caring, are not validated and assigned economic value unless these tasks are performed as important skills outside the home within the paid labour market. (p. 28)

According to Neysmith (1991), “Caring is pivotal to keeping the human enterprise going, yet its function is invisible in the organization of our daily lives,” (p. 281) for it is in the private and emotional domain. We only notice caring work when something goes wrong, and it affects the public work domain. The assumption is if a woman is at home, she is a lady of leisure, for the home is the place of leisure, not work (Butler & Seguino, 1998).

Paid Work versus Caring Work as Leisure Time

Butler and Seguino (1998) point out the gendered model of neoclassical labour theory examines individuals as units of analysis. This is based on the amount of paid work they perform in the job market (p. 53). This model is derived from examples of some married men and single adults without children. Butler and Seguino say this theory presumes individuals make “a hedonistic and dichotomous choice between paid labour and ‘leisure’ based on the wage rate and non-labor sources of income” (p. 53). Thus, any time not spent in the paid labour market is considered leisure time. This ignores “time not spent in paid labor” is frequently allocated “to (unpaid) caring labor for children, elders, and the ill” (p. 53). Furthermore, time spent on unpaid caring labour restricts other choices like paid work (p. 54).

The dominant discourse is that those not in paid employment are considered hedonistic pleasure seekers, dependents, and lazy individuals engaging in undeserved leisure time that is in scarce supply for those working. Underlying this notion is that individuals, particularly, single mothers on welfare, should not be entitled to this leisure benefit if they have not put in their dues through paid work. Furthermore, the assumption is women on welfare do not want
to work, and they are just living off the avails and hard work of others (Evans, 1997).

According to Baines, Evans, and Neysmith (1991), caring work should be made visible and included in social policy discourse and the design of formal services (p. 12). Moreover, caring work that women perform over the life course for independent males, husbands, and partners should be explored in more depth (p. 12). Swift and Birmingham (2000) remind us women's unpaid, caring labour helps to

create and sustain the social and economic fabric by performing labour for their children, spending money and exchanging and distributing goods, by creating public and private networks, providing caring work for friends, neighbors, and relatives as well as providing and sustaining public volunteer services. (p. 108)

More importantly, aside from the unpaid caring work, many women do, in fact, move back and forth between low paid employment and welfare (Edin & Lein, 1996; 1997; Evans, 1996; Harris, 1997). Governments ignore that mothers on welfare are working and classify them as dependent burdens on the state and taxpayers. Since these mothers' activities are not recognized, governments believe single mothers should leave welfare forever by getting a "real" paying job, any job (Skills Now, 1994). Therefore, government maintains a job will give single mothers self-worth by helping them become productive as paid workers in the labour market, gain human capital, and no longer be a burden to the state. Policymakers appear to believe one way to do this is for welfare recipients, particularly single mothers, to enter government employment programs (Skills Now, 1994).

However, just having women enroll in training programs to get a job ignores the continued existence of gender hierarchies and other unseen structures within the workforce. Women exiting from welfare with little education and some training tend to engage in part-time, low paying work often with little potential for advancement (Cameron, 1996; Eden & Lein, 1997; Goldberg & Kremen, 1990; Lord, 1994; Orloff, 1993; 2001; Riemer, 1997; 2001). Unlike women collecting unemployment, disability, and retirement benefits, those having attended welfare to work programs may experience stigmatization (Riemer, 1997; 2001). Furthermore, benefits based on paid work and labour market participation do not necessarily serve the needs of most women (Orloff, 1993, p. 316).
O'Connor, Orloff, and Shaver (1999) point out the 1990s will be remembered for the restructuring of social provisions to include gender within social policy (p. 1). For more than a decade, many academics and feminist researchers have called for changes to current social policy based on a gendered male model. Only when single parent mothers' caring work is recognized will they be on their way to full citizenship in both the public and private domains (Abramovitz, 1996; Baker & Tippin, 1999; Brodie, 1996a; 1996b; Evans, 1997; Evans & Wekerle, 1997; Hernes, 1987; Horowitz, 1995; Kittay, 1998a; 1998b; 1999; 2001; Lister, 1990; Mink; 1999a; 1999b; Neysmith, 2000; Sassoon, 1987a; 1987b; Tronto, 2001).

Thus, transitioning from welfare to employment is extremely complex. It needs more attention than just quick fix policies as “one size fits all” and “any job will do” policies (Andruske, 1996). As solutions, government policies identify and reframe single mothers in a particular way: as non-taxpaying dependents, unemployed workers, and non-participants in the labour market. Thus, they are not perceived as full citizens, but as non-citizens. In the following section, these conceptions of citizenship will be discussed in more detail.

**Citizen or Dependent?**

**Definitions of Citizenship**

Qualifying for citizenship depends on the behaviour attributed to a citizen (Jones, 1990, p. 785). One example of citizenship is T.H. Marshall's classic comparative model. His theory includes civil, political, and social rights (Marshall as cited in Gabriel, 1996, p. 176) based on participating in the public community (Dietz, 1987; Lister, 1990). Inherent in citizenship is power or even the perception of symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1977; Lister, 1990). Today, this power derives from economic independence by valuing waged labour in the public domain. If a person does not work for paid wages in the public sphere and derives her or his — but particularly her in this case — survival from either spousal or state social benefits, then a woman is seen as dependent. Thus, currently, the concept of dependency has negative connotations, and dependent individuals are often labeled abnormal, lazy, and opportunist.

Another redefinition of citizenship occurred with the rise of industrialism when value became attached to payment for labour and how wages were spent (Fraser & Gordon, 1994). This
definition altered the original value of labour derived from experience or means of labour (p. 317). The ideal became for a man to support his household of a dependent wife and children. As wage labour became the definitive norm of independence, it excluded those embodying dependence: the pauper, slave, colonial native, and the housewife (p. 317). The redefinition transformed housewives “from partners to parasites” (p. 318), and households were divided into “good” and “bad” (p. 320). “Good” households supported women and children, and “bad” households maintained women by relief (p. 320). Thus, dependency has come to mean bad and deviant.

According to Fraser and Gordon (1994), shifts in social policy have reshaped the concept of dependency. It was not always categorized negatively, nor did it discount citizenship. During pre-industrial times, men and women shared “a condition of dependency” as they entered into an interdependent relationship with the master or lord of the manor. Thus, dependency was not equated with economic value; however, the term became politicized to mean subjection in the social order (Fraser & Gordon, 1994). By the 18th and 19th centuries, the concept of independence became prominent in political and economic discourse. At the same time, the term became gendered, racialized, and associated with moral and psychological deviance leading to stigmatization (Fraser & Gordon, 1994).

**Interdependence, Care Work, and Citizenship**

Bartle (1998) and Brubaker (1999) call for recognition of the interdependence of men and women between the public and private spheres. Only by recognizing the strengths, needs, and rights of women and how they provide valuable labour through caring can we truly link the public and private domains. Although some men may be caregivers, women tend to perform the majority of caring duties. This enables men, primarily, to go out into the public domain to engage in paid labour. Fraser and Gordon (1994) point out we need to revisit the concept of interdependence that men and women shared with those in power. Interdependence benefited not only the powerful, but it also provided care and services to men and women performing those duties. Consequently, that is the same way we function today although the private caring and public work are separated by politicized definitions and social policies. Thus, relationships between care providers, wage labourers, and social policies need to be re-
examined. By allocating more value to caring labour, we would begin to imbue more symbolic power to women through their caring work. This could pave the way for valuing single mothers primarily engaged in full time caring work as citizens.

Based on interdependency of individuals' caring, unpaid work, Tronto (2001) argues care work should be fundamental in determining citizenship (p. 72). She justifies her stance by pointing out all individuals are engaged in the caring process daily throughout the life course (p. 78). Thus, by virtue of individuals performing and engaging in care work, they as “citizens make contributions to the state through” this unpaid labour (p. 72). Consequently, “To make an activity a mark of citizenship is to imply that it is public and not just private” (p. 78). This would eliminate the private/public dichotomy from citizenship. Furthermore, Tronto contends if the state supports individuals’ caring activities, then this “restores people as the actors [or citizens] who engage in care” (p. 82).

Expanding on Tronto’s argument, Kittay (1998a; 1998b; 1999; 2001) proposes a way to redefine citizenship. According to Kittay (2001), in a market economy, satisfaction, creation, and negotiation of individuals’ needs are related to reciprocity “between the production of wealth and its consumption” (p. 42). By participating in a reciprocal relationship with the state, individuals engage in “social cooperation, a requisite for citizenship” (p. 42). Building on this, Kittay provides a model to legitimate caring work. Needing care is part of being vulnerable human beings and living in a social order. Kittay expands the concept of dependency by relating it to a dependency worker or doula (1998a; 1998b; 1999; 2001).

In seeking to bring a care ethic to the public arena, the contemporary version of social housekeeping, we need a conception of social goods and a notion of social cooperation that acknowledges dependencies and the need for care, and that employs a notion of reciprocation appropriate to a situation where one member of the relations is incapable of reciprocating. Such a concept of social cooperation I have called doulia adopting a term that derives from the Greek word for a service, which I have adapted from the name of a type of caregiver, the doula, who assists the postpartum woman. (1998a, p. 133; 1999, pp. 303-204; 2001, p. 49)

Kittay illustrates how unpaid caring work could be redefined as paid caring labour. The dependency work “must be recognized as social contributions that require reciprocation, not by the cared for, but by a larger social circle in which the dependency relation is embedded....
The social goods and burdens to be distributed and shared must include the goods of caring relations” (Kittay, 1998a, p. 135). Dependency or care workers must be awarded “sufficient resources to care for the dependent and herself” (p. 137). Thus, the dependency worker is entitled to similar benefits as other workers like health coverage, “in-kind services or goods or a monetary equivalent, and housing” articulated by the worker (p. 137). Furthermore, care or dependency workers should be provided with vacations, retraining, and the work must be de-gendered (Kittay, 1998a; 1998b; 1999; 2001).

Kittay attempts to imbue value to unpaid caring labour through wages, benefits, social status, and symbolic power. By valuing caring work in this manner, it illustrates interdependence of private and public labour that actually allows men, primarily, and women to exit the home for public waged employment. This interdependence permits the social spheres to function. By valuing caring work, the state would also bring a new dimension to women on welfare as the primary caregivers of their children, aged parents, the sick, and the disabled by supporting them in their efforts to perform this caring labour for others (Kittay, 2001, p. 50). In turn, this would, hopefully, eliminate the term dependent or dependency from the care worker and acknowledge the choice to perform caring work is not only in the best interests of those receiving the care, but also of the state. In addition to validating care work through redefining citizenship, another view of single mother’s choices and their needs might be opened.

**Citizenship and Choice**

As discussed, Evans and Swift (2000) found by analyzing media articles that construction of single mothers’ images had changed between the 1980s and 1990s. Once viewed with pity, by the 1990s, they had become feared and blamed for their situation and that of their children (p. 86). Evans and Swift maintain the discourse of the 1990s constructed single mothering as a woman’s choice (p. 88). Therefore, the poverty a single mother and her children live results from her choice and disregard for her children’s well being, not low wages or inadequate welfare rates (p. 88). By the end of the 1990s, using their analysis of media articles, Evans and Swift felt single motherhood had become more of a positive choice. They found the stigma of having a child out of marriage had diminished. Because of its increasing acceptability, other women were having babies out of wedlock, and they did not fit the stereotype of the unwed
teenage mother. Women as single mothers “by choice” using alternate means of reproduction or reproductive technology also pose a challenge and break the stereotypical view of single mothers (p. 86). In the past, single motherhood had been associated with “bad” choices.

Solinger (1999) points out, “The core, essential attribute of a person in the state of dependency is the absence of the capacity to make sensible choices” (p. 8). Some say single mothers do not have choices. Others identify these mothers’ choices as good by upholding societal and moral values or bad by destroying social and moral values of the family structure. However, Deirdre Kelly (2000) attempts to expand the “good choices discourse” to include other factors (p. 48). Initially, she examines choices in terms of ideological differences between liberals and conservatives about teen pregnancy and teen mothers’ desire to keep their babies. Kelly says these “models fail to acknowledge the complexity of the human decision-making process” (p. 50), for they omit single mothers’ cultural and material conditions (p. 51). She contends discourse “obscures unequal power relations based on age, gender, class, and race” (p. 61). Kelly concludes: “The individualistic good choices discourse, then, serves paradoxically to lead those with relatively more power in society to think about limiting or controlling the choices of those with the least power while appearing on the surface to be neutral with regard to gender, race, and class” (p. 64). This promotes the view “teen mothers (and low-income single parents generally) epitomize people who make bad choices, especially if they rely on government aid” (p. 64). Thus, single mothers drain government resources through dependency, cause their own poverty, and have no real future as citizens.

Although good and bad choices may inherently guide views of those in power like welfare workers and policymakers, the debate needs to be broadened. As boundaries blur, life is much more complex than this superficial thinking. Individuals — and single mothers are no exception — weigh carefully, for the most part, the choices they make. Their choices are not haphazard or “bad” as policymakers would have us believe. However, their choices are bound or constrained by the opportunities allocated by government policies (Riemer, 2001).

Riemer (2001) confirms the complexity and interrelationships of individuals, policies, and their interpreters that identify, shape, and constrain choices. In her 2-year ethnographic study of 37
individuals at four worksites, Riemer sought to examine the opportunities afforded and allocated to the poor as they made transitions from welfare. Riemer found the men and women in her study possessed motivation, skills, and determination to train and obtain employment (p. 7). She discovered two levels of choices: the categories made by the experts and those made by the individuals. “Funders, gatekeepers, and former welfare recipients alike” made choices calculated “within a web of beliefs about ability, resources, worth, and possibilities” (p. 182). The initial choices of the experts guided the individuals’ trajectories. However, the participants often acted in opposition to the experts by choosing to hold out for the training programs they had requested, waiting until positions in desired companies became available, or choosing a particular profession that met their goals for a better quality of life, good wages and benefits, and status. According to Riemer, “These men and women had been agents in their moves from unemployment to employment, but they made choices from a predefined field of possibilities” (Riemer, 2001, p. 183). Thus, based on “personal histories and ideologies, politics, and economies,” they made choices from prescribed universes (p. 183). In effect, these individuals “faced a predefined field of possibilities,” and they were “bound by the choices at hand” (p. 184). Riemer found the choices and potentialities of her participants were “constrained by limited funding and exclusive eligibility requirements, as well, at times, by their own and others’ imaginings” (p. 185). Despite their choices being bounded by policies and others, the individuals sought to take control of their opportunities.

Citizenship and Social Activism

Dobson (2001) adds another dimension to choice: social activism. According to Dobson, while policymakers and others reform welfare policy in the United States, those not invited to the table, the poor affected by policy, are gathering at “the kitchen table” not only “pondering changing poverty policy,” but they are, in fact, “doing so while daily watching the human effects of poverty” (p. 182). As early as the 1970s, Carol Stack (1974) found this when she examined kinship norms amongst an urban African American community documenting how people survived and managed their hard lives despite the welfare system. Nancy Naples (1992) discovered in her research “activist mothers.” They went beyond what Patricia Hill Collins (1994) called “community othermothers” who cared for others beyond their biological networks. Using “conversations and incidental data from low income mothers and others
whose work is rooted in low-income communities,” Dobson (2001) discovered women discussing, teaching others, making choices, and taking action (p. 177). Their actions depicted “divergent social thinking characterized by judging public choices” as informed by public social policy and individuals’ lived everyday experiences (p. 178). One of Dobson’s participants informed her of “the lessons at the kitchen table... [as] the place where [her] mother tried to tell her children about the world that they inhabit – the tough world of low-income America” (p. 186). The lessons not only included individual responsibility for survival, but her teaching encompassed “the idea of responsibility for others as well as one’s own” (p. 186). Buses, bus stops, welfare lines, community centers, daycare centers, schools, and other locations where women find themselves also serve as places to discuss choices and policies. Consequently, other women embracing this idea of “Kitchen-table policy assumes choices are not clear cut, not black and white, gray is all that is real” (p. 188), share information, choices, and decision-making. Through their strategic, social, political actions and choices, although bounded, these individuals contest opportunities provided by public policy and reformers. In effect, these women push the definition of citizenship to include “taking stands on issues and active family and community participation, in addition to becoming an active creator of culture” and social policy (Horowitz, 1995, p. 228). These women are political, social agents taking action within their communities as social act-ors.

Citizenship and Agency

Pierre Bourdieu (1977) says choice defines individuals as agents (Harker, Mahar, & Wilkes, 1990, p. 203). “Bourdieu conceives of agency in such a way that everyone is an agent whether they like it or not” (p. 203). Therefore, persons strategize choice. Their choices are shaped by their life circumstances and their social relationships. Women’s choices are subject to change as they discover greater options, understanding, and perspectives of their everyday worlds. Thus, choice cannot be interpreted so narrowly as good or bad, but more like gray as the kitchen table social activists would say (Dobson, 2001). Kelly (2000) points out, the complexity of women’s lives needs to be examined in much more detail to include other factors influencing their choices. Dobson would agree with Fraser (1989) that these individuals be invited to the public policy table so their lived needs be addressed.
Citizenship Redefined

To conclude, the concept of citizenship needs to be redefined. First of all, the current model of citizenship tends to place more value on paid workers outside the home as taxpayers and, consequently, economically independent citizens. This type of citizenship is gendered and is based only on one's ability and willingness to work in the public sphere for wages. This model ignores women's unpaid, caring work as they free others to enter the labour force, provide services for the ill and aging, and raise the next generation of citizens: their children. Thus, a new definition should include the interdependence of citizens. Some perform caring work. This too should be valued, not just economic independence through paid work outside the home, for women to be considered full citizens (Lister, 1990, p. 446). Finally, even more importantly, we need to reintegrate into the concept of citizenship the notion of "collective and participatory engagement of citizens in the determination of the affairs of their community" (Dietz, 1987, p. 14). Many women on welfare attempt to change their communities through "lessons around the kitchen table" and their actions to change social policy within their everyday lives (Dodson, 2001). Women on welfare do, in fact, make choices that go beyond government's view that a sensible choice is only to stay off welfare (Lister, 1990). To take control of their lives and make their communities better places to live, many women on welfare make strategic choices, albeit bounded, as they navigate structures to participate in their communities (Dietz, 1987) as political, social, and strategic act-ors.

Everyday Lived Experiences in Social Spaces

To explore women's roles as workers and citizens, we must commence with their daily lives within private and public spaces. Dorothy Smith's (1987) theory of the everyday as problematic and Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) theory of social practice can be used as starting points to do this. The combination of their theories provides a framework for contextualizing and analyzing how women navigate structures they encounter in their everyday experiences as they attempt to make transitions from welfare.

The Everyday as Problematic

Smith — The Everyday

Dorothy Smith (1987) later echoed by Sandra Harding (1991) and Sandra Butler and
Stephanie Seguino (1998) calls for a sociology that acknowledges and begins with women’s everyday experiences. According to Smith (1987),

Beginning from the standpoint of women locates a subject who begins in a material and local world. It shows the different cognitive domains structuring our realities... as a bifurcation of consciousness, with a world directly experienced from oneself as center (in the body) on the one hand and a world organized in the abstracted conceptual mode, external to the local and particular places of one’s bodily existence. (p. 84)

The intent is to give women a vehicle for voice to bring them into the mainstream of research discourse while acknowledging their lives and caring work. For Smith, inquiry begins with actual experiences as they are embedded within “particular historical forms of social relations” determined by the experience (1987, p. 49). Smith maintains that women’s lives, experiences, and unpaid caring work “fall between or outside the institutional spheres” (p. 69) of academia, sociological discourse, and policy (p. 60). Smith further states the everyday world life experiences of women, particularly, should not be isolated, sealed off, or marginalized from the larger socially organized contexts of society (p. 89).

Smith points out research questions can be explored as they originate in the everyday world from the experiences “of members of a society as knowers located in actual lived situations” (p. 91). Although Smith focuses on the cognitive and separateness of the worlds, she does help us examine and think about women’s everyday lived experiences from a different perspective. Smith (1987) explains:

Making the everyday world our problematic instructs us to look for the ‘inner’ organization generating its ordinary features, its orders and disorders, its contingencies and conditions, and to look for that inner organization in the externalised and abstracted relations of economic processes and of the ruling apparatus in general. (pp. 99-100)

Thus, this enables researchers to start from women’s experiences “explicating the problematic of” their “experiences as a sociological problematic” to interpret and relate to the work in terms of their lived realities (pp. 99-100). By commencing with the everyday as problematic, researchers can pose and examine questions to create puzzles that “are ‘latent’ in the actualities of the experienced world” (p. 91), whose social relations do not appear discernable immediately or transparent. Smith compares this to a dance whereby the actor’s part and actions shape “the dance as an actual organization of social relationship through time” (p. 92). However, due to the social world’s complexity, structures and transformations within are not
fully understandable or apparent. “The problematic character of the everyday world is an important component of different social organizations” (p. 93) women participate in daily.

According to Smith, the everyday world is real — not just an abstracted concept for researchers to study. It is an actual, particular setting within the world generating relationships in the form of generalizable social organizations (p. 97). The properties of the everyday, such as material items, social organizations, social relationships, and settings, are excluded or shaped in a particular way by researchers in their investigations. Smith laments that women, particularly, do not have a voice in presenting or shaping the social organization. Through women’s exclusion, their standpoints or “the fundamental grounding of modes of knowing” are not acknowledged. Neither are they made public through textual discourses or legitimated by the management within “government administration, professions, and intelligensia” (p. 108). Thus, this places women’s “knowledge of society and social relations outside experience and cuts us off from the actual grounding of our world” (p. 98). Smith calls for creating a space for women’s voices in the academic discourse and research by exploring the everyday world as problematic. According to Smith, this will illustrate “an actual socially organized relation between the everyday world of experience and the social relations of” (p. 98) the more public and gendered economic world.

Smith says we can explain “actual social processes and practices organizing people’s everyday experience from a standpoint in the everyday world” (p. 152). She contends that social relations underlying organization of activities and their relationships to macro processes can be revealed (p. 152). Smith problematizes everyday experiences and their linkages to social relations, for daily activities within different domains have “an implicit organization tying each particular local setting to a larger generalized complex of social relations” (p. 156). The everyday as problematic emerges from “the juncture of particular experience” and “social relations organizing a division of labor in society at large” (p. 157). Thus, social relations can be used as strategies to analyze individuals’ practices (p. 167).

**Relations of Ruling in the Everyday**

Smith elaborates on social relations by introducing the term “relations of ruling” as “a
complex of organized practices” (p. 3). These include institutions of “government, law, business and financial management, professional organization, and education” and “the discourses in texts that interpenetrate the multiple sites of power” (p. 3). According to Smith, through the relations of ruling, the world is constructed in a particular way as a set of texts in a variety of forms, such as paper, computer, and others, whereby action occurs (p. 3). Consequently, Smith contends, “Forms of consciousness are created that are properties of organization or discourse rather than of individual subjects” (p. 3) or types of abstract structures. Within these texts, relations of ruling embody notions of “power, organization, direction, and regulation as more pervasively structured than can be expressed in traditional concepts provided by the discourses of power” (p. 3).

For Smith, the term relations of ruling makes public the intersection between the gendered division of labour, gender subtexts, and “the institutions organizing and regulating society” (p. 3). Gender roles and relations are pervasive within the private sphere; more importantly, they are intertwined within “the organization of paid work and the institutions of ruling” (p. 4). Women are “excluded from the practices of power within these textually mediated relations of ruling” (p. 4). Often, in their roles as government social workers, women become instruments for these relations of ruling as they interpret and implement welfare policy.

Finally, Smith focuses specifically on commencing research from everyday lived experiences of women to illustrate connections between the public and private social spaces. Smith’s theoretical framework adds dimensions of gender, paid work, and macro relationships to Bourdieu’s theory of social practice to be discussed next.

Navigating Social Spaces

Bourdieu — Theory of Social Practice

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of social practice or generative structuralism can be used to make sense of women’s transitions from welfare to paid work and education. Bourdieu proposes a way of thinking to describe and analyze individuals holistically as social actors by examining the “genesis of the person, and of social structures and groups” (Harker, Mahar, & Wilkes, 1990, p. 3). Through social relationships within
"fields of social practise," as creative, social agents, individuals strategize to maximize their life opportunities (1977; Harker, Mahar, & Wilkes, 1990). Bourdieu offers a way to analyze practical life dialectically by taking into account "the interplay between personal economic practice and the 'external' world of class history and social practice" (p. 3). By scrutinizing individuals' patterns of practice in everyday life, we may begin to understand the relationships and interplay of social structures and the ability of individuals as creative agents to navigate through and within these social spaces. Furthermore, Bourdieu proposes social relations link individuals to dynamic collectives of persons bound together in socio-structural relationships reflecting micro and macro structures within the everyday world (Andruske, 1999b).

**Social Fields and Social Spaces of Practice**

Bourdieu views the world as consisting of dynamic fields of social relationships. Individuals attempt to enter these as they struggle for various forms of capital (social, cultural, and symbolic) they need to remain in particular social fields (Bourdieu, 1977; Harker, Mahar, & Wilkes, 1990). Bourdieu believes social practices and structures are intimately linked. He maintains, "People adopt strategies which are the result of other social practices" (Harker, Mahar, & Wilkes, 1990, p. 202). As relationships shift, so do the strategies. Thus, the process is dynamic and changes as individuals constantly strategize for positions, cultural, social, and symbolic capitals. Harker, Mahar, and Wilkes (1990) point out for Bourdieu,

Fields are at all times defined by a system of objective relations of power between social positions which correspond to a system of objective relations between symbolic points: works of art, artistic manifestos, political, declarations, and so on. The structure of the field is defined at a given moment by the balance between these points and among the distributed capital. (p. 8)

Harker, Mahar, and Wilkes (1990) explain: "Social space refers to the overall conception of social world” (p. 8). Thus, social reality becomes a space or topology (p. 8). Smith (1987) would probably identify this space as women’s everyday lived lives, activities, and social interactions. Furthermore, Harker, Mahar, and Wilkes (1990) describe the social space:

[It] may be conceived as comprising multiple fields which have some relationship to each other, and points of contact. The social space of the individual is connected through time (life trajectory) to a series of fields, within which people struggle for various forms of capital. (pp. 9-10)
Types of Capital
According to Bourdieu (1977; 1986), individuals possess cultural capital (education, language, appreciation for art), social capital (social networks), and symbolic capital (status, prestige, authority) acquired from family and accrued throughout the life trajectory within dynamic fields of social forces. Agencies, programs, institutions, groups of women (for this research), families, friends, and support networks, to name a few, form different overlapping social fields and can create structures for women. Individuals gain entry into fields based on habitus or dispositions (manners, incorporated possibilities, strategies, either acquired or inherent) they display, types of capital they possess, and their ability to “acquire” more of both.

Rules of the Game, Symbolic Violence, and Structures
Bourdieu (1977) contends within social fields, we learn “the rules of the game” to navigate systems and fields to find our places within dynamic social relationships. The rules of the game may contain or bound individuals within social fields. Within fields, individuals strategize for position and power depending upon the individual’s set of dispositions, social capital, cultural capital, and symbolic capital. Thus, collective symbolic struggles occur for positions, choice, decisions, opportunities, control, or power. Additionally, this depends on an individual’s strategies for delegating or imposing decisions on others (symbolic violence) (Harker, Mahar, & Wilkes, 1990). Individuals are stigmatized, kept out, or made to feel uncomfortable within these groups through the unspoken rules of the game or forms of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1977). Through their struggles for capital, individuals encounter structures that may be concrete or unseen. Structures can be created by the impenetrability of entering into a group, gaining access to resources, or acquiring status. In some cases, structures appear as invisible walls. To maintain these structures, through symbolic violence, individuals exercise power, pressure, or control over others. This may include inhibiting individuals’ choices as well as preventing them from entering a social field or accruing social, cultural, or symbolic capitals (Bourdieu, 1977; 1986; Harker, Mahar, & Wilkes, 1990). Symbolic violence can control and oppress individuals, and it comes in many forms. For example, according to Hobgood (1999), “Poverty is essentially a form of structural violence sustained by economic, political, and cultural institutions that violate a wide range of Christian ethical principles and thrive on stereotypes that mask the true nature of social relations” (p. 190).
Horowitz (1995) points out social control, or as Bourdieu would explain it, symbolic violence, can be inherent in programs for welfare recipients. For example, the manner instructors speak to and treat students can instill hierarchical notions of the world that lead women to believe no possibility for advancement exists. This type of symbolic violence can also affect whether a woman is encouraged to critically reflect on her place in the world and strategize to change it or remain where she is. The woman may simply accept instructors' opinions as the truth and the way the world should be without attempting to change it. These opinions and teachings may be directive, or they may be, in fact, unspoken messages (Horowitz, 1995), or rules of the game as described by Bourdieu (1977) to keep people in their places. Thus, symbolic violence may constrain or bound individuals' choices within fields for a myriad of reasons. According to Bourdieu, individuals may operate as creative, social agents singly and collectively within "fields of social practise" as they strategize to maximize their life opportunities (Bourdieu, 1977; 1986; Harker, Mahar, & Wilkes, 1990).

**Role of Social Capital**

Social capital plays a role in averting symbolic violence, assisting individuals in learning the rules of the game, and gaining entry into social fields. According to Bourdieu (1986), "Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (p. 248). Furthermore,

> The volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of connections he [sic] can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his [sic] own right by each of those to whom he is connected. (1986, p. 249)

As described earlier, Bourdieu noted agents may be aware or unaware of their actions. Social networks may have immediate or future utility to individuals. "The network of relationships is the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 249). People must maintain and sustain social networks to acquire social capital to ensure networks grow instead of atrophying leaving individuals open to symbolic violence. Bourdieu explains that in reproducing social capital, individuals exert
"an unceasing effort of sociability, a continuous series of exchanges" to ensure "recognition is endlessly affirmed and realized" (1986, p. 250). This implies that individuals work by expending time and energy on acquiring and maintaining social capital (p. 250). Social capital accrued through social networks facilitates entry into social spaces, helps individuals navigate structures, allows individuals access to resources, privileges, and support networks denied to those not members of the social network or not possessing the group's social capital.

Navigating the Everyday: Problem-Posing through Self-Directed Learning Projects

According to Lave and Wenger (1996; 1991), Bourdieu theorizes and interprets human agency to integrate social practice and relationships (p. 50). He examines thoughts, actions, and socially negotiated meanings of "persons-in-activity" to explain the interdependence "of agent and world, activity, meaning, cognition, learning, and knowing" (pp. 50-51). Thus, "Knowledge of the socially constituted world is socially mediated. I[Meanings] and relations of humans are produced, reproduced, and changed in the course of activity "(pp. 50-51).

Individuals illustrate agency by enacting decision making through choices learned through self-directed learning projects. To understand this, we must examine the everyday as a learning site where individuals are engaged in a culture of learning. According to Lave and Wenger (1996; 1991), learning becomes more than a transfer of information, for it is situated in time, space, and the social world where it has the potential to transform individuals' understandings, meanings, knowledge, social world, and relationships. Learning in the everyday social context "refers to the development of knowledgeably skilled identities in practice and to the reproduction and transformation of communities of practice" while "sustained learning" embodies, "albeit in transformed ways, the structural characteristics of communities of practice" (p. 55). Lave and Wenger seek to overcome traditional dichotomies and dualisms of inside/outside and private/public of learning theories.

Single mothers are part of communities of practice. However, as mentioned before, single parent women are often treated as second-class citizens and, thus, marginalized by society. Often, they are oppressed and relegated to a culture of silence by the structures that surround them. However, this does not have to be the case. According to Freire (1970), by using
critical dialogue and "problem posing," making problematic our taken-for-granted social roles and expectations and the habitual ways we act and feel in carrying them out" (Mezirow, 1981, p. 7), adults begin to evaluate their social realities through critical reflection. For Freire, "reflective thought was an on-going process of dialogue through which there is a continuing re-creation of those individuals involved in the reflective process. Authentic reflection occurs in the challenge of living and thinking about life" (Jarvis, 1987, p. 89). Thus, conscientization creates a shift in personal paradigm or perspective (Mezirow, 1981, p. 7), usually resulting in social action through problem-posing to seek solutions for individual and, thus, community problems. Through problem-posing, critical reflection, conscientization, and praxis, social action results as adults undertake their own learning projects by becoming socially conscious and taking action within their daily community experiences to meet needs (Freire, 1970).

**Self-Directed Learning**

One strategy for action individuals use to navigate social fields or communities is self-directed learning projects. According to Brookfield (1993: 1984), Brockett and Hiemstra (1991), Candy (1991), and Jarvis (1987), self-directed learning is embedded within social contexts of our everyday lives. Moreover, learning projects may become political acts when individuals oppose those with more power and capitals. To understand self-directed learning as a political act, it is essential to look at Brookfield’s (1993) exploration of the concept (Andruske, 2000).

According to Brookfield (1984), the definition of self-directed learning needs to be expanded to include marginalized groups. Brookfield (1993) maintains that self-directed learning is often political, for power and control are frequently catalysts for self-directed learning influenced by "political" structures and conditions. Learning is an activity influenced by social contexts, not divorced from them (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Candy, 1991). Furthermore, social contexts provide arenas for self-directed learning influenced by structures locally, globally, and cross-culturally (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991). Brookfield (1993) contends that "political context, cultural contingency, and social construction of self-directed learning activities" have been omitted for too long. He notes that Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) recommend: "The political dimension of self-direction continues to be largely overlooked by adult educators, and this needs to be remedied" (p. 220). Brookfield (1993) argues "Being self-directed can be
inherently politicizing as learners come to a critical awareness of the differential distribution of resources necessary to conduct their self-directed learning efforts” (p. 239). Furthermore, he maintains: “Instead of being equated with atomistic self-gratification, self-direction can be interpreted as part of a cultural tradition that emphasizes the individual’s standing against repressive interests” (p. 225). When individuals take control of their learning, it will likely bring them “into direct conflict with powerful entrenched interests” (p. 237) and structures.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter has been to set part of the framework for examining women’s transitions from welfare. The intent has been to illustrate that exploring women’s daily lived experiences provides a better understanding of the work they perform – caring work, paid labour or a combination – as it affects their transitions. Furthermore, within their lived experiences, as social act-ors, women make complex, albeit bounded, choices. As strategic agents, women weigh alternatives to determine choices that will benefit themselves and their children. Acting as political strategic agents through self-directed learning projects, individuals challenge and struggle with those in power attempting to control their life choices. Women strategize how to navigate these constraints or bounds to their choices. Additionally, women share the knowledge of these choices with others, particularly women, they encounter within their worlds in the community “around the kitchen table” (Dobson, 2001). By looking at the lives and strategic actions of women on welfare, we can begin to redefine citizenship in terms of caring labour and community social actions based on choice and self-directed learning.

In the next chapter, I present Fraser’s (1989) needs discourse to illustrate how women’s needs are identified, shaped, and constructed by systems, policies, and those in power. By making strategic choices, women seek to meet their needs and those of their children. By challenging government’s pre-determined opportunities, women act in opposition to policies. To contextualize the shaping of women’s experiences during the 1990s, the evolution of training, skills development, and welfare policies will be discussed.
CHAPTER THREE
POLICIES: CONSTRUCTING WOMEN'S NEEDS

Different people have different levels of needs. The whole social structure of catching people that need help is not set out for anyone other than single moms or even families. If they've got kids, they're in like flint no matter what they do.

*Ann*

I don't think we need to train any more service, waitresses, janitors, or lower echelon type jobs. I'd like to see women go further, but the system is set up to just boom, bang, bing, get them out there. Get them working.

*Diana*

The purpose of this chapter is to make visible how policies implemented by the New Democratic Party (NDP) in British Columbia during the 1990s identified, constructed, and framed women's needs. I use Nancy Fraser’s (1989) needs discourse to contextualize the policies that evolved, framed, and bound the 23 women’s transitions in my research from 1998 to 2001. At the same time, I present activation strategies government used to encourage women to get a job. Also, I discuss what appears to help women stay employed.

“*I’m Not Sitting on the Couch Eating Bonbons!*”: Whose Needs?

**Welfare Policy and Legitimate Need versus Wants**

According to Evans (1995; 1997) and Fraser (1989), welfare policy overtly and intrinsically deals with needs. Neysmith (2000) corroborates this by explaining: “The language of need permeates social policy. The language is very powerful yet vague as service providers and analysts consecutively invoke the images of client, consumer, and even customer to describe service users” (pp. 17-18). State social benefits are interpreted as needs and are, then, validated by state experts. Principles used to legitimate and shape claims change over time to reflect shifts in priorities in social, political, and economic values. Thus, income security becomes an “ideological marker that constructs entitlements to benefits and confers different categories of statuses that are embodied in the language of claimant, beneficiary, and recipient,” unemployable, employable, or worker (Evans, 1997, p. 91). Categorization and benefit types provide a badge of citizenship or of poverty, depending upon the label (p. 91).
Furthermore, through policy, the welfare system stratifies and actively orders social relations through programs to determine “divisions of class and status differentiation” (Esping-Anderson, 1990, p. 23). Thus, these categories legitimate whether one is needy and, therefore, can be placed in the state’s care or undeserving and funneled into the workplace.

Often, differentiation between basic needs and what some call “wants” misses the importance and “persistence in people’s lives of so-called manufactured needs” (Neysmith, 2000, p. 18). These so-called wants like childcare, transportation, medical benefits, and clothing are, in fact, basic necessities for single mothers attempting to make transitions from welfare. Without them, mothers have no real way to keep a job while caring for their family’s safety and well being if they choose to enter the paid workforce.

Having individuals seek employment instead of placing themselves in need of government social benefits has been an inherent requirement of the system before individuals are allowed to apply for welfare (Evans, 1995, p. 78). As pointed out earlier, even single parents with young children are deemed employable. Therefore, provincial and federal governments, politicians, and many taxpayers look with disfavor at single mothers resorting to welfare.

Thus, government constructs and determines individuals’ legitimate needs through policies. At the same time, the provinces seek to protect their own resources by cutting spending for citizens finding themselves in dire circumstances. Governments attempt to provide a standard of living above the poverty line without depleting provincial coffers. Provinces want to appear altruistic, but not so beneficent to the needy that economic health is compromised and the needy become a burden on taxpayers.

**Fraser’s Needs Discourse**

**Whose Needs?**

Nancy Fraser’s (1989) politics of needs interpretation provides insights into this discussion. Fraser explains needs as points of tension between institutions, experts, and the lived experiences women create. According to Fraser, “The welfare system does not deal with women on women’s terms…. On the contrary, it has its own characteristic ways of
interpreting women's needs and positioning women as subjects” (p. 149). As discussed in the previous chapter, the welfare system still tends to divide work into two spheres: women’s work as caregivers in the home and men’s work as breadwinners outside the home. Moreover, a tension exists between women’s household work and the burgeoning number of women continuing to enter the labour force. Some mothers may not want a job outside the home because for them, caring work is more important. However, women are now encouraged to re-enter the labour force, perhaps, before they or their children are ready. In fact, the time may not be right. By choosing to stay home, mothers seek to meet their own needs and those of their children rather than those of the state or an employer. However, other single mothers choose to enter the job market, while trying to juggle their caring work, because they feel paid work is the better opportunity to meet their needs and those of their children (Andruske, 2000a).

The Social as a Site of Discourse about Problematic Needs

Fraser attempts to redefine the public social sphere as the site where needs are contested. When the once separate worlds of domestic and economic activities collide, needs discourse occurs. “Thus, the social is a site of discourse about problematic needs” (Fraser, 1989, p. 156). Furthermore, the social is the terrain of contestation whereby needs are interpreted differently and played out by diverse groups (p. 157). Fraser (1989) identifies three types of needs’ discourses: 1) “‘expert’ needs discourses” conducted by policymakers, social workers, therapists, and others; 2) “‘reprivatization’ discourses of constituencies seeking to repatriate newly problematized needs to their former domestic or official economic enclaves”; and 3) “oppositional movement needs discourses” by women on welfare, homosexuals, people of color, the marginalized, and others (p. 157).

Kerans (1994) further expands Fraser’s expert needs discourse. Kerans points out institutions assign defined meanings to individuals’ identities and their needs within the hegemonic symbolic order constituting social systems (p. 51). For people to articulate and name their needs, they must become critically aware of needs associated with their role expectations. Bourdieu would say individuals struggle as reflective agents for symbolic capital in order to alter or move between the social fields they find themselves (Harker, Mahar, & Wilkes,
This creates tensions between institutions, experts, and individuals. Thus, as women attempt to leave welfare, they enter into a struggle between those interpreting policies. Policy discourses identify, shape, and construct women's needs and the prescribed opportunities available to them. This tension is created as women oppose these interpretations and attempt to meet their needs through their own choices, albeit bounded by policy, based on their lived experiences.

**Contested Strategies**

**Activation Strategies**

Contrary to what policymakers, experts, and welfare staff may believe, many single mothers make very conscious decisions about whether to stay on welfare or take low-paying work. Women seek to ensure they are making the best choices for themselves and their children. They tend to contest government's "activation strategies" that target women, particularly, in an effort "to induce the unemployed to be more active in job search and maintain a closer attachment to the labour market" (Wong & McBride, in press, p. 4). Activation strategies, such as workfare, include providing "more effective job-search assistance to the unemployed and obliging the unemployed to satisfy work tests or participate in active programs or in education and training if they are to continue to draw benefits" (p. 4). These strategies increasingly monitor and force individuals to participate in "a combination of training, job search, career counseling, remedial education, subsidized work experience, and job placement or 'job brokering'" (p. 4). Typically, social workers and others implementing these strategies funnel individuals, particularly women, into "low road occupations," part-time work, or dead-end jobs with poor wages (pp. 4, 9). Some women do select pre-employment programs, for they feel they may acquire skills and regain self-confidence for entering the labour market. However, not all programs meet women's needs, but some do attempt to go beyond just providing skills and self-esteem as will be illustrated in the ensuing discussion.

Even though government policies seem to indicate these activation strategies are the solution to meeting women's needs, women do not necessarily agree. Often these strategies further sort and classify individuals they are meant to help (Riemer, 1997; 2001). Some women and men feel these programs do not provide benefits or keep their promises, nor do individuals
believe they need programs to “fix them up” (Riemer, 2001). At the same time, other women may fall between the cracks of employability programs as some covertly and intentionally discriminate against women based on age and work experience (Baker & Tippin, 1999, p. 69). Training programs often reinforce the gendered division of labour and only tend to prepare women for low paying jobs (Cameron, 1996, p. 56). Policymakers fail to examine women’s needs once women leave training programs (Cameron, 1996; Riemer, 2001). Frequently, upon exiting programs, individuals must pay for training or formal education to further their job prospects (Riemer, 2001). Others think education is not necessary to enter the labour market. Some women believe education is the key, so they attempt to find agencies, institutions, or employers willing to pay for their training or education (Baker & Tippin, 1999; Riemer, 2001). However, some may not be so fortunate, for further training or education often burdens women with high debt as they are encouraged by government to take out student loans. Since women decide formal education is the answer leading to a career, they feel the debt is worthwhile. Once women graduate with a certificate or 2-year diploma and burdened with student debt, they discover they are competing for jobs with individuals possessing 4-year degrees and more experience. Thus, women transitioning from welfare realize they need more education to compete (Pandey, Zhan, Neely-Barnes, & Menon, 2000; Riemer, 1997; 2001).

Weighing Choices
In a study exploring how single mothers survive welfare and low-wage work in four cities in the United States, Edin and Lein (1997) found most welfare-reliant mothers sought to maximize their incomes. The women carefully measured their choices for survival by minimizing economic disaster (p. 63). Not only did women examine financial benefits, they also weighed “the time they would have to spend away from home – [that] could jeopardize the safety and well being of their children” (p. 64). Riemer (2001) also found welfare recipients contested choices made by case managers, trainers, and employers by selecting programs and employment opportunities they felt were in their best interests and met their dreams, and goals (p. 13).
Programs: Badge or Stigma

Single mothers’ hidden needs may not be met by welfare-to-work programs. According to Muszynski (1994), labour market policy in Canada and the United States, especially government training support for welfare recipients, stigmatizes and virtually marginalizes trainees (p. 316). Corroborating this, Riemer (1997) found in her ethnographic study of 23 individuals in two U.S. companies employing welfare recipients, some programs may unintentionally reinforce individuals’ welfare images (pp. 85, 89). They also further stigmatize rather than abet them in creating new identities (pp. 85, 89). Riemer substantiated this in her study of 37 “successful” men and women at four different workplaces. She discovered well-meaning case managers “who acted within a web of beliefs about being poor in America” through designated training programs had sorted, classified, and stigmatized individuals (2001, p. 13). According to Riemer, this may seem contradictory because her respondents were categorized as “successful” in making the transition to work albeit to low paying jobs. The training initiatives in her study were driven by “the assumption that work in and of itself is an antidote to the ‘welfare problem’” (Riemer, 1997, p. 105). Many proponents of training and welfare-to-work in both Canada and the U.S. advocate getting “any” job will help welfare recipients “get their foot in the door.” This may be true, but Riemer (1997; 2001) maintains individuals need additional education and actual opportunities for job advancement; otherwise, workers will remain in a situations economically and contextually precarious.

Is a Job the Answer?

Canadian researchers also confirm that although single mothers would like to leave welfare, it is not always possible to do so based on their family’s needs. For example, in the Self Sufficiency Project (SSP), researchers discovered not all welfare recipients willingly accepted the offer of financial incentives to leave social assistance for employment. Bancroft and Vernon (1995) found in their focus group discussions those refusing to take the supplement were more worried about their lack of education and inability “to budget while living ‘high on the hog’” (p. 57). Furthermore, non-takers had no faith they would be better off in 3 years when the subsidy ended. In fact, “There ‘is no way you’re going to better yourself”’ (p. 57). As illustrated, after carefully weighing the benefits, these women questioned what might happen to them after government withdrew the subsidies.
Perhaps, these women have reason to be suspicious about government’s attempts to shift them from welfare to the workforce. Cancian and Meyer (2000) found this in their examination of data acquired from the U.S. National Longitudinal Survey of Youth of 984 women having been off welfare for 5 years. In accordance with government policy, they found getting and keeping a “good” job was associated with success later on (p. 85). Changing jobs to advance assisted women in the long term. Although pursuing education resulted in higher wages, not all women following an educational trajectory were necessarily successful in making the transition from welfare (p. 85). More importantly, Cancian and Meyer determined “employment itself is not a guarantee of economic success” (p. 85). Therefore, one must wonder what does help women make the transition from welfare.

What Appears to Work
A number of recent studies in Canada and the United States have uncovered what appears to help individuals, particularly single mothers, leave welfare successfully. Based on their observations and starting with women’s particular lived needs (Fraser, 1989), researchers identified areas that often assist women make transitions to paid work: family and work fit, transitional benefits and supports, employment programs, and higher education.

Family and Work Fit
According to DeBord, Canu, and Kerpelman (2000), a work-family fit must be considered if single mothers hope to make long-term transitions to work. Based on telephone interviews with 30 women throughout North Carolina, they discovered when work and women’s needs and those of their families were taken into account, women were more successful in experiencing a work-family fit and keeping their jobs (p. 313). The researchers identified key areas for support: needs and supplies, demands and coping abilities, and abilities to meet work place and community demands. Needs and supplies covered: emotional and social needs; resource needs, job security and advancement; childcare; and transportation (pp. 316-318). DeBord, Canu, and Kerpelman found women needed to feel positively about themselves and to have supportive workplace relationships. Medical insurance and paid sick leave were essential in helping women make a successful transition to work. Higher wages and paid vacation also were a major benefit as were financial assistance for schooling and
childcare. Additionally, participants indicated job security was extremely important as temporary or more precariously funded employment made it difficult to count on work. Moreover, women wanted opportunities to advance in their jobs. The researchers discovered if women had dependable, safe daycare, they tended to have a more positive attitude about their ability to balance family and work responsibilities. Furthermore, reliable transportation for work and for attending to children's needs was crucial. DeBord, Canu, and Kerpelman pointed out "the dynamic nature of the work-family fit model; the level of fit between needs and supplies can affect the fit between job demands and parents' abilities" (p.318).

DeBord, Canu, and Kerpelman (2000) discovered single mothers also needed to be able to cope with demands on their time for work and spending with their children. Additionally, women had to learn how to fit into the work culture to interact with their fellow employees and meet production standards (pp. 320-321). To succeed, women required coping skills for mental and physical job stresses. They also needed the ability to budget, plan, and organize their time to manage their lives. Employer flexibility for women to care for their children was crucial for retaining a job. Additionally, women needed organizational skills for balancing demands by outside agencies for furthering their education and managing the fit between family abilities and work demands. DeBord, Canu, and Kerpelman also found continuing to pursue education had a positive affect on the women themselves, their families, and their ability to make a successful transition to work and retain a job (pp. 321-322).

Using the U.S. National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, Heymann and Earle (1998) examined and compared working conditions of 2077 mothers in the workforce (p. 315). Of these, 153 had been on welfare for more than 5 years (p. 315). Like DeBord, Canu, and Kerpelman's (2000) study, Heymann and Earle found balancing work and family was crucial for women's successful long-term transitions to work. They discovered single mothers needed "to find ways to meet the many unpredictable time demands of children" (p. 314). Sick leave, paid vacation and personal days, and work and employer flexibility could assist women in meeting these demands (p. 314). When parents could not take paid leave, had inflexible work schedules, and had no one to rely on for help, they were frequently "forced to choose between meeting work demands and meeting children's needs" (p. 319). The result was they were
more likely to make the decision to leave their jobs.

**Transitional Benefits and Supports**
Preparation, assisting, educating, and training single mothers for work is important and might meet some of their needs. However, transitional support for retaining the job once found can be a critical factor for individuals entering the workforce after a long time. For example, in their study of 38 welfare recipients from Ohio and 15 individuals on welfare from California, Pearlmutter and Bartle (2000) investigated recipients' views about obtaining and retaining jobs. One of the findings indicated women wanted “support for retaining their jobs, such as negotiating time off to care for their own and their children’s medical needs. They want peer support from mentors, and they want safe, affordable, and round-the-clock day care” (p. 168).

The Self Sufficiency Project (SSP) Plus program in British Columbia and New Brunswick corroborated the need for job support for welfare recipients to retain jobs, not just find them (Greenwood, 2000; Lei & Michalopoulos, 2001). From 1995 to 2000, welfare recipients were offered a 3-year wage top up as an income incentive to help them leave welfare. However, one policy challenge had been to assist individuals to remain employed while they sought better jobs (Greenwood, 2000, p. S248). Thus, SSP Plus employment services planned through job retention support to build bridges between work and long-term welfare recipients (Greenwood, 2000; Lei & Michalopoulos, 2001). In addition to helping with employment plans, resumes, a job club, workshops, and job leads, SSP Plus supplied job coaches. Their duties included job search, job advancement, job leads, and job retention (Lei & Michalopoulos, 2001, p. 13). Job retention assistance included child care providers, transportation services, emotional and psychological support for relating to bosses and other employees, and suggesting further job and attitude training (pp. 13-14).

Blank, Card, and Robins (2000) confirmed the SSPS Plus findings. In studying financial assistance programs in the U.S. to determine if financial incentives increased individuals’ shift to work from welfare, they found: “Carefully targeted financial incentive programs can raise work effort and improve the living standards of welfare recipients” (p. 401). However, they discovered when management supports were added to financial incentives for welfare
recipients, the impact was even more significant. Even though long-term recipients had been mandated to attend the services, these assisted individuals stay employed (p. 401).

**Employment Programs**

Propelled by the aforementioned activation strategies, Canadian provincial governments are moving towards a U.S. workfare model for awarding welfare entitlements (Wong & McBride, in press). As a result, women are being funneled to employment programs to assist them with the transition from welfare to work. Snyder (2000) examined the utility of these programs and whether women should attend voluntarily or be mandated to participate. She used a multivariate regression analysis to explore the success of 192 women 5 years after they had left a voluntary welfare program in Ontario. The program provided assistance with child care and employment expenses. Despite the belief by many researchers and women on welfare that child care is a major obstacle to finding and retaining employment for women, Snyder discovered other more important factors. The most significant included: long-term involvement in the voluntary employment program, career planning, job search, and previous work experience (Snyder, 2000, p. 65). Snyder revealed that “Although amount of child support is a factor in clients’ leaving social assistance, it is not as important as work experience and involvement in programs” (p. 64). Snyder also discovered dropping out of college or university had “a negative impact on other factors and is associated with not attaining employment or not leaving social assistance” (p. 65). According to Snyder, mandating women to attend employment programs is not necessary if career planning and job search components are provided for women attempting to leave welfare for paid work (p. 66).

Brown, Ganzglass, Golonka, Hyland, and Simon (1998) examined welfare-to-work programs in the U.S. that appeared to help recipients move to employment. The most beneficial tended to take into account individuals’, particularly single mothers’, needs. These included: ongoing contact with case managers; mentoring programs; financial assistance and services; child care support services, transportation, health, and housing; and reducing payroll and income tax (pp. 14-26). These programs sought to help women stay employed, not just make a quick transition to work only to revolve back to welfare. Other recommendations covered: developing training programs with employers; improving access to training and education
opportunities in the workplace and the community; and assisting women advance on the job (p. 6).

**Education**

Pandey, Zhan, Neely-Barnes, and Menon (2000) argue access to higher education for women on welfare will have benefits. They point out poor women will participate more in the labour market through better access; experience of higher job retention; higher wages; self-reliance; greater self-esteem and self-confidence; and feelings of empowered (pp. 112-113). Women’s families will also benefit through better educated children with improved health (pp. 113-114). Finally, these researchers maintain society gains through decreased fertility rates, lower maternal and infant mortality rates through improved health care use, and increased gross national production (pp. 113-114). In concluding their article, Pandey, Zhan, Neely-Barnes, and Menon contend: “There is a direct link between postsecondary education and a secure financial future. Education provides choices in life” (p. 160).

In a community-driven research project exploring enhancing educational opportunities for women in Vancouver, British Columbia’s Downtown Eastside, Sorell, Eror, Butler, Louscher, and Alkenbrack (2003) made a number of findings about effective education and pre-employment programs. The 75 women on low incomes and on welfare in this study pointed out the most effective programs for them “a) provide opportunities for work without deductions of earnings from welfare cheques; b) include a focus on life – and other skills relevant to workplace culture; and c) are taught by women with relevant life experience” (p. 7). Helpful services and programs also encourage women to become informed about issues and take responsibility by becoming actively involved in decision-making structures within the community. Additionally, these women found they needed opportunities to volunteer and acquire skills through training. To do this, the women wanted to create support through belonging to a community while providing advice for circumventing bureaucratic problems. To further assist them, women needed daycare services, nutritious free lunches, “clothing, emergency/transitional shelter, health care, laundry, and showers” (p. 7). These services would enable women to participate in learning opportunities that accommodated their learning styles, disabilities, needs, and work histories. Furthermore, to pursue education
and programs, women wanted flexible scheduling to take into account their time dedicated to
caring responsibilities. Additionally, women needed support groups while in college and as
they entered the labour market (p. 13).

**Linking Programs to Work**

According to Riemer (2001), as measured by categorical delineations set by government, the
4 welfare-to-work initiatives that the 37 men and women in her study attended “worked
because they linked unemployed individuals to jobs” (p. 182). Thus, by government standards
her participants were successful because they had been able to make the transition to work,
albeit in some instances low paying work without benefits. However, despite this success,
Riemer points out individuals’ knowledge and skills were minimized as they were only
measured by academic knowledge (p. 182). Furthermore, trainers, staff, and employers
matched participants to training for “suitable” work roles (p. 185) while “creaming” off
others for opportunities leading to higher paying jobs and benefits (p. 196). Despite the
streaming of individuals, the men and women often contested these imposed choices (Fraser,
1989).

Riemer (2001) suggests two types of programs to help people leave welfare and meet their
needs: process model and competency-based. Process model programs incorporate adult
participants’ needs, concerns, objectives, and paths as a multiplicity of steps people take to
meet their goals over the long term (p. 223). The competency based training model that
allows individuals to advance at their own pace, measures success through skill-based
competencies, and results in training-related employment (p. 225). Riemer points out these
models take into account “moving onto the job ladder requires the trial and error that is not
just a first step, but supported second and third steps as well” (p. 226). Riemer also contends
integrated and ongoing education and training should be part of the long-term process to
move people off welfare to good jobs with benefits and supports (pp. 228-235).

**Summary Thoughts about What Works as Linked to Women’s Needs**

Overall, these studies highlight the significance of transitional benefits, support, programs,
higher education, and individuals’ actual needs. These research projects emphasize the
importance of starting from women’s lived needs as Fraser (1989) would say. However, transitional benefits seem to be the most crucial for women in many of the cases presented, for they assist single mothers to remain in the workforce after leaving welfare. Government needs to consider the worth of tangible financial incentives and intangible emotional supports. As mentioned, financial encouragement may be a high minimum wage, top ups to low pay, daycare and childcare subsidies, tax credits, and medical and dental benefits for women and their children. Additional incentives may consist of transportation and clothing supplements and access to monies for unforeseen work expenses. Other changes in legislation need to include new policies that allow women to keep child support payments from ex-husbands or ex-partners without having these taken away or clawed back by government. Additionally, many transitional benefits may contain better information about well-paying careers and access to training and education programs that are long enough to prepare women for more than just low-paying jobs or low road occupations (Wong & McBride, in press). Some intangible supports are those that can help single mothers actually keep jobs, such as flexibility in work hours if a child becomes sick and access to safe, quality childcare. Additionally, women need paid sick leave and vacation; support for handling problems at work with fellow employees or bosses; assistance finding a new job if laid off or dismissed; information about labour market changes; and help building financial reserves. Single mothers also find benefit in parenting programs that minimize role strains of juggling work and parenting; involve children in community, recreational, and cultural activities; and acknowledge and understand single parents’ everyday demands. These factors can help women and their children make gradual, long-term transitions from welfare to enjoy a quality standard of living. These will also assist employers in retaining female workers, decreasing turnover rates, and reducing training costs.

As mentioned above, if policymakers truly hope to encourage and assist women in making transitions from welfare to paid work, they must incorporate single mothers’ everyday needs into the policy discourse, design, and implementation (Butterwick, 1992; 1996). Furthermore, when examining women’s needs, policymakers must take into account single mothers’ unpaid caring labour, especially in the private domain. This cannot be separated from women’s roles within the public labour market, for it influences their ability to choose paid
work over their unpaid caring work. Moreover, women’s needs determine the types of social benefits they receive and how they are defined as citizens within the public and private domains. Who determines needs becomes very important and exerts power over others. Fraser further (1989) states: “The social is a site of discourse about problematic needs, needs that have come to exceed the apparently (but not really) self-regulating domestic and official economic institutions” (p. 156). Ultimately, government policymakers identify, shape, and construct women’s needs while dictating their life opportunities within the system. Such policies, as those discussed in the next section, created under the New Democratic Party during the 1990s contextualized the women’s lives in my study from 1998 to 2001 as they attempted to leave welfare.

**Policy Discourses Shaping and Structuring the Women’s Needs**

Needs discourse is evident in British Columbia’s welfare policy through its design and implementation. The province, policymakers, business, labour, interest groups, educators, and others, except for the women on welfare, defined, constructed, instituted, and enshrined welfare recipients’ needs in government policy. They did this through a series of policy initiatives during the 1990s culminating in revised welfare policy implemented in 1996: *BC Benefits*.

**Influence of Federal Funding Cuts**

These provincial policy initiatives were propelled by changes in federal welfare funding and transfers to the provinces. In 1990, the federal government began substantial funding cuts to the Canadian Assistance Plan (CAP) created in 1966 to “provide financial aid to all residents judged to be ‘in need’” (National Council of Welfare (NCW), 1991, p. 2). This same year, the federal government began a series of funding cuts and instituted a 5% ceiling on CAP expenditures to the three wealthiest provinces: Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia. Thus, they would need to find monies elsewhere for costs surpassing the federal ceiling (p. 18). The recession that began in 1990 compounded these cuts (NCW, 1997, p. 1). Consequently, this led to massive unemployment resulting in growing numbers of individuals resorting to employment insurance and welfare. In 1993, these circumstances forced the federal government to cut spending to social programs and employment insurance even further.
In 1996, the federal government eliminated CAP and replaced it with “block funding” called Canada Health and Social Transfer (p. 40). This block transfer covered costs for welfare, post-secondary education, and health (NCW, 1999-2000, p. 67). By 1997, the federal government attempted to reduce child poverty through the new Canada Child Tax Benefit to assist low income and middle-income families (NCW, 2000, p. 66). However, families of children on welfare were excluded from this benefit, thus, pushing them farther into poverty.

**British Columbia’s Response**

In response to federal funding cuts to the provinces and globalization, Premier Mike Harcourt under the New Democratic Party (NDP) began reviewing the economy, skills, and education of the workforce. He sought to determine if workers met the needs of business for an educated, well trained, skilled, and flexible labour force. These changes placed increasing importance on a workforce with highly developed human capital while creating escalating labour market polarization between those investing in education and training and those with little or none (OECD, 1997; Rubenson, 1992). In an attempt to alleviate these discrepancies and streamline the BC economy, through a series of provincial summits, Premier Mike Harcourt sought to revise government policies. His objective was to provide opportunities for retraining the unemployed, the marginalized, and those on welfare (particularly women) to enter the workforce. However, despite government efforts to implement policies that might benefit women, frequently, these policies, in fact, constrained or bound women’s efforts to leave welfare. To understand the provincial context and the complexity of the policies shaping the 23 women’s experiences during my study, the most influential policies are presented in the following sections.

*The Premier’s Summit: Skills Development and Training: The Solution*

**Key Challenges: Need for Skills and Training**

In an attempt to identify the “key challenges” for British Columbia’s economy and its workforce, Premier Harcourt held a series of summits on Trade and Economic Opportunity, Education, and Training (BC Institute of Technology, *Premier’s Summit*, 1993). Through the summits, Harcourt launched his goal to improve skills development and training for British
Columbians. He wanted future generations to see BC as “a province adapting to change and getting it right” (p. 5). For Harcourt, the summits were a way to create a shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities the province and citizens would be facing; identify key sectoral partnerships for success; define roles, responsibilities, and relationships more effectively; and recommend action and follow-up (p. 5). He wanted “British Columbians to be flexible, adaptable, skilful people” to share in a “prosperous, robust economy which offers jobs for people” (p. 5). To do this, Harcourt believed the province needed: “To train more and train better in a fiscally responsible way to better equip British Columbians with the skills they will require to succeed” (pp. 5-6). The Premier sought to ensure skills and training initiatives were accessible in the future to all British Columbians whether they were unemployed, on welfare, from equity groups, or a particular age. To do this, he began to create an integrated education and training structure that would provide seamless, lifelong learning, and training of all types to everyone (pp. 9-10).

The Ideal Learning and Training System

Thus, during the first Summit, representative stakeholders gathered to review the economic picture and labour market within BC. At the same time, they crafted a “vision” of an ideal learning and training system for the future; identified obstacles and opportunities to the vision, and suggested actions to the challenges for the vision to become a reality (pp. 13-14). The first Summit’s goal was to assist in the creation of

a more flexible and integrated educational and training structure, ideally a seamless one, based on a fundamental and equal respect for learning and training, be it technical, vocational, or academic, that encourages a learning environment throughout society and at all ages that more fully integrates the practical and experiential with the theoretical and academic, that encourages a smooth transition from school to work and that reduces barriers to entry and re-entry for all, thereby giving greater substance and centrality to the concept of lifelong learning and one that is more directly relevant to the global and local economic and social context. (1993, p. 9)

Premier Harcourt promoted the importance of providing greater access to education, training, and lifelong learning while recognizing technical and vocational training as equally valuable as academic programs. He stated: “We have to dedicate ourselves to upgrading our education skills – and keep on upgrading – or we’ll see our standard of living fall and our unemploy-
ment and welfare lines grow even longer” (p. 4). For Harcourt, all British Columbians needed to be better equipped: “with the skills they will require in the 21st century. We need to train more and train better. And we have to do it in a fiscally responsible way” (p. 53).


The Summit and Women on Welfare as Marginalized

The Premier’s Summit (1993) called for a flexible, better educated, and trained workforce with more skills. For the first time, a provincial document mentioned single mothers and single women on welfare. The consensus was more information was needed about women (p. 19). At the same time, the document identified women with disadvantaged and marginalized groups, such as aboriginals, older workers, unemployed workers, people with disabilities, and visible minorities (p. 19). Generally, the Summit’s authors assumed these women lacked skills and education. Therefore, women needed opportunities for better access to programs, relevant training, traditional skills, technical and distance learning, and “income support linked to training and economic strategy” (p. 20). By identifying women as marginalized and categorizing them with others labelled as disadvantaged, the underlying assumption seemed to be women on welfare avoided work and were dependent by virtue of receiving welfare benefits (Andruske, 1998a). Consequently, government defined women as lacking skills. Therefore, to remedy this deficiency, policymakers targeted women as needing to be fixed up and reshaped through training to acquire relevant job skills to enter the paid labour market (Brodie, 1996a, p. 135).

Skills Now: Real Skills for the Real World

The Seamless System for Learning and Training

In the Skills Now: Real Skills for the Real World (1994) report, government focused on a plan to create a seamless system of lifelong learning and training for all British Columbians, not
just the young (p. 9). In this document, government changed the identity of both single mothers and single women on welfare to “unemployed British Columbians” (p. 7). Since they were unemployed individuals, policymakers believed women just needed “real skills for the real world” (p. 1). Again, this discounted skills women possessed derived from unpaid caring work and past experiences. Fraser (1989) would say this was a simplistic explanation of women’s needs.

**Opportunities for the Unemployed**

According to government, by linking K-12, post-secondary education, vocational, technical, and workplace programs together into one system, British Columbians would be provided with greater access to training. These opportunities would benefit especially those previously denied access, primarily by “moving the unemployed from welfare to the workforce, by building on people’s strengths and abilities” (*Skills Now*, 1994, p. 1). Government proposed to assist the unemployed and those on welfare by creating individual training plans. This would allow women on welfare to receive counselling and training to help them take advantage of “job opportunities that match their abilities” (p. 7) and meet local community job needs. To complement this, the Workplace Training for Jobs initiative would assist 45,000 individuals earn a living while learning real skills. An additional 20,000 people would receive provincial funding and support services for training for specific vocational programs at colleges and universities. Furthermore, the training plans would be matched to community job needs and small businesses. Thus, people could train and work while they earned a living. Finally, these initiatives would provide people with “new jobs” and “more opportunities” for “well paying jobs” (p. 1).

**Women on Welfare Problematized as the Unemployed**

Despite the promises enshrined in government policies, *Skills Now* (1994), defined women on welfare in a particular way. They were identified as a problem marginalized by welfare resulting in an inability to make choices to access education and training for work. Thus, through policy discourses, women on welfare were reshaped and reconstructed into unemployed workers without jobs. According to policy, the women’s problem was they needed “real” skills because they had become skill deficient through their time on welfare as
mothers. Therefore, women on welfare needed to be fixed, so they required greater access to training for them to learn “real skills for the real world” (p.1). Even though women would work in conjunction with a consultant to determine a training plan, this was, ultimately, for short-term programs to move women into the labour force quickly. The type of education and training women would receive was shaped by skills and workers the economy needed, not the woman’s goals. This approach did not necessarily consider women’s needs or choices for education leading to a degree, ensuring higher paying jobs, and improving quality of life for women and their children. Again, the complexity of women’s lives and their needs were constrained by the view they could easily be shifted from welfare through access to training (Andruske, 1998b).

Training for What?

Work-Skill Fit

Finally, a document presented by the BC Labour Force Development Board (BCLFDB), Training for What? (1995), informed government policy by examining the fit between employers’ needs and workers’ skills. According to The Board,

One of the most important current policy debates is about how education and training resources can be best utilized to ensure there is an optimum fit between the needs of the workplace and the knowledge, skills and experience of current and future employees. (p. 1)

Reconceptualizing Women on Welfare as Transitional Workers Needing Skills

Although dissolved in 1997, the BCLFDB created to advise the Minister of Skills, Training and Labour had a significant influence on provincial policy by changing conceptions of women on welfare. In this document, the Board identified single mothers as transitional workers “who have been displaced from the workforce and face barriers to re-entering it” (p. 10). They were also categorized as an emerging “growing potential underclass” of more ethnically diverse participants consisting of aboriginals, women, visible minorities, and the disabled (p. 33). Single mothers and women tended to be identified as individuals needing substantial and continual upgrading (p. 33). The Board noted that for members of equity groups and aboriginal peoples, learning systems and work places needed to be more flexible and welcoming. If this did not occur “their opportunities to participate fully in learning and
work” would continue to be limited (p. 28). “As a result, aboriginal peoples, members of equity groups and persons receiving Income Assistance tend to have lower average incomes than the population at large” (p. 10). Therefore, the Board recommended these individuals needed to acquire more skills by enrolling in applied, vocational, or apprenticeship programs through more inclusive and welcoming training and work environments. Furthermore, they needed basic foundational skills to keep and secure employment. These included: communication, thinking, learning, and teamwork skills. They also required positive attitudes and behaviours, adaptability, the ability to take responsibility (pp. 20-21). To do this, the Board recommended campus safety initiatives and creation of training and employability programs within the Ministry of Skills, Training and Labour (p. 28).

At that time, Training for What? affected the thinking of government, policymakers, business, and educators. The document identified women on welfare as particularly needy displaced workers who were fast becoming an underprivileged underclass. One of the underlying messages here was that they had the potential to become even more of a problem if the women did not receive basic upgrading and fundamental skills to secure and keep employment. However, the skills and training seemed to be geared towards low road occupations as opposed to high wage jobs (Wong & McBride, in press). The Board conceded that women faced barriers for addressing their needs as they attempted to re-enter the job market and education. Therefore, the Board suggested some measures should be taken to help women enrol in applied and employment programs to teach women how to enter the workforce while providing them with basic education and skills. However, this ignored the underlying ageism that is often found in the labour market, for Training for What? focused on youth between ages 19 and 29. At the time, this was the largest unemployed group in BC. Again, women on welfare were expected to meet the needs of the labour market by learning particular skills for specific jobs. Thus, the underlying assumption was if the market’s needs were met, so would the women’s. However, women’s needs and their lives were much more complex than identified by simplistic, albeit well-meaning, solutions.

Summary Thoughts
Ultimately, Premier’s Summit, Skills Now, and Training for What? identified women on
welfare as dependent, marginalized, and skillless. They were reconstructed as unemployed individuals needing to be fixed up. To do this, government would provide help for women to access skills through vocational and employment programs to move them off welfare and back into the workforce. Thus, the women would once again become contributing, working taxpayers helping the BC economy. However, no one consulted the women or invited them to the policy discussion table to find out just what women believed they needed to make transitions from welfare. Once again experts sought to identify women's needs while constructing women in a particular way that would lead them to opportunities pre-determined by government (Fraser, 1989).

**Welfare and Social Policies**

**Changing the Guaranteed Income Act: The Caring Community**

In addition to the summits, Premier Harcourt took a multi-pronged approach by examining the province's social assistance policies and their relationships to employment, skills development, training, and education. Harcourt advised the Ministry of Social Services to study possible changes to the outdated Guaranteed Available Income for Need Act (GAIN). GAIN had been created during the 1930s Depression to assist those in need. To do this, the Ministry appointed a 15-member Advisory Council presenting social services, advocacy groups, labour, and business (B.C. Advisory Council on Income Assistance, *First Step*, 1994, p. 5). The Premier assigned them the task of reviewing income assistance and its relationship to the new informational technology and globalized markets of the 1990s.

The Advisory Council’s philosophy was welfare is a human right, not charity. “Investing in people though income security supports citizenship with dignity” (p. 5). Citizens should contribute to their communities. Conversely, they are entitled to a caring community that includes a culture encompassing employment, education, family, food, housing, and recreation (p. 5). Additionally, a caring community should include respect for individual strengths and cultures, right to choose and control life decisions, and acceptance of responsibility. “No one should be excluded from the benefits of citizenship, opportunity and dignity” (p. 5).

The Advisory Council’s work culminated in two reports: *The First Step* (1994) and *The
Second Report (1995). These documents were particularly interesting, for they served as stepping stones to set the tone and direction for a later report: New Opportunities for Working and Living: Report from the BC Premier's Forum (1995). Unlike other training and economic summits, the Advisory Councils chose specific models that initiated long-range reforms to revise welfare benefits to meet the demands of individuals during the 1990s.

The First Step

The Process Model

In developing the recommendations for The First Step (1994), the Advisory Council used a process model based on individuals' needs. First of all to do this, the Council defined welfare recipients differently. The Council maintained: "Individuals have the right to control their own lives and to take responsibility for their actions. Individuals must be given choices, wherever possible, to maximize their self-determination" (p. 5). Moreover, the Advisory Council stated: "All people should be valued as human beings and treated with respect, dignity and compassion, be willing to 'walk alongside' people to help them, and promote self-esteem, self-worth and confidence in people receiving services" (p. 14). Furthermore, to ensure welfare recipients were treated with respect, the Council reminded staff to avoid intimidating and victimizing potential clients. Additionally, they needed to "be sensitive to the stressful circumstances that applicants are in and do their best to serve them efficiently and compassionately, without hiding behind bureaucratic policies" (p. 15).

Secondly, to ensure individuals' needs were met and cultures were honored, the report developed "A complete process of employment training, life skill training and job creation, rather than focusing solely on individual programs" (p. 12). In examining and revising the social safety net, the Advisory Council believed in looking at the individual's needs and those of their families. It pointed out: "Helping people become part of the work force includes rebuilding their self-esteem, ensuring literacy, teaching life skills, developing communications and generic skills...as well as training people for specific jobs" (p. 12). For the Council, this also meant investigating growing trends that threatened an unstoppable cycle of poverty leading to a cycle of dependency on the welfare system. The trends showed more employable individuals resorting to welfare; increasing numbers of single parent
families headed by mothers due to divorce or separation; replacing lost jobs with lower paying ones; and predictions of a “jobless” recovery (p. 3). To prevent pushing people further into poverty and to prepare individuals for the transition from welfare, current income support rates should be “based on real needs” (p. 7). “The current GAIN rates are insufficient to meet the basic needs of individuals and families” (p. 7).

Increased Benefits
Finally, to meet individuals’ needs, the Advisory Council recommended benefit levels and exemption rates be raised for welfare recipients. The Council also suggested redefining the concept of disabled. It sought to cover all types and severity of disabilities while integrating the handicapped more fully into communities and workplaces. Furthermore, the Advisory Council proposed to deal with high unemployment, program duplication and redundancy, and communities’ local needs by creating a Jobs and Training Steering Committee. It would oversee a rural and urban pilot project to initiate community partnerships, provide local job creation, and teach transferable skills to eliminate the “one size fits all” (p. 13) policies. This model would promote “real training for real jobs” (p. 12) by creating “a process of employment training and job creation” (p. 12) for all individuals on welfare.

Welfare Recipients Can Make Responsible Choices
As illustrated, the authors of The First Step (1994) constructed the identities of individuals on welfare somewhat differently to change the “one size fits all” policies (p. 13). The Council defined recipients as persons able to make responsible choices for maximizing self-determining opportunities for their futures. Additionally, the Council attempted to look at leaving welfare as a holistic process that included not just sending an individual to a program but providing training for employment, life skills, and job creation. Having work at the end of the process would ensure individuals would become paid employees able to use what they had learned. Using Fraser’s (1989) needs discourse as a frame, it appears the Council attempted to examine the complexity of individuals’ lives in relation to the labour market. However, the authors still continued to identify individuals’ needs as self-esteem, basic literacy, life skills, and communication skills. The authors did not really construct recipients’ opportunities to encompass advanced education, but as requiring “real training for real jobs” (First Step.
Again, the intricacies of transitioning from welfare were discounted. On the other hand, the Council recommended benefit rates be increased to assist people with making a transition from welfare, for they recognized individuals’ survival needs were not being met.

The Second Report

Citizenship Model: The Contributing Taxpayer

A year later, in *The Second Report* (1995), the Advisory Council recommended creating the client-centered Community Based Program. To accomplish this, the Council proposed using a citizenship model for the new initiatives believing:

The current system is based on a passive model of social assistance which undermines the self-esteem of recipients and denies them opportunities. Income recipients are treated as non-participants in our society rather than as active capable citizens. They are viewed as living off of the “contributing” taxpayer. (p. 10)

According to the Advisory Council, the Ministry should “move to a citizenship model of social assistance which recognizes recipients as contributing members of society with equal access to the rights and responsibilities of citizenship” (p. 10). Such a model would signify: “Taxing Income Assistance like all other income means treating recipients as contributing citizens rather than charity cases” (p. 12). Thus, in addition to citizens having rights, they also had the responsibility to be working taxpayers. To encourage labour market participation and full citizenship, the Council proposed to eliminate disincentives to work. This would be achieved by establishing “a method of determining adequate Income Assistance rates, and to develop programs which deliver Income Assistance services which integrate the needs of recipients with the social and economic development of their communities” (p. 1). Monies raised through taxes would be redirected to raise income assistance to adequate levels (p. 13).

The Advisory Council recommended creating the client-centered Community Based Program. This would be “adapted to the needs and aspirations of the client” as opposed to attempting to make individuals fit into existing programs (p. 15). By avoiding administrative duplication, these programs would provide more effective and customized services to meet recipients’ needs (p. 15). Following the successful Social Services Community Volunteer Program and controlled by a community-based board, “The Community Based Program combines income incentives with education, job training, skills development, community
service, and employment opportunities for people with incomes below adequacy. Such incentives would further contribute to closing the gap between current rates of Income Assistance and adequacy” (p. 14). This would occur by topping up clients’ incomes while they participated in training, education, or work placement programs. By integrating welfare recipients into the local community through labour market participation, they would have an opportunity to earn an adequate income. This would “enable members of a household to be a part of society” (p. 9). At the same time, it would keep them out of poverty while they actively contributed to their communities as taxpaying citizens. Moreover, by taxing all income equally and treating individuals as taxpaying citizens, this would remove some of the existing disincentives. It would contribute to the broader economy, and it would result in a more fair and effective tax system [as] making all income taxable would in effect decrease the high marginal tax rate between Income Assistance and employment income.... Such tax reform must be balanced with tax relief provisions for households with an income below the level of adequacy. (1995, p. 12)

Thus, the Advisory Council saw welfare recipients as responsible taxpaying citizens able to participate in their local communities. At the same time, they would have opportunities to engage in the Community Based Program to enhance their training, education, or work skills.

Welfare Recipients Redefined as Taxpayers
In The Second Report (1995), the Council reshaped the identities of welfare recipients further by intimating that individuals’ responsible choices meant becoming a particular type of citizen with rights: a taxpaying citizen. To help welfare recipients move into the work force and into society, the Council sought to meet individuals’ needs to learn skills, train for jobs, and access education by providing locally customized opportunities for community employment. Despite the discussion of welfare recipients having choices and becoming citizens, they were defined as marginalized, non-contributing members of society. They needed to be legitimated as citizens through paying taxes derived from paid jobs. Council assumed work would provide an adequate income; thus, individuals would be better off than on welfare.

New Opportunities for Working and Living
Life Cycle Model
To follow up on recommendations from the First Step (1994) and The Second Report (1995),
Premier Harcourt called his forum on *New Opportunities for Working and Living* (1995). By that time, many Advisory Council members had begun thinking about future welfare policy revisions. Initially, they had proposed the changes follow a process model of development and a taxpaying citizenship model while considering welfare recipients’ needs. This thinking was also linked closely to *Skills Now* (1994). The combination of the models produced a new one that was a “life cycle approach” (BC Social Program Renewal Secretariat, *New Opportunities for Working and Living*, 1995, p. 2).

The Premier’s year long Forum *New Opportunities for Working and Living* (NOW) (1995) built on the *First Step* (1994) and *The Second Report* (1995) and incorporated *Skills Now* (1994) and ideas from *Training for What?* (1994). The Forum attempted to address “the growing gap between those with good jobs and those without, many of whom have become dependent on our income security system. This dependence has, in many cases, become long term” (NOW, 1995, p. 1). Thus, the government maintained: “These changes should encourage and reward work” while promoting British Columbians’ belief “that the best form of income security...comes from participation in the labour market” (p. 2).

Based on the diversity of their backgrounds in health; business; education; activist groups for the disabled, poor, and housing; social services; training agencies; government; labour; and resource management, the Forum’s members adopted “a life cycle approach for their suggestions. This recognized that people within each age group share some specific needs” (p. 2). The age groups included children newborn to 6 months; 6 months to 3 years; 3 years to 6 years; 6 to 12 years; 13 to 18 years old; youth between the ages of 19 to 24; adults 25 to 65 years of age; seniors 65 years old an above; and the disabled of any age. Although the Forum did not develop specific recommendations, they did propose opportunities for renewal through support packages and programs representative of each age stage’s needs. The Forum group’s suggestions for all British Columbians were actually the precursors to the new welfare policy introduced in *BC Benefits: Renewing Our Social Safety Net* (1995). Only the points specific to the women on welfare in my research will be mentioned here.
Mothers and Children

To assist children, avert poverty, and a cycle of dependence on welfare, the Forum proposed addressing the primary caregivers’ needs: single mothers. Changes in family composition and women’s roles caused by increased divorce rates, reaching 58.9% in 1991, also demanded attention as more mothers were entering the labour force (NOW, 1995, p. 15). To help women until their dependent children reached age 18, the Forum suggested single mothers be provided with job security and income support (pp. 46, 48). Furthermore, to help women raise children, child support should be forthcoming from ex-partners or ex-spouses even if it meant garnisheeing their wages (pp. 52-53). To ensure health during and after pregnancy, mothers and their children should be entitled to health care benefits to avert stress caused by poverty. In addition, the Forum proposed family-based childcare, institutional-based or educare childcare, and before and after school care should be available for all mothers with children. This was especially important when mothers returned to the labour force, and their children enrolled in school at age 7.

Youth

The Forum maintained the least appropriate place for youth between the ages of 19 and 24 was welfare (p. 4). They conceded that due to changing economic times in the 1990s, collective agreements, apprenticeship requirements, and other impediments, “Many young adults find themselves shut out of the labour market because of their lack of experience or a mis-match between their education and labour market needs” (NOW, 1995, p. 55). This often resulted in “marginalization for the young and relegating them to a life of income assistance, passivity, and, ultimately, dependency” (p. 56). To counter this, the Forum suggested through Skills Now (1994), the young would have access to more seats in relevant training programs to meet their needs and those of the labour market while eliminating welfare dependency.

Thus, youth could be streamlined into short-term employment readiness programs, community work experience, and treatment programs for addictions, if needed (p. 63). If youth were to receive welfare, “Government should require that income assistance applicants participate in a work readiness program as a condition of receiving assistance” (NOW, 1995, p. 62). However, the Forum still thought the best place for youth was in the workforce. Therefore, they believed that the private sector should create more jobs, renew
apprenticeships without barriers, and create more employment preparation programs to ensure “young adults stay attached to the work world” (p. 62) by providing youth with relevant work skills.

Solving Adult Welfare Dependency

According to the Forum, increased adult dependence on income assistance was extremely complex. “Technological change; economic globalization; federal, fiscal and monetary policies; a closed labour market; changing family structures; reduced welfare stigma; and disincentives to work” all combined to elevate welfare rolls (p. 67). The Forum’s solution was

For adults of working age, the top priority of our income security system should be to encourage active participation in the labour market and in the community. By doing this, we will promote self-sufficiency and security for working-age adults and their families. (p. 65)

To discourage passivity and encourage self-sufficiency, “We must redesign existing programs to make sure they promote participation” (p. 70) by requiring “training, community service work, or any other activity” to receive benefits (p. 71).

One way to encourage participation and redesign programs would be to put adult training, like welfare programs, education, and employment standards, under provincial jurisdiction in the newly created Ministry of Skills, Training and Labour. This already had a good start through Skills Now (1994) to move welfare recipients to the workforce by providing relevant new skills “to working-age adults” (NOW, 1995, p. 71). This was being done through “an enhanced, integrated assessment, counselling and referral program and an array of workplace-based, institution-based and community-based training programs” (p. 72). Additionally, the Forum recommended higher benefits be paid to single parents with children under three, individuals in treatment programs for drug or alcohol dependency seeking to return to the job market, those “actively pursuing approved employment preparation training, and any individual in need who is accepted into a community work experience program” (p. 77).

Child Tax Benefit

The Forum also recognized the difficulties of low income working families. Therefore, they
suggested a child tax benefit be created “to remove child-related benefits from the income assistance system and provide them through a separate child benefit program” (NOW, 1995, p. 80). According to the Forum, this would provide a number of advantages. First of all, it would encourage parents to work because “Benefits for children would not be removed as a parent moved from welfare to work [while reducing] the existing barrier to independence” (p. 80). Secondly, the benefit would be fair and equitable for all since it “would be available to all low income families with children, not just those receiving income assistance benefits” (p. 80). This would reduce inequities between the working poor and those collecting welfare. Lastly, the provincial child tax benefit “would provide more adequate resources for children,” by assisting a family in moving from welfare to work (p. 80). It would do this by reducing “the level of income assistance benefits needed to support families with children” (p. 80).

**Working Income Supplement**

Additionally, the Forum suggested creating a Working Income Supplement to assist low and middle income working families (p. 81). Unlike the child tax benefit, this would be available only to working families, and the supplement would be attached to the family’s earnings.

According to the Forum,

> A working income supplement utilizes the income tax system to “make work pay” for those who earn at or close to the minimum wage. This addresses the problem of low income working families whose earned income can sometimes be less than the benefits they would receive on income assistance. (p. 81)

The Forum believed the Working Income Supplement would have a number of benefits. First, it would help low income families make ends meet. Second, it would provide families with an incentive to continue working. Third, it would be cost effective, for families would not need to resort to welfare. Fourth, by staying employed, individuals would be able to “gradually improve their working earnings and maintain or further develop job skills” (p. 84). Last, it would help “single parents, especially women, to enter and remain in the labour force (p. 84).

**The Disabled**

Finally, to assist the disabled, the Forum recommended disability be redefined according to the World Health Organization as “any restriction or lack of ability to perform an activity in
the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being” (NOW, 1995, p. 89). They hoped to provide more benefits, supports, and easier entry to work and education. “To succeed in the transition from school to work people with disabilities need vocational counselling, testing, training, and placement services to help them get and hold a job” (p. 91). Provincial Skills Now (1994) initiatives had added more counsellors, increased access to post secondary education, and programs. However, new labour market programs needed to be developed to

Assist employers to hire persons with disabilities, help them to get work and to participate as fully in the labour market as possible. To do this, we need new programs, incentives for employers, more accessible workplaces and support for those who want to work. (NOW, 1995, p. 91)

To help the disabled live with dignity, the Forum proposed they be moved from the welfare system to a new framework of support to “be tailored to fit the real needs of persons with disabilities” (p. 96). Thus, government could play a key role in helping the disabled remain employed “by encouraging businesses to hire people, and encouraging unions to provide workplace support” (p. 96)

The Forum also suggested more construction and availability of social housing (p. 85). This would not only benefit those on low income, but it would help senior citizens and individuals living with disabilities to live independently (p. 93). Particularly, older women would find this helpful, for they tend to live in poverty without safe, affordable housing (p. 108).

Streamlining the System
To implement these changes, the Forum recommended a one-stop model. This would provide information sharing and easier client access to streamline costs, efficiency, delivery, and “administration of public resources dedicated to employment, income transfer and the delivery of community based health and social services” (1995, p. 110). They hoped this would eliminate redundancy. In addition, the Forum noted that the Ministry of Social Services’ policy development and practices were outdated and based on exceptions. Overworked Financial Assistance Workers were bogged down determining client eligibility instead of spending quality time focused on clients’ needs (p. 111). To revise the current welfare system, the Forum made nine suggestions. These included the following:
• standardizing welfare benefits across Canada;
• revising asset levels for people on welfare;
• moving towards a “one-window” approach to decentralize some services;
• eliminating Welfare Wednesday through varying electronic bank deposit dates throughout the month;
• taxing income assistance;
• supervising, consistently, and clearly discretionary grants;
• reducing overlap and duplication from federal Canada Pension Plan and provincial Income Assistance program;
• seeking redress for broken down sponsorships of immigrants; and
• allowing the province access to information on training program outcomes for estimating increases in welfare recipients’ independence by entering, re-entering, or retraining for the workforce (NOW, 1995, pp. 112-114).

Women on Welfare: Paid Taxpaying Workers

Thus, the New Opportunities for Working and Living (1995) document produced by the Forum presented new options for welfare in BC through a multi-faceted approach. Although based on the view that people, especially women, need more skills to enter the workforce, the document attempted to take a more holistic approach by incorporating individuals’ needs from childhood to old age. Guided by the First Step (1994) and The Second Report (1995), the New Opportunities for Working and Living (1995) document focused on a combination of three models. These included the process model of employment training, life skill training, and job creation; the citizenship model emphasizing citizens’ rights, responsibilities, and duties to work and pay taxes; and a needs model based on specific age related needs to become a productive, taxpaying citizen. Despite adding the component of ensuring individuals’ needs were met, the Forum still identified and constructed women in terms of paid workers outside the home. Thus, their needs and opportunities were constructed around provision of daycare, skills, and programs for employment. Incentives for women were those that would help them transition and remain in the paid workforce. Furthermore, women’s citizenship was still defined through paid work in the workforce, not caring work performed in the home.
Moving Towards the Future

Although the Forum’s goal was simply to present ways to improve the current system, Premier Harcourt’s government utilized many of these suggestions to create the new welfare policy. The Forum’s proposals were combined with recommendations from Premier's Summit: Skills Development and Training (1993), Skills Now: Real Skills for the Real World (1994), and Training for What? (1995) into the new BC Benefits Act implemented in January of 1996. These documents and policies ultimately shaped and constructed the identities, needs, and opportunities of single women and mothers on welfare.

The Outcomes: The New Era through BC Benefits: Renewing Our Social Safety Net

In 1995, as a result of the Summits, Advisory Council, Forum, and BC Labour Force Development Board reports, the NDP government introduced its new welfare policy to eliminate welfare dependency through BC Benefits: Renewing Our Social Safety Net (BC Province of BC, 1995). In an abbreviated form, this document outlined the need for revising the 60-year-old welfare policy to coincide with the changing economic times of the 1990s as BC sought to deal with burgeoning numbers of unemployed individuals, youth, and single parent women collecting welfare. In addition to the changing global economy affecting BC, the NDP government maintained changes in the Unemployment Insurance Act, increased in-migration to BC, growing numbers of single parent families, and the need for new jobs skills and retraining for people to enter or re-enter the job market all contributed to the ever increasing welfare rolls.

Welfare Dependency

According to Renewing Our Social Safety Net (1995), welfare dependency affected adults, youth, families, and senior citizens. The document described the problem of dependency:

Welfare does little to provide employable adults with the skills they need to get out of the system and into decent jobs. Many people are left with little choice but to stay on welfare. This growth in dependence simply isn’t sustainable or desirable, either in financial or human terms. (p. 5)

Additionally, government focused on the increasing number of high school dropouts. It maintained they would probably always be marginally employed. Therefore, government believed: “Rather than providing a hand-up, the system is holding people back from
achieving independence” by allowing those individuals between the ages of 19 to 24 to collect welfare (p. 4). Furthermore, the problem of welfare dependency had far reaching consequences.

For too many hard-working British Columbia families with children, poverty is a painful reality. The long term impact of this poverty affects all of us through increased illness and welfare dependency, reduced community stability and the waste of human potential. And while everyone seems to agree that families are better off when parents can support them through employment, the system doesn’t do much to help parents get back to work. (Renewing Our Social Safety Net, 1995, p. 5).

To assist seniors over age 64 and the disabled, government would remove them from the welfare system. For the disabled, “a new program of pension-type benefits will be developed in consultation with disability communities” to meet their special needs while they seek independence and participation in community life and the job market (p. 16).

A Hand-Up Instead of a Hand Out for Welfare Recipients

According to the government, “British Columbians want to work, and value the independence that a job brings. Renewing Our Social Safety Net provides programs and financial support to give people a hand-up to jobs rather than a handout to welfare dependency” (1995, p. 8). Furthermore, the new policies included benefits for low income working families with children. “It means new alternatives that put an end to welfare for tens of thousands of people. It means continued protection for those who need it” (p. 8). They also instituted rate changes and adjustments. Single employable youth between the ages of 19 and 24 and single employable adults would be reduced to $500 a month from $546 (p. 9). Employable youth and adult couples would have their rates decreased to $811 after one month from $903 (p. 9). All others, except people with drug or alcohol dependency, would have their rates maintained at the same benefit level before Renewing Our Social Safety Net (p. 9).

To assist both low income working families and single parents, particularly women, seeking to leave welfare, new income benefits would be added. Based on the recommendations from the New Opportunities for Working and Living and in an attempt to address child poverty, a Family Bonus would be instituted to “level the playing field for these families by helping with the cost of raising children” (BC Benefits: Renewing, 1995, p. 10). This would “make it
easier for families with children to leave welfare and stay off, because they’ll continue to receive benefits for their kids outside the welfare system” (p. 10). Furthermore, to remove one of the barriers of moving from welfare to work, a new dental and vision benefits package, Healthy Kids, with up to 100% coverage would be implemented to assist low income working families “support their families through work” (p. 11).

For the Young: Youth Works
Under the new BC Benefits: Renewing Our Social Safety Net, government sought to move the growing numbers of youth between the ages of 19 and 24 receiving welfare to Youth Works. Through a contractual partnership between government, trainers, employers, and the young person, “Youth Works will guarantee eligible youth access to job search, job preparation, work experience or training. In return, eligible youth will be required to participate in these programs in order to receive benefits.” (1995, p. 12). For the first time, BC Benefits clearly spelled out government’s three-phase Youth Works program. During the 7-month Phase One, youth would be required to record their active efforts to seek employment through career exploration, planning, job search, and labour market news. In Phase Two, youth would be encouraged to participate in volunteer work to acquire new skills and required to enroll in “specific programs including career planning, skills plan development and job finding clubs” for a period of 2 months (p. 12). During Phase Three, youth would have the option of joining 1 of 4 categories of programs to meet their specific needs. One group of programs would be work preparation through courses including literacy, English language training, and adult basic education (p. 13). Another type would consist of workplace training for 1 year at private businesses where youth could learn on-the-job training for employment. Employers would receive $8,000 training credits for each individual they took; youth would be paid minimum wage; and no employees would be displaced. Single parents working part-time seeking to move to full time at their current job would “be eligible for a transition to work bonus and assistance with child care costs” (p. 13). Lastly, other opportunities for youth ready and interested would be student assistance programs for post secondary training. Also, “Youth Works will provide participants with career planning assistance to help them make educational choices that will lead to jobs” (p. 13).
For Adults: Welfare to Work

Although youth would be given preference, adults between 25 and 59 were expected to participate in the same types of welfare-to-work programs to receive income support. According to the government, “People are better off working,” so “Welfare to Work will redirect adults from welfare into job search, training and work experience. Its goal is to provide skills and experience that will help people leave welfare for work” (1995, p. 14).

Additionally,

Welfare to Work builds on existing Skills Now training programs, using partnerships with employers and trainers to deliver services. Particular focus will be on assisting single parents, those who have been out of the workforce for a long time, and those who face a variety of barriers to returning to work. (p. 15)

Furthermore, “Welfare to Work reduces barriers to moving from welfare to work, without reducing the support that’s provided to families with dependent children” (p. 14). By legislating the Family Bonus, Healthy Kids, Youth Works, Welfare to Work, Access to Independence for the Disabled, and Protecting Children at Risk, the NDP government believed individuals would move from welfare to work. This would reduce caseloads, provide individuals with new skills, and make it possible for single parent families and low-income families to remain in the labour force.

Women and Men as Welfare Dependent

Renewing Our Social Safety Net clearly identified welfare recipients as a growing problem of dependency. The solution was to provide program opportunities to return all individuals to the workforce through needed training and skill acquisition. Since government identified dependency as a growing problem, it implemented punitive measures to encourage people to return to the workforce: reduction of welfare benefits for single employable youth and adults and linking benefits to welfare to work training and employment programs. However, some benefits were added to reward the working poor and assist single mothers to return to the workforce: a family bonus and medical and dental for children. Despite the benefits to some, the document authors seemed determined to resolve the perceived dependency problem by converting individuals into taxpaying citizens. Again, the complexity of women’s lived experiences and needs as they transitioned from welfare were subsumed by government’s focus on individuals’ dependency.
Implementation of BC Benefits Legislation: The New Era

In 1996, the NDP government enacted BC Benefits in its entirety. The white papers include overlapping acts and regulations that cover: income assistance (for adults); Youth Works; disability; childcare; and appeals. These documents define and legislate assistance, benefits, employability programs, misleading information, offences, overpayments, maintenance rights, and the Minister's rights and responsibilities. The Child Care Act (1996b) stipulates childcare subsidies and grants. The Appeals Act (1996a) outlines appeals, the appeal board and panels, and their rights, responsibilities, and power to make regulations. Within BC Benefits, several subsidies are of interest for my study. Thus, only these will be discussed: the transition to work, child maintenance, and childcare.

Transition to Work Benefits

To make the transition to work smoother for welfare recipients, government offered a few benefits to those entering the workforce. These subsidies were meant to help a person with the costs of commencing employment. One of these benefits was the transition to work.

Incidental Costs

According to the income regulations, a single parent on assistance commencing a full time job may receive a “benefit of up to $200 to cover incidental costs related to entry into the work force” if she or he has never received this benefit before under this regulation, Disability Benefits, or Youth Works regulations (BC Benefits: Income Assistance Regulation, 1997c, p. 22). Such a benefit includes “actual and necessary costs a family incurs, due to employment, for transportation, child care or both” (p. 22). A person is only allowed this 12-month $150 benefit once for up to 1 year and must have at least 1 dependent child in the family. However, if anyone in the family commences employment or receives a youth or a disability allowance, the family is ineligible for this benefit (pp. 22-23).

Clothes

Government also realized that individuals having been out of the labour force for a long period of time might not have the necessary wardrobe for a work environment. Therefore, government made provisions so that a single parent is entitled to
the cost of purchasing clothes, if the recipient is not working but has arranged confirmed employment in Canada that would significantly promote his or her financial independence and is required to purchase clothes that the employer considers necessary to begin that employment. (p. 23)

Transportation
Furthermore, a single parent is allowed “local transportation costs required during the first month of employment if the recipient has confirmed employment in British Columbia” and transportation costs to a child protection proceeding if the parent is given notice and “is a party to the proceeding” (p. 24). Any of the aforementioned benefits are only available to the single parent if the person has no other sources of funding for costs, or the minister approves the expenses before they are incurred (p. 14).

Health Benefits
Finally, hidden under general health benefits section, provisions are made to cover health costs for single parents for 1 year after leaving welfare. “The minister may pay for any health benefit set out to the following persons: An employed single parent is eligible...and a dependent child of that single parent is eligible...for benefits...for a period of one year from the date the single parent ceased receiving income assistance, or a longer period specified by the minister” (pp. 29-30). Healthy Kids program covered children’s basic medical and dental.

Utility of Transitional Benefits
The government transitional benefits appear to take into account single parents’ needs as they move from welfare to work by providing for unforeseen start up costs. However, the way government policy is written seems to indicate single parents should be able to make a complete transition to work within a year without further need of the monthly $150 to help offset costs. Little consideration is given to wages earned and the type of job or jobs a person may find in her attempt to leave welfare. In addition, policymakers seem to assume a person will need only 1 month of transportation subsidy. It appears government believes a person will have a car and reliable and flexible bus service. Little consideration is given that a person might not be able to buy a car or find a car pool when the 1-month subsidy expires. Also, no account is taken that in some areas, like Chilliwack, flexible, reliable, and convenient bus
service is unavailable when a woman needs it for shift work or leaving and collecting her children from daycare or school. On the other hand, basic medical and dental benefits are provided for a woman’s children, and she may receive medical for 1 year. However, no provisions are made for single parents’ medical after a year or more serious children’s health and dental needs. Again, the assumption is that women will have found a job with medical benefits by the end of one year. This does not take into account that women often find low occupations with poor wages, especially in rural areas, such as Chilliwack. Overall, as Fraser (1989) points out, government only superficially addresses the complexity of women’s needs. Moreover, single mothers’ needs vary. One size does not fit all.

Child Maintenance Benefits

Spousal Child Support

The BC government has outlined policies and procedures to help women acquire financial child support from their ex-partners. Government stepped in because, generally, when many women separate from spouses, they are left without assistance from ex-partners to care for their children. Although some men do provide support, this is not the case for all mothers. Women are no longer able to get legal aid for divorce, custody, and child maintenance payments. According to the *BC Benefits Income Assistance Act* (1997b), a recipient may assign to the government the right to do one or more of the following:

- a) to bring a proceeding under an enactment to (i) obtain a maintenance order entitling the recipient to maintenance for the recipient or a dependent child, or (ii) vary or enforce a maintenance order under which the recipient is the creditor;
- b) to enter into (i) a maintenance agreement entitling the recipient to maintenance for the recipient or a dependent child, or (ii) an agreement varying a maintenance agreement under which that recipient is the creditor;
- c) to bring (i) a proceeding under any enactment or law to enforce a maintenance agreement under which the recipient is the creditor, or (ii) a proceeding under the *Family Relations Act* to vary a filed maintenance agreement under which the recipient is the creditor. (pp. 9-10)

Effects of the Policy

The act, then, assigns exclusive rights to the government for assisting single mothers in procuring maintenance for their children. This provision might be a benefit for some women. However, the overriding assumption in this policy is that women and their ex-spouses are not able to work out a consensual arrangement to care for their children once a woman has resorted to welfare. One must wonder what happens to those women and their ex-partners...
who have a working child maintenance arrangement and how monies are distributed to the women and their children. Finally, a policy like this also brings into question the definition of citizenship that government is promoting and women’s needs.

Child Care Subsidies

The Subsidies

One of the major problems for women returning to the labour force is safe, reliable, quality daycare. Thus, government provided subsidies for all low income, working mothers. *BC Benefits: Child Care Regulation* (1997a) set the subsidy parents could receive to put their children in daycare. Table 1 below depicts the most common child care subsidies for monthly daycare in licensed, unlicensed, and in-home settings. Although daily rates are provided, most women tend to use daycare on a monthly basis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age &amp; Type Care</th>
<th>Licensed</th>
<th>Unlicensed</th>
<th>Home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family 0-18 months</td>
<td>$21.90</td>
<td>$21.90</td>
<td>$19.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-Home 2nd child 0-18 months</td>
<td>$9.90</td>
<td></td>
<td>$198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family 19-36 months</td>
<td>$20.20</td>
<td>$20.20</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-Home 1st child over 18 months</td>
<td><strong>$15.90</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>$318</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-Home – Each additional child</td>
<td><strong>$7.35</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>$147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family 37 month-5 yrs.</td>
<td>$17.70</td>
<td>$17.70</td>
<td>$354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out-of-School Kindergarten</td>
<td>$12.75</td>
<td></td>
<td>$255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out-of-School Grade 1 &amp; up</td>
<td>$8.65</td>
<td>$8.65</td>
<td>$173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool – up to 4 hrs./day</td>
<td>$107 only</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* No rates provided for in-home care
** Only for in-home care

Adapted from *BC Benefits (Child Care) Regulation* by British Columbia, 1997a, pp. 13-14).
Hidden Costs of Daycare

Although government allocates some subsidy, it does not take into account other issues, such as limited daycare spaces and prohibitive costs for child care. According to Resseau as the Coordinator for Child Care and Resource Referral Program, child care costs in Chilliwack range from $20 to $30 per day or $400 to $600 per month (B. Resseau, personal communication, February 5, 2003). Ultimately, these government subsidies do not reflect real daycare costs for children. For example, depending upon the care, mothers could end up paying anywhere from a few dollars to $200 extra above the subsidy. Most, if not all, women on welfare can hardly afford these costs – as it is, they are just barely managing to survive. Consequently, Resseau points out many daycare providers subsidize women’s costs by absorbing the extra fees. Thus, this compounds the problem by putting a financial strain on daycare providers since they too are barely making ends meet. The issue of daycare becomes and is a woman’s problem as it tends to effect mothers and daycare providers, generally females. Granted some affordable places do exist; however, these spots are generally taken quickly, and waiting lists are long.

Equality of Care Costs?

Government policy does not take into consideration the actual costs of daycare for children. One must wonder why the subsidies, as depicted in Table 1, decrease from $438 for a child under 18 months to $404 for children 19 to 36 months to $354 for children 37 months to 5 years, and finally, to $173 when a child reaches school age. The assumption seems to be after school care is cheaper, and school age children need less care. Children at age 5 need different types of care – more along the lines of educare. One must wonder how can this be deemed less valuable than caring for a baby. Mothers attempting to work need safe, reliable, and flexible daycare that matches women’s actual work schedules, not just a nine-to-five model. No provisions are made to meet these needs in the welfare policy, thus indicating a gender bias towards a particular type of working day and availability of mothers and daycare workers after school. Low subsidy rates devalue caring work of mothers and daycare professionals and children’s needs.
Reflections about Policy for Women on Welfare

Through the changes implemented in welfare policy by *BC Benefits*, government attempted to acknowledge single parents’ needs for transitioning to work. They did this by providing various types of benefits, such as transitional, guarantees of child support, and child care subsidies. The assumptions seemed to be that once single parents had a job, they would no longer need transitional, transportation, or medical subsidies since a job would eliminate all these issues. Government did not take into account single parents might only be able to find part-time, low paying jobs. Therefore, mothers might have to juggle several jobs, child care, and the transportation needed to work and care for their children. Even child care benefits had value and gender embedded within them as illustrated by subsidy amounts women were given to pay for often scarce, unreliable, and inflexible daycare. Thus, although government policymakers attempted to identify women’s needs, they constructed mothers as needing to choose to work. By choosing to work and, thus, acquiring the status of a taxpayer, a single mother would once again become a valued citizen. This discounted a woman might transition from welfare only to become a working poor citizen unable to meet her needs or those of her family. Again, this ignored the complexity of women’s lives and their children’s as they interrelate with daycare workers and employers.

Building on a process of education, training, and work, taxpaying citizens, and age-based models, *BC Benefits* provided new welfare policies for all British Columbians. The legislation also included additional benefits for transition to work, child maintenance, and child care subsidies. Through the new policies, government intended to help people move from welfare dependency to full citizenship as taxpaying workers to “make work pay.”

Summary and Concluding Thoughts

The purpose of this chapter has been to illustrate how government constructed the needs of women on welfare during the 1990s. Through the Advisory Councils’ suggestions, government proposed to look at women’s needs on an individual basis and move them from welfare to work. This meant constructing women’s identities to become taxpayers, thereby, valuing them as contributing citizens and workers, but most importantly as taxpayers. On this basis, government defined and identified women on welfare as unemployed workers. At the
same time, while proposing to use a life development model, government sought to construct women’s opportunities in terms of getting a job. Consequently, women were defined as unemployed workers needing skills to enhance their job marketability. By blending social welfare policy and training and economic policy, government believed itself to be taking an integrated approach to alleviating what it defined as women’s welfare dependency. Thus, by providing women the opportunity to improve their skills through training, government contended women would, then, have more likelihood of moving from welfare to getting a job to become active, worthwhile, taxpaying citizens. Mother’s caring work was identified in terms of getting a job to provide for their children. Additionally, government did recognize the need for health and dental benefits, so proposals were made to separate these from welfare so even the working poor could receive this coverage for their children. Despite attempts to define women’s identities, construct their needs, and shape their life opportunities, government did not necessarily take into account individuals’ needs, nor their abilities to make choices, as the Advisory Councils had recommended.

Government *BC Benefits* policies’ depiction of women corroborates Fraser’s (1989) needs discourse about how the public domain can become the site of collision as government constructs women’s needs differently than women’s actual lived realities. Consequently, struggles ensued between women and those interpreting government polices as women attempted to make choices for new opportunities to meet their needs as they sought to leave welfare. Knowing how policymakers construct women’s identities, needs, and opportunities sets the context for examining the tensions created by the policymakers’ interpretations and women’s lived experiences of their needs in my research.

The following chapter presents the methodology for this research. The sites for the study, Chilliwack and Abbotsford, are also described as are the study’s limitations.
CHAPTER FOUR
BEGINNING OUR EXPLORATIONS: THE METHODOLOGY

It's a very complicated process being a single parent and being on welfare. To sum it up, the reason I decided to participate is because I think I feel that these kinds of surveys [are important], and if you don't ask the questions, you're not going to get the answers.

Mabel

The purpose of this chapter is to present the methods used to explore how the 23 women in my study made transitions from welfare. Through the life history methodology, the women's stories and experiences were collected, analyzed, and interpreted. Because women's stories need to be situated within their everyday lives, I introduce the two communities, Chilliwack and Abbotsford, where the research was carried out. Finally, I examine the study's limitations.

Life History: Research Frame


Daniel Bertaux: Life History

Since much confusion exists between life biography, life history, and life story, Bertaux helps clarify the distinction between these terms. He states case history, life records, human documents, personal documents, autobiography, and more, have been used interchangeably with life story and life history. He defines life biography as “written by somebody focusing upon somebody else’s life” (1981, p. 7). Bertaux describes the life story as solely the oral narrative account or the oral story of part or all the life as told by the individual – no other personal documents are collected to explain or define the life told by the person (Bertaux, 1981; Bertaux & Kohli, 1984). On the other hand, the life history includes the life story, and other personal documents (Bertaux, 1981, p. 6).
Furthermore, Bertaux’s definition highlights the exploration of particular social relationships within the everyday lifeworld (Bertaux & Kohli, 1984). According to Bertaux (1981), *social relations* are the essence of sociological knowledge, and this can be gleaned: “Through life stories – not just any, raw life story, for it takes hard work to put them into readable form. This raises interesting questions – people are able to communicate to one another through the mediation of sociology” (p.44). Bertaux challenges researchers to go beyond telling life stories of individuals and include stories and patterns of social relations, culture, groups, and researchers’ own stories “to discover the forms of discourse through which elements of knowledge about socio-historical processes will find their way into living cultures and thus, coming to public life, become at last common knowledge” (p. 44).

In addition, Bertaux explains the life story as a means to link the micro-sociological levels of life to macro-sociological questions and structures in society. In other words, individuals' life histories can be connected to structures people encounter in their everyday experiences. Life histories illustrate patterns of practice that depict ways individuals learn. Thus, these patterns of learning, then, may be linked to social structures. According to Bertaux (1981), individuals and institutions are joined through social-structural relationships. In turn, these are bound across time, space, and historical events.

Bertaux (1981) views the researcher as the embodiment of the connection between the micro and macro structures within the social world. Furthermore, life stories force the researcher to scrutinize socio-structural relations women and men living the stories experience and how these social structures are put in motion, facilitated, and maintained through time (p. 169). By examining the links and interrelationships, the researcher can provide a glimpse of the lived life, potential opportunities in the unlived life, and learning that could occur within the structures and social relationships (Bertaux, 1981; Alheit, 1992; 1995).

**Peter Alheit: Learning Unlived Potentialities**

Peter Alheit’s work complements Bertaux’s by providing an explanation of adult learning. This can be applied to my study to examine how and what women learn as they navigate the different structures in their transitions from welfare. Alheit maintains that the individual is a
socially, reflexive, and strategic act-or (Boal, 1990) creating and shaping his or her biography in the context of the lived social spaces. Through this, the individual as act-or can decipher "surplus meanings" of biographical knowledge as a new type of learning process in the individual's transitions, not just the psychological but the sociological as well (Alheit, 1994, p. 290). Through these connections to new knowledge, the individual can learn more about his or her personal life and the links to the social structures. Thus, through learning, the individual has the potential to live those unlived lives and potentials not yet realized (p. 293). Alheit believes adult educators' greatest impacts are in informal and unintended educational processes outside the scope of formal, structured education.

According to Alheit (1994), life histories aid researchers in examining the "discovery" of learning processes within transitions" (p. 285), for the research may trace these discoveries over time through interviews and the individual's discussion of her life choices. The biographical approach takes into consideration influences of structures and individuals' abilities to plan their lives while instigating changes on diverse institutions through dispositions they discover learning to navigate life experiences. Alheit (1992) points out: "Biography itself has become a learning ground where transitions must be anticipated and managed, and where identity possibly is but the result of difficult learning processes" (pp. 187-188). Alheit (1994) maintains how we as individuals narrate our life constructions allows us to find "hidden references to the structural conditions imposed on us" (p. 288). Through these constructions, we produce meaning and analyze within our biographies our "potential of unlived life" (Von Weizacker, 1956 as cited in Alheit, 1994, p. 288). Through this analysis, individuals may produce transformations and transitions in their lives within institutional frameworks on structures operating "in the background to which social individuals relate intuitively when they act on the everyday plane" (Alheit, 1994, p. 289). Individuals possess "biographical background knowledge...[as] emergent potential for changing structures" (Alheit, 1995, p. 64). Some are able to use this biographical knowledge within their lifeworlds to shape social contexts anew in their unlived lives (Alheit, 1992; 1995). According to Alheit, unintended learning and education are the result of non-evaluative communication; thus, through biographical learning processes, the individual may reshape structures and conditional frameworks encountered in social spaces.
Summary Thoughts
As presented, life histories can provide a basis for exploring women's transitions from welfare to work and education. They can link women's everyday, private, and subjective experiences to public social and structural influences impinging upon them as they navigate different fields of practice throughout their life courses. Moreover, biographies can serve as means for individuals to learn to live their unlived potentialities and use these for self-transformation. This can be accomplished through strategies, such as interviews and written texts.

Feminist Traditions of Life Stories
In addition to Bertaux and Alheit, other researchers must be considered. A number of feminist academics, particularly, highlight gender sensitivity and social relationships in women's lives lend support to this study. These researchers contend that women's stories need to be located within the community, not on the margins.

Watson and Watson-Franke: Women's Stories as “Deviant”
Watson and Watson-Franke (1985) maintain women's experiences through life histories are undervalued and underestimated. They point out too often Western sociologists and anthropologists relegate women's stories to their roles as wives and mothers. This "makes it hard to obtain female life histories that describe women as autonomous personalities, as selves in their own right" (p. 163). Since women are not seen as "true representatives of their societies" (p. 164), their stories are relegated to “deviant” aspects of the culture, not as those of individuals leading exemplary lives (p. 164).

Atkinson: Contextualizing Women's Lives
In the late 1990s, Atkinson (1998) reiterates: “The feminine voice needs to be given opportunities to be heard, analysed, and theorized about” (pp. 18-19). This could assist researchers in determining “more effectively the similarities and differences between the male and female experience” in synthesizing and expanding the life story (pp. 18-19). She points out that through story, individuals recognize meaning through a contextual location linking the individual’s life and roles to the larger community. Atkinson’s definition in a North American context contains elements of Bertaux’s (1981) European perspective. According to
Atkinson (1998), “The life story as a narrative form...uses a methodology that is transferable across disciplines and from one researcher to another” (p. 3).

**Gluck and Patai: Validating Women’s Life Histories**

Another dimension of life history, more specifically oral history, is work represented by feminist scholars Gluck and Patai (1991). During the 1970s and 1980s, these researchers sought to include and validate women’s voices and cultural histories in the discourse of Western academic disciplines. Their work, later known as “research by, about, and for women,” began with “Women doing oral histories with other women in order to recover their stories and revise received knowledge” to make “available in accessible forms the words of women who had previously been silenced or ignored” (pp. 1-2). Gluck and Patai’s work has evolved to include questioning the researcher’s role and influence. They point out even when the interviewer consults with or benefits participants in some way, generally the academic returns to “her scholarly enterprise, having transformed women’s words into various written forms, but having also walked away – usually for good – from the situation” (pp. 2-3). This problem-posing approach leads to a new avenue where researchers may begin to reflect on another level about their relationship to and with their participants.

**Long: Life-Telling of Women’s Stories through Gender Sensitive Research**

In the late 1990s, Long (1999) added another dimension to the call for more gender sensitive and critically reflective research. In her quest for a woman-centred research methodology to tell women’s lives, Long created a framework redefining the concepts of subject, narrator, reader, and text (pp. 3-5).

For Long, the subject in text is “the biographical individual whose life is being told; when that life is told by another, that other is called the narrator” (pp. 3-4). The subject is the creative agent made “apparent when set in motion by a particular act of telling” (p. 4). The reader is creatively involved through her own empathy and biography’s influence (p. 4). Through this framework, the narrator is no longer the traditionally defined and desired objective researcher. The narrator becomes actively involved with the subject as agent in creating the story, for their relationship “determines the existence, the development, and the outcome of the research
encounter” (p. 4). Furthermore, relationships between narrator and subject offer “a moment in the production of text” lasting “only as long as subject and narrator are in relation, rather than a permanent ‘role’ independent of the situation” (p. 4). The reader also is drawn into the relationship and plays a key role, for women reach out with their stories as a lifeline to women readers, particularly (pp. 4-5). The role is complex, for the reader can be an appreciative consumer, gatekeeper, or critic of the writing (p. 5).

Finally, for Long, the text is “Life-telling as discourse originates in communication” (p. 5) in written form and face-to-face encounters. However, through face-to-face encounters, expression becomes the text through a concrete relationship established by connecting the “tellers or singers and their listeners,” forming a discourse (p. 5). These texts stand in relation to other texts (p. 5). Since most traditions have been masculine, and writing has been gendered, “hearing” women’s voices through their stories has been difficult. Women’s stories are limited by what researchers, even when female, may want to hear bound by academic objective constraints and what male perspectives can understand about women’s lives.

This empathetic role of researcher in feminist life-telling as a form of objectivity, such as Long describes, will help resolve issues of identification, otherness, and distance by acknowledging that we are dealing with other human beings, our equals (p. 125). Thus, this “restores the sentient narrator to the research encounter and opens up new areas of inquiry” (p. 125) previously ignored, discounted, or untouched. This rang true for me, and much of what Long discusses, I did intuitively with the niggling worry of “Have I become too empathetic with the women in my study as they discuss their life stories?” Long encourages researchers to hear women by digging into the depths of their stories. This can assist researchers in trying to understand on a more profound level another individual’s life by creating an empathetic, shared dialogue about different experiences of gender, location in the world, social status, ethnicity, and lived experiences. Long incorporates gender sensitivity, empathy, and recognition of our humanness into the methodological frame in her call for a “new objectivity.”
Harding: Standpoint as Socially Situated Research

Prior to Long's call for a new objectivity, Sandra Harding (1991) had already begun to critically examine the researcher's role in relation to the investigated, participant, or the "object" (p. 152). Harding questions the notion that research is truly objective and value free as it attempts "to identify and eliminate only those social values and interests that differ among the researchers and critics" deemed "by the scientific community as competent to make such judgments" (p. 143). Harding points out only the legitimated social values and interests are allowed to remain embedded within research (p. 143). Harding states all socially situated beliefs need to be acknowledged as a standpoint epistemology since human beliefs are socially situated and "require a critical evaluation to determine which social situations tend to generate the most objective knowledge claims" (p. 142).

Summary Thoughts

The goal of this discussion is to point out that we need more gender sensitive research starting from women's life stories as they are located within their social worlds. To do this, we as researchers need to examine our roles and relationships to women as they participate in our explorations so that we too do not marginalize women. Only after we acknowledge, understand, and critically reflect on these beliefs and their relationships to the researcher and the "object" can we become truly critically aware of biases we may hold and our relationships to women. With these discussions in mind, I introduce the study and my research methods.

Exploring Women's Transitions

Pilot Study

Using the aforementioned researchers' theories, I began planning my study. However, prior to commencing my research, during the three summer months of 1998, I conducted a pilot study with three women (Mabel, 45; Tumbleweed, 47; and Advancing/Advocacy, 54). I had previously taught these women in a pre-employment program. By the end of the summer, I had tested my research questions and the broad themes that might be important to women's transitions. These themes included: the role of the welfare state; women's daily experiences of welfare; conceptions and roles of the family; experiences and conceptions of mother's work and paid employment; education and training programs; ageism; gender; geographical
location; self-concept and self-perceptions; learning; and women’s reasons for participating.

Through this pilot study, I made a number of discoveries. First, Mabel, Tumbleweed, and Advancing/Advocacy felt it was particularly important to participate in my research so they could share their stories with other women attempting to leave welfare. Second, the theme of food emerged and how women are going hungry in our society so that their children might eat. The three also discussed the importance of budgeting and food. Third, I learned going on welfare can create extreme trauma for women. Fourth, I was reminded of the importance of paying attention to recording equipment, for I had lost two interviews because I inserted the batteries incorrectly into the microphone. Finally, and most importantly, these interviews helped me begin to rethink the length and number of times I would interview women. This became particularly evident to me when Mabel did not show up for an interview and disappeared from my study. Perhaps, I had crossed some boundary, but it taught me to be even more sensitive to the frequency I met with the women. Therefore, I kept these lessons in the back of my mind when I commenced my main study.

During the fall of 1998, I began recruiting women in earnest for my research. By early December 1999, I had all 23 women, and I had been following two of the original participants for over a year. Prior to this, I needed to decide how I would select and recruit the women.

**Women’s Selection**

To begin the recruitment process, as a base, I started with the three women from my pilot study I had taught in a pre-employment program. I was primarily interested in single women and single mothers of varying ages, for I suspected they might face different challenges leaving welfare. I also included mothers with school age and young children because I was curious if this might influence these women’s trajectories from welfare.

Using the snowball technique, I asked each woman in this group and who subsequently joined my research to recommend others to participate. Although women did not always refer another, I soon had a web of women recruited through their social networks. (Please see
Appendix B for a complete presentation of where I had first contact with the women.) When I met them, the women were at various locations in their transitional processes. Some were just embarking on their journeys while others were well on their way, and some seemed stuck in the process.

**First Contact and Reasons for Participating**

Women joined my study for a variety of reasons. Kate Franschild, Diana, and Tusk asked to participate once they learned about the topic and its focus. Kate Franschild had heard about my research while she was attending an anti-poverty group where Almond had handed out my cards to participants in an attempt to help me recruit more women. I met Almond, Tusk, and Lilith through a community group called Rainbow Women. My first contact with Rochelle, Lovey, and Collette was at a community resource center that provided information for welfare recipients. Another woman, Diana, requesting to join my study, had been a student of mine in a sociology class at the university college in Abbotsford. My hairdresser referred Mary to me. Taylor suggested her cousin, Susan. Of the 23 women, I became acquainted with 13 when I taught in pre-employment programs in Chilliwack and Abbotsford. These women recommended one another. Ann, Taylor, and Heather were from an Abbotsford program, and Gloria, Ali, Mabel, Maya, Scout, Tumbleweed, Cactus, Vivianne, Advancing/Advocacy, and Brown Bear were from Chilliwack at the time. Diana and Tusk had been off welfare for 6 and 10 years respectively. These two women wanted to participate because they thought they could offer insights into their transitions since they had not “reverted” back to welfare.

**Who Joined?**

Overall, my participants totalled 23 women: 3 women in their fifties; 5 women in their forties; 11 women in their thirties; and 4 women in their twenties. (See Appendix C for more detailed demographic information about the women.) Two of the women were Native Indians; one woman was East Indian; another was American with Canadian citizenship; and 1 was from South America and married. Of the 8 women 40 or older, 1 woman had no children. Of the 11 women in their thirties, 3 had children 6 years old or younger. One woman in this group had no children. Finally, the 4 women in their twenties had children age 7 and younger. Seventeen of the 23 women lived in Chilliwack at the beginning of the study, and 6 lived in Abbotsford.
Of the Chilliwack group, 6 had moved, and 1 had returned to Chilliwack. Recently, 2 of the women from Abbotsford moved away — 1 to Chilliwack and another to Langley. One woman, Mabel, disappeared from my study. She did not provide an explanation, and later her telephone was disconnected. I assumed that she had moved away. Scout was very difficult to interview, for she was continually busy with work or had personal crises with her young son. I managed to interview her once in person and once over the telephone.

Who Refused?
Of all the women I met for coffee during the recruitment process, only five refused to participate. Their reasons for not joining my research were similar. Two said: "It just doesn't interest me." Another told me, "Aside from being very busy with work, my life is going really well, and I do not want to dredge up old, unpleasant memories." Two more were afraid they would be forced to get jobs instead of exploring alternate paths or more programs to find out what they wanted to do. One of these women did not need to worry about looking for work because she had a newborn baby, and government allowed new mothers to stay home.

Safe Places to Talk
Once the women agreed to participate, I needed to find a safe, confidential place for us to meet. I had a contact at the local community college, so I was able to use rooms there as my primary interview site. Additionally, I wrote a letter of request to the director of the local YMCA explaining my study, the need for space, confidentiality, and safety for women I would interview. The director wanted to support research like mine, so she was quite helpful as was the staff in allowing me to book a room at the YMCA when I needed it. As I came to know the women, a number of them suggested that we conduct our sessions in their homes for convenience. I also interviewed some women in my apartment in Vancouver after I moved from Chilliwack.

The Next Step
Once I had selected, recruited, and found safe places, I was ready to begin the interviewing process. This will be discussed in the next section where I explain my data collection.
Collecting Women’s Stories

This section focuses on the different techniques I used to capture the multiple perspectives of women's life histories. The interview was the main collection method. Introductory summaries and contextual observations and activities also provided additional information.

Conversations with a Purpose: Interviews

With the women’s informed consent, biographical interviews formed the primary basis of my encounters with the women for the pilot study and the main research project. (See Appendix E for letter of invitation, consent, and certificate of research approval.) I used a combination of two types of interview techniques: semi-structured or focused and unstructured. The semi-structured or focused interview elicits specific information (Merriam, 1991). This was true in that I wanted to cover common themes with all women, such as age, time on welfare, experiences of welfare, education and training experiences, and work. On the other hand, the interviews were also unstructured in that a topic would appear in our conversations, and then I would encourage the woman to discuss the issue in more depth. These unstructured parts of the interview, then, provided me with new topics to explore with other women. According to Merriam, “One of the goals of the unstructured interview is, in fact, learning enough about a situation to formulate questions for subsequent interviews” (p. 74).

Furthermore, through narration of life histories, the biographical interview allows individuals to suspend accepted, discursive, and rigid ordering logic in order to pinpoint significant events (Alheit, 1995, p. 74). One of my participants, Maya, corroborated this when she said, “Are you getting what you want?” I responded, “Remember, this is about your life, so there is no right answer or anything I want you to say in the interview.” Maya, then reflected:

Well, yeah, I guess it’s better that I answer you off the top of my head; otherwise, if I took home the questions and thought about them, I’d probably revise them so much that they’d be what I thought you wanted, so this is better even though I feel like I’m rambling.

Some might wonder why women were not given the questions before the interviews. My reasons were twofold. First of all, as Maya pointed out, like her, some women would try to

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2 For confidentiality, some place and personal identifiers have been removed. With the permission of the women, others have been left to illustrate research points.
provide answers that appeared more socially acceptable or what they thought I wanted. Second, I felt I did not have the right to ask the women for more of their valuable time to devote to my research. Their lives were extremely complex, and they might need that time for other activities, such as caring work. Thus, I decided to wait until we met for our interviews to provide the questions to them.

Aside from women's initial nervousness about the tape recorder's presence, our meetings were relaxed. The interviews were actually "conversations with a purpose" (Webb & Webb, 1932, p. 130 as cited in Burgess, 1982a; 1982b, p. 108). Generally, our conversations lasted approximately 2 hours. However, this depended upon the woman's availability and energy level. Due to the depth of the women's answers, we often had to carry themes over to subsequent interviews. For a couple of women, our conversations were shorter due to constraints on their time.

After the first interview, I returned a typed transcript to each woman. To ensure the information was correct, I had the women review the transcripts. If they wanted to add or delete any information, they were free to do so; however, not one changed anything she had said. All were pleased to have a copy of the transcript, for it was a record of their transitions for them and the struggles they had overcome or were experiencing.

Intervals and Number of Interviews
Initially, I had intended to meet with the women every 3, 6, 9, and 12 months. I had wanted to try to understand their experiences and explore their changes over time. Based on what I had seen when many women exit government training programs, 6 months was and is not enough for most women to make major life changes. Therefore, I had wanted to examine women's transitional processes from welfare. My original intent to interview women at 3-month intervals proved to be over ambitious. The women were not necessarily available to talk during the intervals as I had planned. Therefore, even though I phoned women every three months, they could not necessarily meet with me, so the number of interviews I had for women varied based on their availability and the changes occurring in their lives. When women were embroiled in a major personal crisis, they did not necessarily want to speak to
me during the time that they were trying to resolve it. Some did though.

From 1998 when I began my pilot study to 2001 when I concluded my meetings with the 23 women, I ended up with a total of 97 interviews. Of these I analyzed and coded 75 using the data analysis program Atlas.ti. While listening to the other 22 tape recorded interviews, I took out the salient points to inform the analysis. These were not coded in depth because they repeated answers given in the woman’s previous interviews, or the women discussed personal problems particular to their own lives. Thus, these did not translate to other women’s situations or transitions. (See Appendix B for the time periods and number of interviews for each woman.) The majority of the interviews took place during 1999 to 2000. To construct a picture of women’s transitions, I took a beginning point when they joined my study, a mid-point in their interviews, and an “end-point” when I concluded the research or had my last contact with the woman. I determined each woman’s mid-point interview by counting her total interviews and then selecting the middle one. This gave me an idea of what was occurring in the women’s individual transitional trajectories during the different time periods. (See Table 8 in Chapter 5 for an in-depth picture.) During 2000 and 2001, I conducted "closure" interviews to find out what women were doing at the end of 1 and 2 years. By the end of 2001, I also had introductions from all but three women. Except for Mabel, I maintained contact with all women over the course of three years from 1998 to 2001.

Another Facet of “Me”: Introductions
Primarily, to provide women with voice within my dissertation, I asked them to introduce themselves to the audiences of this thesis. Initially, I felt like this was a way to include them and to provide the women with more control over the representation of their lives. However, as I collected these, I discovered other facets of their lives that had not surfaced in our many interviews or telephone conversations. When reading the diversity of styles, feelings, and experiences in these introductions, I knew they were more: they were other windows women were providing into their transitional processes. Thus, these texts highlighted some very powerful insights into the women’s trajectories and how they saw themselves through time. The most important reason for the introductions was for readers to hear the women’s voices unedited by the researcher’s perceptions. (See Appendix A for the women’s introductions to
the reader.) However, through life history, researchers attempt to divine as many facets of individuals’ lives as possible. The introductions were one way to do this.

**Transparency of Research Process**

In the next section, I will discuss my role as researcher. To make the research process transparent, I will also provide an explanation of the audit trail; thick, rich description; and member checks before presenting the limitations of my study.

**My Role as Researcher**

The following question posed by one of my committee members forced me to examine my role and relationships to the participants: "Why was I," as it was put to me, "‘studying down.’ Why was I not studying individuals of my same socio-economic status?" Needless to say, I was a bit stunned by this question, for I did not really see or understand it as “studying down.” However, it did make me more cognizant and question just what was my role in the research. My intent throughout the study was to treat the women as I would like to be treated: as an equal. My own life experiences, beliefs, and adult education background just seemed to naturally lead me in this direction.

As I observed women and their interactions with others throughout my research, I did note not all people related to women on welfare as equals. In an attempt to understand women’s experiences of how they might be treated, I stood in welfare line ups and interacted with welfare staff to acquire information. Additionally, causing myself great anxiety and stress during the event, I attended an orientation for potential welfare recipients. These encounters gave me an idea of what it was like although unless I had been on welfare I could never fully comprehend the experience. However, my activities gave me an idea of what women might go through as they attempted to navigate the welfare system. I witnessed differential treatment of some women by government officials and agencies. I also experienced this in my forays into different welfare offices although some were more welcoming than others. I was surprised to see this on occasion even at the pre-employment program, for although women were respected, they were subtly stigmatized based on behaviors or preconceptions by staff.
Qualitative researchers operate from the assumption that “reality is holistic, multi-dimensional, and ever-changing” (Merriam, 1991, p. 167). It is not a static or objective reality waiting to be catalogued into an objectified box. Thus, the qualitative researcher’s task is to interpret mental realities and lived memories of participants’ daily experiences. Researchers are expected to try to understand and make meaning of how individuals construct, act, and experience their multiple realities. Therefore, the researcher, if the study and process are sound, is bound to represent “those multiple constructions adequately; in other words, the reconstructions” that the researcher has discovered “via the inquiry are credible to the constructors of the original realities” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 296). Based on the methods, descriptions, and interpretations the researcher uses, he or she is obligated to portray “a more or less honest rendering of how informants actually view themselves and their experiences” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 98) so that fellow researchers and academics can see the kind of rigor that was adhered to in order to judge the soundness of the research process.

Soundness of qualitative research is often discussed in terms of credibility, transferability, dependability, and objectivity. Soundness in these terms explores how the researcher collected information; whether the process was explained in detail; whether the researcher’s process can be traced; whether the researcher accounted for and described changes during the study; if participants reviewed information they had provided; the study’s length; and the researcher’s role and biases. To ensure soundness, the researcher creates an audit trail describing data collection and analysis so others may scrutinize the process (Merriam, 1991, p. 122). To create the audit trail, through thick description, I used triangulation and member checks.

My intent throughout the dissertation, data collection, and data analysis has been to provide this verbal photograph for the reader so he or she may understand and experience the women’s transitions as I witnessed them and as the women lived them. This description provides other researchers “interested in transferability” with “a base of information appropriate to the judgment” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 124-125). According to Denzin (1989), thick, rich descriptions capture “detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another” as well as inserting history and establishing “the
significance of an experience, or the sequence of events” for participants (p. 83).

With the women’s permission (See Appendix E.), to explore consistency, I used background texts, introductory summaries, and field notes to corroborate similarities within the individual and between the women. This functioned to reveal unique discoveries gleaned through these different data (Patton, 1980, p. 331).

Throughout the initial interview process, I transcribed the interviews verbatim and gave each woman a copy of the transcript for her personal records. To ensure that the information was correct, I had each woman review the text to check for accuracy, meaning, and intentions. As mentioned, I asked each woman if she wanted anything added or omitted from the transcripts. (See footnote 2.) However, all women agreed with the transcribed interviews and wanted all the material included. They also asked me to share the information with other women and research participants so they might benefit from what the women themselves had learned as they attempted to make transitions. The women’s introductions served as a means for me to check and corroborate what women had divulged about their lives throughout the research.

**Summary Thoughts**

The goal of this section has been to briefly explain my role as researcher. In addition, I have attempted to make transparent the research process by creating an audit trail through thick, rich description and checking it through triangulation and participant input. In the next section, I present the two research sites: Chilliwack and Abbotsford.

**Research Sites**

MAKE WELFARE AS DIFFICULT TO GET AS A BUILDING PERMIT!!!

(bumper sticker on a half-ton truck in Chilliwack)

The goal of this section is to introduce and describe the uniqueness of my two research sites: Chilliwack and Abbotsford. As will be illustrated, they are much different than a large

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3 For maps of Chilliwack and Abbotsford, please refer to Appendix D.
metropolitan area, such as Vancouver. In fact, based on my experiential understanding from having lived and worked in both sites after I immigrated as an outsider and a single woman to BC, I would classify them as closed communities. These communities are closed in that they do not welcome outsiders. Entering a social circle and finding a job is heavily dependent on well-established social connections through religious affiliation, family ties, social networks, community participation, ethnicity, and values. Through my own experiences, I have observed the changes Chilliwack and Abbotsford have been forced to make over the years with the inflow of diverse populations to the Fraser Valley. The quote at the beginning of this section reflects the views of many individuals, particularly in Chilliwack. Furthermore, it depicts the stereotypes and discrimination welfare recipients, particularly single mothers, must navigate in these communities. Based on my own knowledge, I selected these sites, for they are quite different from urban areas; they may represent some features in common with smaller cities in Canada. Currently, both Chilliwack and Abbotsford are commuter communities in transition.

Chilliwack

Geographic Location
Located in some of the richest agricultural land in Canada, Chilliwack, my primary research site, is surrounded by parks, the Cascade Mountain Range, and bounded by the Fraser, Chilliwack, and Vedder Rivers. Its geographical location and mild climate support outdoor activities, fishing, hunting, hiking, kayaking, and local tourism. Chilliwack is protected from over-development by the Agricultural Land Reserve restrictions.

Growth and Employers
Seen as a retirement community, since 1996, Chilliwack has been experiencing an influx of people. This has been due, in part, to the recent inflow of immigrants into Vancouver approximately 70 miles away. As this occurred, demand for real estate soared driving up property values in Vancouver. Many Vancouverites sold their homes to profit while taking early retirement or seeking a more rural lifestyle. This influx into Chilliwack accounts for 80% of the growth trends. Currently, Chilliwack has a population of approximately 69,776 people residing in its 100 square mile area having grown from 66,254 in 1996 (Statistics Canada, Community Profile Chilliwack, 2003).
Originally, primarily an agricultural community, by 1996, the major employers of Chilliwack's population were the retail trade, government services, health and social services sectors, and the local community college. In 2001, individuals held jobs in manufacturing and construction, retail and wholesale as well as health and education.

Population Composition
Although a farming community, Chilliwack is primarily a White community with few visible minorities. As depicted by Table 2, the immigrant population has actually decreased slightly by 150 individuals between the 1996 and 2001 census periods. Visible minorities and aboriginals have only increased marginally by 830 and 740 persons respectively. Therefore, the mix of the population remains dominated by Whites unlike cities such as Vancouver and Abbotsford. Chinese and Asians from various countries are only now beginning to make small inroads into the community unlike surrounding towns and metropolitan areas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: Chilliwack Population Composition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chilliwack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visible Minorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Original population provided.


Family Composition
The norm in Chilliwack is married or common law husband and wife families as depicted in Table 3. Single-parent or lone-parent families in Chilliwack have grown at a slightly higher rate — by 725 between 1996 and 2001 — than have married couple or common law families at 605. Although female single parent families have continued to grow, the greatest increase in families has been the almost doubling of the lone male parent in Chilliwack from 364 to 655 as can be seen in Table 3.
### Table 3: Chilliwack – Family Composition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Composition</th>
<th>1996</th>
<th>2001</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Families</td>
<td>18,480</td>
<td>19,810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married Couple Families &amp; Common Law Families</td>
<td>15,880</td>
<td>16,485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone-Parent Families</td>
<td>2,600</td>
<td>3,325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Lone-Parent Families</td>
<td>*364</td>
<td>665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Lone-Parent Families</td>
<td>*2,236</td>
<td>2,660</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Statistics not supplied by Statistics Canada. To provide an understanding of the Chilliwack area, the percentages are taken from 1996 Census Profile of British Columbia’s Census Subdivisions for Chilliwack. (Winter 2000/2001).


### Employment and Income

As depicted in Table 4, the employed labour force grew for both men and women in Chilliwack between the 1996 and 2001 census periods. However, in 1996, 32.1% of males in Chilliwack were considered economically “dependent” on transfer payments. Women’s “economic dependency” was 41.1% at that time. Both these ratios were substantially larger than the provincial ratio of 19.91% for men and 27.36% for women in 1996 (BC Stats, Income Profile 1996, Chilliwack, 2000, p. 2). However, by 2001, the total number of individuals between the ages of 19 and 64 receiving BC Benefits had dropped slightly from 6.8% to 6.1%. This is still 6.1% well above the 2001 provincial level of 4.3% (BC Stats, Community Facts, Chilliwack, 2003).

### Table 4: Chilliwack Employment and Source of Income

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<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>Females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed Labour Force</td>
<td>15,700</td>
<td>12,760</td>
<td>17,665</td>
<td>14,975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals Performing Unpaid Child Care</td>
<td>8,475</td>
<td>11,540</td>
<td>9,605</td>
<td>12,075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals Performing Unpaid Housework</td>
<td>21,125</td>
<td>24,065</td>
<td>23,060</td>
<td>26,085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number Individuals Receiving BC Benefits Ages 19-64</td>
<td>Total *4,505 (6.8%)</td>
<td>*1,446 (32.1%)</td>
<td>*3,059 (41.1%)</td>
<td>Total **4,256 (6.1%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As illustrated in Table 4, the number of men and women performing unpaid child care and unpaid housework has grown. However, women continue to undertake the majority of this unpaid labour in the household.

**Religion**

Chilliwack, like Abbotsford, is part of the Bible belt in the Fraser Valley. The community of Chilliwack supports 53 churches, encompassing 20 different denominations (www.chilliwack.com, n.d.). This contrasts with its large criminal element found in 16 prisons in the surrounding area.

**Summary Thoughts**

Despite continued efforts by the municipality, the local economy appears depressed. However, during the past five years, career, counseling, employment services, and training programs have exploded in the Chilliwack area, particularly to assist the unemployed and welfare recipients. It seems to be a growing industry as the service providers have increased from five to ten. Most, even the private providers, obtain some type of government funding. Probably, this explosion was precipitated by BC government 1996 reforms of the welfare system into BC Benefits. The community appears to have remained a White community with traditional family values. However, the number of single parent families is growing rapidly.

**Abbotsford**

**Geographic Location**

My secondary research site, Abbotsford, is located approximately 50 miles from Vancouver. Abbotsford’s location covers approximately 145 square miles. Abbotsford is bounded by the Fraser River, scenic mountains, and Washington state minutes to the south. Abbotsford’s rich farmland is in the center of the agricultural belt in the Lower Mainland of the Fraser Valley. Although somewhat closed, Abbotsford experienced population and economic growth at least
five years before Chilliwack, due, in part to the influx of people from Vancouver. Consequently, it continues to be one of the fastest growing communities in North America. Currently, the population is 115,463 having increased from 105,403 in 1996 (BC Stats, *Community profile Abbotsford*, 2003).

**Population Composition**
Due in part to its agricultural economy, Abbotsford is home to a large immigrant population. As farmers, East Indians comprise the largest number of immigrants in the area. As depicted in Table 5, between 1996 and 2001, immigrant and visible minority populations increased significantly in Abbotsford by 3,710 and 7,735 individuals respectively. The East Indian population continues to grow followed by other Asian and Chinese groups (Statistics Canada, *Community Profile Abbotsford*, 2003).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5: Abbotsford Population Composition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abbotsford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visible Minorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Original population provided.


**Employers**
The rich soil and ideal climate continue to attract immigrants while making the Abbotsford area one of the most productive agricultural areas in Canada. Abbotsford is known as the "Raspberry Capital of Canada," and it is the second largest raspberry producer in North America. It is also a major supplier of blueberries and strawberries. Furthermore, the community is acclaimed for its daffodil production, and it hosts an annual Bradner Daffodil Show where growers from all over the world attend to purchase daffodil, tulip, and gladiola bulbs for commercial production and home gardening. In addition to its large market share of berry production, the Abbotsford area is renowned for its contribution of other agricultural
products: eggs, turkeys, broilers, and milk (www.abbotsford.net, 1999-2002, p. 2). Other employers include the large university college, retail service and sales sectors, manufacturing, and a growing tourism industry. Furthermore, the Abbotsford International Air Show is world renown and provides many jobs and an influx of capital each year.

Family Composition
As illustrated in Table 6, the norm in Abbotsford is married or common law husband and wife families. Like partnered families, lone-parent families have increased by 855 between 1996 and 2001. As depicted in Table 6, female lone parent families continue to surge by 685 —4 times as much when compared to the increase in lone male parent families at 165.

Table 6: Abbotsford - Family Composition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Composition</th>
<th>1996</th>
<th>2001</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Families</td>
<td>28,910</td>
<td>31,890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married Couple Families &amp; Common Law Families</td>
<td>25,325</td>
<td>27,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone-Parent Families</td>
<td>3,585</td>
<td>4,440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Lone-Parent Families</td>
<td>*645</td>
<td>810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(18%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Lone-Parent Families</td>
<td>*2,940</td>
<td>3,625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(82%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Statistics not supplied by Statistics Canada. To provide an understanding of the Chilliwack area, the percentages are taken from 1996 Census Profile of British Columbia’s Census Subdivisions for Abbotsford. (Winter 2000/2001).


Employment and Income
As highlighted in Table 7, employment for both men and women in Abbotsford increased significantly between the two census periods. At the same time, the number of adults between the ages of 19 and 64 collecting BC Benefits dropped from 4.7% to 3.8% well below the 4.3% provincial figure (BC Stats, Community Facts Abbotsford, 2003). This differed from 1996 when 21.36% of males in Abbotsford were considered economically “dependent” on transfer payments. At the same time, women’s “economic dependency” was 32.31%. At that time, unlike currently, these ratios were larger than the provincial ratio of 19.91% for men and 27.36% for women (BC Stats, Income Profile 1996, Abbotsford, 2000, p. 2).
Table 7: Abbotsford Employment and Source of Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>Females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed Labour Force</td>
<td>25,160</td>
<td>21,225</td>
<td>31,460</td>
<td>26,675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals Performing Unpaid Child Care</td>
<td>4,040</td>
<td>18,485</td>
<td>16,170</td>
<td>20,915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals Performing Unpaid Housework</td>
<td>32,595</td>
<td>37,440</td>
<td>37,290</td>
<td>41,850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number Individuals Receiving BC Benefits Ages 19-64</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>*4,954 (4.7%)</td>
<td>*1,058 (21.36%)</td>
<td>*1,601 (32.31%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Statistics not supplied by Statistics Canada. To provide an understanding of the Abbotsford area, the percentages are taken from 1996 Census Profile of British Columbia’s Census Subdivisions for Abbotsford. (Winter 2000/2001).


As depicted in Table 7, the number of men and women performing unpaid child care and housework increased approximately the same. However, women continued to undertake the majority of child care and household duties.

Religion

Abbotsford is known as the Bible capital of Canada. It boasts 84 churches. At least one church can be found on each block in many areas (www.abbotsford.net, 2000, p. 3). Because of the rich farmland, Abbotsford originally attracted large groups of Mennonites to the area. Abbotsford’s numerous religious populations contrast significantly with the surrounding 16 correctional facilities and the booming local drug trade.

Summary Thoughts

Although the Abbotsford area supports job and pre-employment training, it does not seem to possess increased growth for employment service providers. It seems to be in keeping with population levels. Approximately seven employment agencies offer services that usually include assessments and some life skills for securing and maintaining a job. Some programs focus on assisting individuals from different cultures in training, attaining, and maintaining a job. Abbotsford appears to be more open to change as reflected in the diverse ethnic groups
moving into the area as well as its participation in international events like the air show and
daffodil and berryl festivals. Economic growth is also benefiting the community through
greater employment and what seems to be a slight decrease in welfare rolls.

Comparisons: Chilliwack and Abbotsford

Population Composition
Overall, Chilliwack and Abbotsford have some similarities. They both have an agriculturally
based economy. They are religious communities with traditional family values. However,
Abbotsford welcomes a more diverse ethnic community than Chilliwack. Different ethnicities
in Chilliwack are still a rarity, and a visible minority or someone speaking a language other
than English, German, or Dutch stands out. Unlike Chilliwack, the immigrant and visible
minority populations have grown significantly in Abbotsford while Chilliwack’s immigrant
population has decreased. Similarly, Chilliwack’s visible minorities have only grown slightly
when compared to Abbotsford’s.

Employment and Income
Currently, when compared to Abbotsford, Chilliwack still has a significantly higher proportion
of its adult population between the ages of 19 and 64 collecting BC Benefits. Chilliwack at
6.1% is almost double Abbotsford’s rate of 3.8%, which is well below the provincial level of
4.3%. However, lone-parent families, especially headed by men, continue to grow in both
communities since 1996.

By 2001, employment growth had increased more significantly in Abbotsford than in
Chilliwack. Women in both communities continued to care for children and households in
greater numbers than their male counterparts.

Summary Thoughts
Of the two communities, Abbotsford appeared in better financial health. It also had a more
cosmopolitan population reflecting changes in cities like Vancouver. On the other hand,
despite the influx of people to Chilliwack, it still retained its White homogeneity.
The intent of this section has been to provide a demographic picture of where the women in my study lived in order to illustrate the uniqueness of these two sites. In the following section, I present the limitations to my research.

Scope of Limits to the Study
I encountered a number of limitations to this research. These included: the researcher's experiences, women not included in the study, interview intervals and number of interviews, journal entries, and where the women are today in their transitions.

Researcher's Experience of Welfare
Some would say that a limitation to this study is that I as the researcher had never been on welfare. In fact, they would say I was "studying down." Despite this "limitation," I could empathize with the experiences of single women in the Abbotsford and Chilliwack areas based on my previous treatment when I had immigrated to Canada alone and lived as a single woman in these two communities. Furthermore, as previously pointed out, to attempt to understand women’s experiences in more depth, I engaged in a number of activities that women on welfare undertook daily. These included standing in welfare line-ups to gather information, attending an orientation for those applying for welfare, and working in a pre-employment program for women on welfare. These gave me a feel for women’s lives even though I might not fully understand women’s treatment by others.

Non-Participants
In an attempt to capture a cross-section of women on welfare, I sought to include as many ethnicities, ages, and experiences of women as possible. Even though my participants included immigrants, women of color, native women, and older women, I was unable to recruit women from some categories often left out of studies. For example, women having been on welfare for much of their lives, those living with men, and others living on the edge declined to participate. Although they said, "The study does not look interesting," I think some were worried that it might be another invasion on their already well-scrutinized lives and bring them to the attention of welfare workers. Also, others seemed as if they did not want to give away strategies they used to help them survive and stay on welfare. Two appeared worried
participation would mean they would need to get a job even though one had a new baby, and the other was enrolling in a program. A few other women had been discouraged from participating in my research by family, male partners, or even pre-employment program staff.

**Interview Intervals and Numbers**

Originally, I had intended to interview the women at 3-month intervals throughout the study. Because these women’s lives were so complex, I found that I had to change my original timetable. Consequently, I had to decide how I was going to adjust my study to fit the complexity of their lives. To meet their needs and my goal to follow women over time, I made the decision to look at the women’s first, last, and mid-point interviews.

Based on the length of time and number of women I followed, I had an overwhelming amount of interview material. This could be perceived as a limitation. In total, I conducted 97 interviews. Of these 75 were transcribed, and I listened to the other 22 for pertinent and relevant information. Also, the number of interviews per woman varied as some joined the study earlier than others. However, for those participating later, I had already honed the research questions, so this relieved some constraints on their time. Additionally, some women were more available for interviews than others, so this resulted in the uneven number of taped interviews between women as well.

**Non-Return of Journals**

Another limitation I encountered was with the women’s non-return of their journals. Originally, after giving each woman a notebook, I had asked her to keep her reflections, experiences, and other memories written down. I had intended for those written texts to supplement the interviews. However, only three women returned their journals. The others had often used the booklets to keep their own private diaries instead of information for my research. Many apologized for not writing in or returning their journals. Most explained that they were just too busy to write for me, or they preferred to take that time to reflect and record their very personal and private thoughts. Thus, I had once again been over ambitious in my expectations.
The Women's Lives Today

It might be argued that a final limitation to this study is that because it ended, I am not sure about the women's current endeavours. This research on the women's lives is like a story half read to me, for I am still curious about the women's trajectories off welfare today. However, for women like Lilith, Almond, Mary, and Gloria, I did hear about their later activities through my network of women. Still, I would like to know how all are doing in their transitions.

Summary and Concluding Thoughts

The purpose of this chapter has been to describe the research process for exploring women's transitions from welfare to paid work and education in the communities of Chilliwack and Abbotsford. I chose to follow 23 women, primarily single mothers, from 1998 to 2001 as they attempted to leave welfare. In discussing the research process, I described the life history method that formed the framework for the study to collect women's experiences of living on welfare and how they made transitions. The life history method contextualized women's lives in the everyday as problematic as they attempted to navigate social structures they encountered with individuals and institutions in both the private and public domains that impinged on women's lives and their unlived potentialities. My research commenced with a pilot study where I interviewed three women to discover themes and refine conversational interview questions. For the next phase, I discussed how I invited women to participate in my research. I explained the data collection strategies to illustrate how these techniques contributed to the credibility and soundness of the study by creating an audit trail based on thick descriptions and triangulation.

The next chapter is the first of three where I present and discuss my findings in the women's life histories. In the following chapter, I introduce the women's transitions to work, education, and moving to other opportunities, and the insights I gained.
CHAPTER FIVE
THE TRANSITIONS:
FINDING A JOB,
GETTING AN EDUCATION, OR
STAYING ON WELFARE BUT MOVING TO...

Life changes. There’s new transitions within your life you go through. It’s whether or not you can struggle enough to survive your new transition. It was difficult at the time, but I see myself as making transitions still.

Task

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the women’s transitions and present the categories I found from my data analysis. I discovered three themes: finding a job, getting an education, and staying on welfare but moving to disability and education. I begin the chapter with a brief discussion of the concept of transitions for adult education.

Transitions: Learning through Life Histories

Often when people, especially government policymakers and the general public, think of a transition, they seem to focus only on the resulting end product: in this case getting a job. This implies transitions are a simple movement from one point to another, such as from welfare to work. However, as will be demonstrated by the women’s stories, this is a simplistic view. It does not account for the complexities of women’s lives. In fact, the women did not just move from point A to B. Some women were straddling a number of activities: working, receiving welfare, and juggling their children’s care. Others were struggling with health issues while working part-time and receiving Disability. Another group was receiving Disability, volunteering, and working at part-time jobs. Some women were working in low paying jobs and attempting to cope with poverty. Others were going to college, volunteering, or sometimes working part-time while managing their children’s lives.

As pointed out, transitions rarely occur as simple movements from a beginning point A to a concluding point B. According to MacLure (1996), through life stories, transitions and “changes of direction need to be told, both as discontinuities (something new/different
happened here), and as accumulative events (this led from here to there)” (p. 274). Thus, commencing with this chapter, I will demonstrate the complexities of the women’s transitions through their conversations as they recounted their life stories.

According to Alheit (1994), in learning through life histories, “We possess the chance to identify the surplus meanings in our experience of life and to appropriate them for a conscious change in our self- and world-referentiality” (p. 289). Problem-posing, critical reflection, and conscientization (Freire, 1970) are learning processes that result in shifts in meaning perspectives (Mezirow, 1981) that create “transition[s] to a new quality of self- and world-referentiality — a process that leaves neither the learning subject nor the surrounding structural context unchanged” (Alheit, 1994, p. 289). Thus, through biographical knowledge relating to individuals’ lifeworlds and through self-reflexivity, individuals may continually redesign and reshape their lives through contextually lived experiences (p. 290) resulting in life transitions. Through learning, individuals discover “the potentiality of [their] unlived lives” (p. 290). Moreover, transitions created through learning as discussed by Alheit could be described as transformational learning: “Learning that produces change [and] shapes people [so that] they are different afterward in ways both they and others recognize” (Clark, 1993, p. 47).

Transitions do not suddenly occur. Changes are “triggered” through events (career, family, leisure artistic, health, religion, or citizenship) (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980) or “disorienting dilemmas” (Mezirow, 1981). These events or dilemmas create opportunities for individuals to engage in various types of learning projects. Many of these may be self-directed as individuals are posed with problems from their lives to resolve. Problem posing engenders critical reflection; consequently, individuals attempt to learn by using variety of means to resolve the issues. In turn, these create changes leading to transitions for individuals.

Transitions are ongoing processes of disorientations (Taylor, 1987), struggles, and discoveries, as pointed out by Tusk in the opening quote. Similar to Freire (1970) and Mezirow (1981) in their discussions, Taylor (1987) corroborates Tusk’s comments through four phases of self-directed learners’ transitional experiences. The first transition is where
individuals go from equilibrium to disorientation: “The learning process begins with the collapse of the learner’s frame of reference” (p. 184). This might be due to a marriage breakdown, health, or financial situation (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980) caused by welfare as some women will relate in their stories. The next transitional phase occurs when individuals name (Taylor, 1987, p. 186) or pose the problem. This, then, leads to critical reflection where individuals begin to explore options, resources, and support networks to help them resolve the problem (p. 183). Finally, individuals test out their findings by taking action (p. 183) on choices they reach through decision-making.

Throughout the following chapters, the women’s conversations about their life histories will depict these transitional phases. They will also illustrate that their transitions are processes of insights, choices, and learning that produce changes. As the women’s stories will show, the women may have progressed to, yet women also took steps back when individuals, agencies, or policies blocked their choices and opportunities. Additionally, the notion of progress as defined by policymakers is different than what the women experienced as they navigated different structures as will be depicted throughout the chapter. Moreover, policymakers tend to think transitions can be forced to occur through short-term quick fixes like learning to write a resume, knowing how to dress, attending a seminar on interviewing, researching jobs, or participating in 6-month pre-employment programs. Although these skill building activities are helpful, and the end goal of getting a job is extremely important, the transitional process seemed to be a key for change as described by the 23 women I interviewed. The change process for many women took at least 2 years, and for some it is still occurring. Thus, through their stories, the women disrupt the notion that transitions are simple, direct, and progressive. They will reveal the circuitousness and messiness of theirs. Thus, transitions were extremely complex processes continuing beyond the scope of this research.

The Transitions Described

All 23 women confided to me their transitional processes were difficult, lengthy, and constant, not overnight or instant. Similar to the definitions presented at the beginning of the chapter, transitions were evolutionary, however, with ups and downs. The struggle for survival often did take a toll on women as Collette pointed out to me. “You think ‘Do I have
creativity to survive, to find food, but not to dream, not to create, not to play with colors, not to stand up and say, ‘Oh, look at our pictures, and that’s so beautiful?’ I don’t need that.” However, Collette and other women did eventually find the time to look beyond survival to dream, to plan, and to take hold of a new future.

First Steps in Leaving Welfare

To begin the process of leaving welfare, women needed to take those initial first steps. These included becoming aware and realizing that they might be in a rut. Also, women often needed a jumpstart before they could begin to take action (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980). Along with this came a change in attitude. This helped them to think about getting healthy before leaving welfare. Sometimes, the women needed a nudge to leave a marriage. However, on occasion, life presented traumatic events or children as catalysts for women to change. Thus, the women in my study made a choice to leave welfare. Some began by refreshing their skills. Others regained control of their lives. Some wanted to change because they did not want to perpetuate society’s view of single motherhood leading to a welfare cycle for children.

Awareness. One of these first steps was to become aware they needed to choose to make a change. Advancing/Advocacy said: “If you confront something and learn about it and work with your strengths and weaknesses, you can go further doing that than not having faced it.” Thus, women usually experienced a change in attitude as they made transitions from welfare. Taylor pointed out: “If I didn’t take that first step, who knows what I would be doing.”

In a rut. Sometimes, women found themselves in a welfare rut. Cactus, having been on and off welfare four or five times over approximately 12 to 13 years, offered this explanation:

> A rut is not working or doing something worthwhile that makes your human body feel good. You can stay at home all day, go visit your friends, do nothing, and clean your house. It starts to become a routine you don’t care for, but you’ve got somebody giving you money, so you don’t have to go get that job. Comfort starts to set in.

---

4 The length and number of times women have been on welfare are often approximations. (This information can be found in the charts in the Appendix C.) Many had gone on and off welfare while working in between, or they have been subsidized while working, so calculations are approximate.
However, as Cactus went on to say, “Now, change to actually do something different than you’re used to, that’s the hard part. Once we start getting change, we start to sparkle - see light. You become more healthy [in] spirit, mind, and body. You can accomplish more.”

**With a little help and encouragement.** Not all women became stuck in a rut. Single mothers, particularly, like Vivianne, needed a little help from welfare “whether it’s my medical or my babysitting. That doesn’t mean I’m going to be just a loser for the rest of my life.”

**A jumpstart.** Most women in my research had no intention of remaining on welfare for lengthy periods of time. Some felt a jumpstart to leave welfare might be helpful. However, government was not always supportive and was often disciplinary in the way it chose to provide these pushes. Gloria was a dual client of both EI and welfare. She described how government encouraged her to seek work in a letter she received: “‘You’re a dual client. You must [attend a seminar at an employment center], or your benefits will be reneged.’ But I looked at the letter, ‘I need this boot. I need it.’” Taylor elaborated further on this by saying that even though she could stay on welfare because her boys were under 7, she wished: “I would just get cut off. I feel like maybe that’s the only way I’m ever going to do it is if someone says, ‘You can’t do this anymore. You have to go to work.’”

**Taking action.** On the other hand, although women may have needed or wanted encouragement to leave welfare, they must also take action as Taylor maintained, “Life is what you make it. If you want to change you have to do it. Nobody’s gonna help you, [or] change it for you. I was sitting, waiting for something to happen. It was only me who was gonna get up and do something.”

**Change in attitude.** Not only was action important, but so was the realization and belief one can change. According to Heather, “Anybody can change, but they need to want to change. They have to come to that realization on their own. I realized that and took advantage of it.” However, Tumbleweed believed the key attitudinal change to leaving welfare was for women “to have a mind of their own, have confidence anything’s possible, and use resources to get
there. You can’t do it by yourself. You need friends, family, institutions, people, but you need determination to know what you want and then go and — get it.” In addition to determination, a person may first need something else as Diana wondered,

So do women get off welfare? My impression is public opinion seems to think it’s so enticing, it’s so comfortable, women don’t get off. When, in fact, it’s so uncomfortable, so painful, and so degrading to the point of some major depression, and women can’t get off of it, but it certainly doesn’t empower anyone to do anything. You just have to get mad.

As these women have pointed out, commencing a transition from welfare may be the realization one is, in fact, in a comfortable rut that takes over life. Also, the women described how they found they could not sit around and let change happen; they had to be proactive through realization; getting mad, whether that was at their treatment by the system or the public; and they had to find the determination to make the beginning steps to change.

The 23 women I interviewed did just that: they faced their realities and chose to make a change to embrace their unlived potentialities. Through our discussions, the women revealed to me they all had experienced some sort of triggering event that led them to a new awareness. During my study, some were still finding those first steps while triggering events (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980) led others off welfare to jobs and education.

**Getting the health.** Kate Franschild, like Almond and Lilth, began to find her way off welfare by trying to resolve health problems. She contended: “The problem is getting time away from being ill. I am expected to see where I fit in, [so] what is an appropriate choice for my physiological, psychological, and aptitude-wise needs? What can [I] do; how can I do that when I don’t even have the health?” However, Kate Franschild believed not only was it important for her to take responsibility, but the system also had responsibilities to clients. Kate Franschild maintained she should be asked: “What do I need to get where I want to go or am capable of going?” Thus, to make a change, Kate Franschild pointed out health as well as other needs should be taken care of and examined for her to “unmuddle” herself. (Women’s needs will be discussed in more depth in the next chapter.)

**Leaving a marriage – a nudge.** Gloria, representative of women like Advancing/Advocacy
and Heather, left a physically and psychologically abusive marriage that had been unraveling for some time. Often dissolving a marriage is quite traumatic for women. Frequently, it may take several attempts before women leave or have the partner go. In the meantime, women wonder what will happen to themselves and their children once they must resort to welfare. However, outside events sometimes nudge women to take action. As Gloria recounted,

I was walking around crying. I was an emotional mess. It was just after I had gone on the system, late October, I got this letter that said I had to attend this session at [a women’s center]. That week my ex-got caught being himself at the hockey rink with our son threatening not to pay for his hockey. I kept telling this kid, “Don’t you worry. I’ll get you there.”

Events like this or when women discovered their children had been watching abusive interchanges between the spouses often made women more open to changes. These initial events were reinforced when women received nudges initiated by government or the encouragement of counselors or trainers that might help women attempt first steps to personal and employment changes. However, as Gloria maintained, sometimes, “There is a lot in the community for women, but you don’t know what or where to go.”

**Traumatic events.** Some women, like Brown Bear, had unusually traumatic events occur in their lives that literally shook them to their foundations. For years, Brown Bear had cared for her severely disabled daughter.

When [my daughter] was alive, we were our own business. We had employees, did conferences. [We were a society.] I got money from government to run the society. I had to do X number of hours with her, so I was an unpaid employee, but I was on social services. I could have workers, but because she needed 24-hour care, I took up the bulk. The Ministry used to send me $2500 a month for her care, to pay people, and her programs.

When Brown Bear’s daughter was killed in a accident, Brown Bear’s world came tumbling down. Her identity had centered on her disabled daughter’s needs, care, and learning. When Brown Bear was sent to an employment counselor before she was ready to return to work, she discovered “I needed something to see where I could go. I wanted a new career.” Brown Bear knew: “I have to re-find me. That’s a big struggle. The grieving, it’s unbelievable.” For her, the road to change might be the pre-employment program she had read about in a newspaper advertisement.
Children and family as catalysts of change. For other women, their children were the catalysts for them to make life changes. Rochelle was one of these women whose children pushed her to seek a new path. “I’d two kids with ADD. One is just a nightmare as far as problems go. He’s living with his Daddy. I was constantly in conflict with these kids. I had been sober for five years. That conflict was my catalyst for everything.” Later, too much conflict within her home led Rochelle to re-examine her goals.

Taylor also received impetus from family to begin to make changes in her lifestyle. In Taylor’s case, her sister initiated the first steps by taking some unusual action:

She wrote me this paper telling me what I was doing to my children, [and] myself. It was a horrible letter, but it was the truth. She wrote me a whole list what was gonna happen to me [and] my kids if I went out drinking and didn’t come home. One time I went out. I never phoned anyone, never came home, and I didn’t even think about the kids. The next day I got home, and she says, “Do you know what happened last night? I couldn’t find you.” At 10 o’clock at night, she was breastfeeding the baby. She thought [my son] was sleeping. He went out onto the road. It was pouring rain, and he was in his pajamas. Two girls brought him to the neighbors’ saying, “Do you know whose kid this is?” This really, really woke me up. It was [my son].

Taylor’s sister was even more helpful, for she found a program. Taylor’s initial reaction to attending a job search program had been: “Forget it!” However, when Taylor learned more about the program for abused women, she said, “I thought, ‘I need to get through this.’ They helped with counseling. I got to know myself a lot and about being drunk.”

Making the choice. In addition to receiving help and information from family, women, such as Tumbleweed, Maya, and Ali, often dug into their innermost cores to choose to help themselves during their darkest moments. Tumbleweed recounted one of these times: “The light doesn’t go on overnight. It probably started when I got really, really sick. That’s when my life really started to change because I got so depressed. When you can’t think for yourself, you just give up on living.” However, she discovered the choice was hers, no matter how bounded that choice was by situations or events outside. It was still her choice.

Tumbleweed described her process:

When I made the decision, something clicked in my mind. Maybe when I was an hour away from going to Riverview for electric shock. They couldn’t do anything for me, no medications; nothing would get me out of this depression - four months on a psychiatric ward. Literally, it was, okay. Nobody can help me. This is my head. I need to make a choice. If I can help
myself by learning and accept myself for the good and bad, it made it much easier. Actually, the easy part was learning. The hard part was accepting.

**Refreshing life skills.** Many women chose to refresh their self-knowledge by attending programs or taking courses to review life skills that would help them. Cactus, much like Vivianne and Scout, sought on various occasions during her times on welfare to attend life skills programs. Cactus firmly believes a woman can never have too many life skills courses. She feels new perspective teachers presented give her even more information than she had before. The first time Cactus took a life skills program, she was inspired by her ex-mother-in-law because as she said, “I thought, ‘She can do it. I can do it.’ So I did it.” After completing the program, Cactus told her ex-husband:

“I’m going to get a job just like I used to do.” Got dressed and I walked downtown to this very nice family restaurant. I introduced myself. I got to see somebody right away. I said, “My name is [Cactus], and I want to get a job. You’ll be happy you hired me.” And I worked there for two years.

Based on her experiences, Cactus pointed out that repeating life skills at various times is beneficial because “The repetition stops you from getting [and] staying in that same hole.”

Although some women expressed that they were vehemently opposed to repetition, surprisingly, quite a few did, in fact, indicate they needed the repetition and had attended several programs. Perhaps, repetition made changes easier for women in the long run. However, most described taking the initial necessary steps as difficult, yet they were willing to meet that challenge.

**Regaining control.** Mabel’s changes probably began in the United States when she started saving for airline tickets to Canada for herself and her daughters while planning to escape from her husband after her girls were out of school for the summer. Subsequently, upon her return, Mabel became depressed, “so I went to a depression group. I had been through a traumatic experience 2 years controlled by a man. I wanted structure in my life,” but she had not been ready for the pre-employment program despite the urging of her son’s girlfriend. Furthermore, Mabel, like other women, wanted to regain and retain control of her life.

“When you’re on assistance, government has total control over you. I don’t plan on staying on welfare, so I’m doing everything I can. I’m not going to sit and just give up. No way!
For other women, the control exercised by welfare over their lives was a catalyst to leave welfare quickly. This was the case for Diana 6 years prior to participating in my research. Diana was the only woman in my study leaving welfare after approximately 1 year. At one point, Diana thought this might be because she did not know the strategies of how to use the welfare system to get what she needed. However, she was just as happy to leave welfare to retain her privacy, determine how she would attend college, and maintain control over her own life. Diana felt if she followed the plan the employment counselor proposed,

That meant I had to stay on welfare, and I had no control over my life. I had to deal with those people, that system, the degrading, and the shame, so I didn’t want that either. I wanted to get away from those feelings of being less than, ashamed, or judged by my neighbors, my friends, and their friends. That’s when I decided student loans, and away we go.

As mentioned initially, events triggering (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980) women to leave welfare were all different; therefore, time differentials appeared in the women’s stay on welfare. Although the women in my study would agree with Diana, they chose to remain on welfare longer because they felt that choice was in their best interests and their children’s.

**Stopping the perceived welfare cycle.** Finally, for some women like Mary, the triggering event (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980) that propelled them to leave welfare was they did not want to perpetuate what they thought could develop into a stereotypical view of children having been raised on welfare: adults with no desire to work. Mary was conscious of these stereotypes, for she admitted initially, “When I worked, I looked down on people on welfare.” However, her own experience shattered these beliefs because she knew: “You’re not lazy. I work on my house, mow the lawn, take the garbage out, [and] do all the housework. I do everything. If the pipe breaks, I fix it.” Mary, like other women, did not want her son to become a stereotypical statistic as promoted by the media and believed by the general public. “I want to get back to the workforce because he’s getting older. I don’t want him to feel that welfare stigma; a lot of kids feel that too.” Mary, particularly, like Heather, Tusk, Vivianne, Tumbleweed, and Maya, did not want her son thinking he did not have to work. Mary wanted her son to be proud of her and see her as a good role model: a working mother. Mary said her son knew that she worked part-time in a retail store, but he didn’t
know she collected welfare. However, “Eventually he will. His dad doesn’t work, but he’s in a wheelchair now. His grandmas work, so he’s got somebody to look [up to]. I want him to have a good life and work.” Mary’s life turned out differently than she had expected, for she thought she would get married. “I’d be a mother with a husband. I was going to be a stay at home mom.” However, her fiancé “got MS, so we split up because we weren’t married. We thought, ‘It’s going to be too hard to have him sick and a child.’ We’re friends. I take my son to see him every 2 weeks.”

As illustrated, a variety of triggering events (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980) led women to begin the first steps of their transitions to leave welfare. Some needed to “unmuddle” themselves as Kate Franschild pointed out. Others needed to deal with emotional events such as marriage break ups like Gloria, or the death of children like Brown Bear, or conflict and chaos like Rochelle. For others, like Taylor, family members nudged them to begin their first steps. Some, similar to Tumbleweed, needed to choose at their darkest moments to make changes while others knew they needed to refresh their life skills like Mabel and Cactus. Women like Diana left welfare to retain control of their lives. Others like Mary did not want their children becoming welfare statistics. They wanted to ensure their children had working role models as their mothers. As pointed out, these were women’s initial steps. In the next section, I highlight women’s transitions of going to work, getting an education, and staying on welfare. Following the discussion of women’s needs, I will explore the process of change of just how women in my study strategized to navigate structures for their transitions.

**Starting Our Transitions to…..**

The women’s first steps eventually led them along the path to going to work, getting an education, or remaining on welfare but moving to…. These categories cannot be sharply defined as women shifted between categories, and sometimes, they even straddled two or more at the same time. However, for the purpose of presenting the analysis, I decided the categories would reflect where the women commenced their transitional processes. To do this, I needed to think about where I had originally met the women, if they were on welfare at the time, and where they were when we had our last conversation. (Appendix C presents the categories where women began their transitions.) In a number of instances, by the end of my
research, some of the women had shifted categories from where they originally started. This illustrates just how fluid their transitions could be.

Table 8 depicts the women's transitional trajectories from their beginning point to mid-point to "end-point." Tumbleweed, Ann, Heather, Diana, Taylor, Scout, Susan, Rochelle, and Maya transitioned from welfare to college. Mabel, Ali, Almond, Kate Franschild, Gloria, Lilith, and Lovey appeared to remain on welfare. Advancing/Advocacy, Cactus, Vivianne, Mary, Collette, Brown Bear, and Tusk all began their trajectories from welfare with a job.

Government policy seemed to indicate once a woman had made a transition to work or education her life would be relatively calm. However, Table 8 illustrates the variety of activities the women engaged in and the fluidity of their lives. When examining the women's trajectories, I discovered at their mid-points, the women transitioning to work appeared to have the most tumultuous transitions. Surprisingly, at their mid-points, 4 (Cactus, Vivianne, Mary, and Collette) of the 7 women had lost their jobs, and 2 (Advancing/Advocacy and Tusk) had quit, so of the 7 women, 5 were no longer employed at their first jobs. One (Advancing/Advocacy) had revolved back to welfare, and she was also on Disability. Two, Cactus and Mary, were on EI. Examining their ages ranging from 26 to 55, I found age did not seem to have a bearing on their job loss as I might have expected. At age 55, Brown Bear was actually unusual, for she became employed and retained her first job.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Beginning point</th>
<th>Mid-point</th>
<th>“End”-point</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(bursaries/student loan)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1999 - Welfare &amp; part-time work — pre-employment program — college</td>
<td>2000 -- stopped out of college for full time work</td>
<td>2001 — full time union work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(bursaries/student loan)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heather</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1999 - Welfare — pre-employment program — college</td>
<td>1999 -- returned to ex-partner for summer — then left him — college</td>
<td>2000 — College -2002 graduated (diploma) - looking for work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(bursaries/student loan &amp; child care subsidy) &amp; part-time work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1999 - Welfare — pre-employment program — college upgrading courses</td>
<td>1999 — stopped out of college — welfare</td>
<td>2000 — full time work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(bursaries &amp; free tuition for upgrading &amp; child care subsidy)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>college &amp; part-time work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1999 — Welfare — pre-employment program — college</td>
<td>2000 -- stopped out of college — welfare</td>
<td>2001 --- full time work &amp; part-time CGA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&amp; some part-time work --- Disability 1 -- volunteer work</td>
<td></td>
<td>Disability 1 – volunteer work – part-time work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Almond</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1998 -- Welfare &amp; part-time work</td>
<td>1999 -- paid volunteer work --- Disability 1 -- thinking of college</td>
<td>2000 -- thinking of college for design course --- Disability 1 – part-time work -- 2002 passed away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Disability 1 &amp; part-time work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>1998 -- Welfare — some part-time work &amp; foraging</td>
<td>1999 -- Disability 1 &amp; health issues --</td>
<td>2000 -- would like to take college courses - Disability 1 --</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franschild</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>stopped out of college --- welfare --</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The last time I spoke to this group, they had made the transitions documented above. By the end of my research, 3 women (Vivianne, Collette, and Tusk) having lost their jobs had found full time work. Vivianne had become the manager of a retail outlet. In my last conversation with Advancing/Advocacy, she had some part-time and volunteer work, and her social worker was encouraging Advancing/Advocacy to seek Disability 2. While collecting EI, Cactus was getting ready to attend another program. After being laid off from her job and

<table>
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<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
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<th>Beginning point</th>
<th>Mid-point</th>
<th>“End”-point</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lilith</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1999 -- Welfare --- Disability 1 ---</td>
<td>1999 -- Disability 1 &amp; enrolled eating disorder clinic in Vancouver</td>
<td>2000 -- Disability 1 2002 government employment program at college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lovey</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1999 -- Welfare &amp; volunteer work --- pre-employment program ---</td>
<td>2000 -- college upgrading -bursaries &amp; child care subsidy</td>
<td>2001 --- enrolled in nursing program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advancing/Advocacy</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>1998 -- Welfare --- pre-employment program --- work --- welfare --- other monies ---</td>
<td>1999 -- quit job &amp; moved - Disability 1 &amp; some volunteer &amp; paid work &amp; some self-help programs -</td>
<td>2000 -- thinking of returning to college for management courses - Disability 1 - volunteer work - part-time work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cactus</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1998 -- Welfare --- pre-employment program --- full time work &amp; some help from welfare</td>
<td>1998 -- lost job --- EI --- full time work (2 jobs) ---</td>
<td>2000 -- EI &amp; government employment program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vivianne</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1998 -- Welfare --- pre-employment program --- college &amp; full time work (bursaries/student loans &amp; child care subsidy) --- stopped out of college --- full time work (2 jobs) &amp; some help from welfare --- transition subsidy ---</td>
<td>1998 -- lost job &amp; --- 1999 -- moved to Manitoba --- 1 month welfare due to illness --- full time work ---</td>
<td>2000 -- moved back to Chilliwack --- full time work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collette</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>1999 -- Welfare &amp; volunteer work --- full time work &amp; college ---</td>
<td>2000 -- lost job -- EI --- some welfare for health ---</td>
<td>2001 -- full time work &amp; college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown Bear</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>1999 -- Welfare --- pre-employment program ---</td>
<td>2000 -- welfare &amp; part-time work ---</td>
<td>2000 -- full time work --- would like to complete GED &amp; then take college courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tusk</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>(1999) -- Welfare --- university --- graduated BA (Social Work) --- full time work --- moved from Ontario --- (10 years off welfare) --- temporary work --- EI --- full time work ---</td>
<td>1999 -- EI --- full time work ---</td>
<td>2001 --- quit to go on a holiday</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(date): I met these women after they had been off welfare or Disability completely. They had been on welfare in the past before they joined my study.
collecting EI, Mary returned to welfare and later found part-time employment. While working full time, Collette enrolled in the Bachelor of Adult Education program at a university. During my last conversation with Tusk, she told me that she had quit her job and was on her way to Australia for a holiday.

Nine women originally started out their transitional trajectories to education as illustrated in Table 8. However, by their mid-points, 3 (Ann, Taylor, and Maya) of the 9 had “stopped out” of college. Two, Taylor and Maya, revolved back to welfare and then found full time work. Ann chose full time employment over the college. The other 5 women graduated, and 1, Susan was still continuing her education at the end of my study.

Again, age did not appear to have a bearing on whether women stopped out of college. However, for Taylor and Maya their young children under age 7 did appear to influence their decisions to leave college at that time. Another finding was at least 3 women (Rochelle, Tumbleweed, and Heather) on student loans revolved back to welfare during the summers. This had quite an effect on Tumbleweed as she felt she had failed in her transition.

In more detail, the 6 women remaining in college accomplished the following. Diana graduated in 2000 from a university with a degree in psychology and began working for an aboriginal agency as a guardianship worker. After studying nursing at a university, Rochelle graduated with a Licensed Practical Nurse’s Diploma in 2000. By 2001, she had her BSN, and then, with her family, Rochelle moved to Alberta for a full time nursing position. Tumbleweed later graduated from a college with a Recreational Therapist Diploma in 2000 and began working full time as a recreational therapist in a group home. Scout received her Early Childhood Education Diploma in 2000 and found employment as a full time daycare worker. In May of 2002, Heather e-mailed me that she had graduated from college with her Social Services Diploma and had moved to Chilliwack where she was looking for work. Susan was on Canada Pension Disability enrolled in upgrading courses. She later transferred to college courses leading to a degree in the future.

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5 Stopping out is a term used to indicate that people leave education for other activities and plan to return later to complete courses or degrees.
Those stopping out of college eventually became employed. After taking a few courses and revolving back to welfare, Maya found full time work and enrolled in the distance Certified General Accountant’s Program (CGA). Ann began the Criminology Program, but when I last spoke to her, she had put her studies on hold as her part-time job had become a full time union position, and she had the option to advance if she moved. Taylor completed upgrading and computer courses and became fully employed as a hairdresser.

Initially, 7 women, as depicted in Table 8, began their transitions either from welfare to Disability, or they remained on welfare. By 2002, 3 women (Lovey, Gloria, and Lilith) were enrolled at the college. Two of these were government training programs. Age may have had a bearing on this category, for only those 35 to 47 appeared in this group. However, the major influence on these women was their physical and mental health as will be discussed.

The women remaining on welfare made the following transitions. When Mabel disappeared from my study, as far as I know, she was still receiving income assistance. When I first met Lovey, she was on welfare and trying to enroll in a pre-employment program. Subsequently, after completing the pre-employment program, Lovey began taking courses with the hope of getting into the Nursing Program at a college. Gloria received social assistance and was attempting to become self-employed by selling kitchen products. Gloria later enrolled in another pre-employment program at the government’s insistence. Ali worked part-time for a local community organization while receiving Disability 1 and welfare. Almond also received Disability 1, welfare, and worked sporadically. Although Almond, Kate Franschild, and Lilith were on Disability 1, they were seeking Disability 2 to receive more benefits. In July 2002, I learned Almond had died in a car accident. That same month, I heard Lilith had enrolled in a program. As far as I know, Lilith did not engage in part-time employment. However, Kate Franschild collected wild plants and grew a garden to supplement her diet. She may have had some odd jobs occasionally.

All in all, the women made many transitions, and they continue to do so today in 2003. These included moving from welfare to education and work. Transitions also meant shifting from welfare to work or revolving from work back to welfare or even seeking better status and
benefits through Disability while remaining on welfare. As illustrated through portions of conversations presented in the rest of the thesis, the women’s lives were in a constant state of flux and very complex. Now, I will explore their transitions in more detail.

Finding a Job, and off to Work We Go!
I’ve always worked ever since I was forced to drop out of [high] school when I was pregnant.

Mabel

Going to Work: Volunteer and Paid
Perhaps, the category providing the most insights from my data analysis was going to work. At first glance, finding a job and going to work seemed straightforward. However, it too was messy and fluid. I discovered through the interviews that to enter the workforce did not mean simply full time work free from welfare. As well as leaving welfare completely for a full time job, for some women, this category could be interpreted to include a variety of roles. For example, Ali typified one group as she juggled volunteer and paid activities. After her work experience through a pre-employment program, Ali continued to volunteer at Community Services to learn new job skills at the Volunteer Bureau, Crisis Line, and paymaster for bingo. “I’ve made all these changes. I decided that I needed to do something to prove to my kid that this is the way life can be.” Then, Ali explained that in the spring:

I was hired for 6 weeks part-time while somebody was sick. Now, I’m doing Christmas applications. I’m paid full time, but it’s not enough to be off welfare. If I had 40 hours, I would be able to, but full time is considered 30 hours. It’s still not enough to get off welfare, but it’s a job.

Ali, like other, women, remained on welfare because she could not earn a sustainable living wage from her paid work.

Full Time Work – Not Enough to Make Ends Meet
However, even after women became employed full time, this still might not be the total solution. Cactus found that she had a hard time making the transition from welfare. “A year isn’t enough time to adjust for a woman to go to work. All of a sudden, welfare’s not paying your rent. It was hard to pay bills. You’ve got to find your way. I’m still having problems; it’s been 2 years.” For a while, Cactus was receiving some assistance from welfare, but because she could not leave her job to make an appointment with her social worker, Cactus’
file was closed. Despite this, Cactus described being off welfare as “It made me feel light. I didn’t have to put in a stub every month.” However, this created hardship for her because she did not have medical and dental. “That’s important.” Something happened, and she thought, “I’m going to see if I can get some help.’ I went to Social Services. My kids get prescriptions. I can go see the doctor; I needed to see a doctor.”

Cactus also illustrates some of the problems women faced when they attempted to leave welfare completely. She had no medical or prescription coverage and not enough money.

**Jobs as Stepping Stones**

Other single mothers like Mary sought to leave welfare by taking low paying jobs they hoped would be stepping stones. While still on welfare and trying to juggle a retail job’s erratic work schedule, Mary also needed daycare subsidy to pay for babysitters. Aside from having a difficult time finding adults or teenagers to cover daycare during odd hours Mary had to work, she was faced, like other mothers, with trying to get an appointment to reapply for daycare subsidy. Mary said:

I worked [the retail outlet] at Christmas. It was hard. For 6 days, I’m gone. You come home do stuff [to] run a house. I was making less money [than on welfare]. It was easier; you get paid every 2 weeks. I [needed daycare]. I didn’t get my subsidy appointment for November; I was working. I had to wait ’til February, so I had to pay my babysitting.

Even if women attempted to take a stepping stone approach to leave welfare, they faced other issues, such as ensuring they had daycare for their children.

Aside from the points discussed above, I made a stunning discovery as I watched and listened to the women’s transitions from welfare: 6 out of 10 women lost jobs after they had been employed for three months to several years. A seventh woman’s job continually hung in the balance of her being let go or remaining employed. In the following discussion, I will highlight these events. I have divided the job losses into underlying themes: no reason, pushed out, and doing a man’s job. Then, I have included women keeping their first jobs as “the exceptions.”
No Reason

In this section, I present the stories of Cactus and Vivianne fired for "no reason" from their jobs. Cactus had been working for her employer for over two years whereas Vivianne had just reached the end of her three-month probationary period.

Cactus. As mentioned earlier, I had met Cactus at a pre-employment program. I also watched her as she completed the program and was offered a 30-hour a week job at a local community center. She was ecstatic. However, Cactus said: "Everything happened so fast with that job. It had not been my intention to rush into a job, but I really like it although I would like more hours." As I used the center frequently, I watched her as she performed her job with clients. When I told her about my study, she was interested in joining and sharing her experiences. During our first informal conversation, Cactus related her future plans to me to train for other work related to her job. "I'm taking a fitness instructor's course. I'm planning on trying to get some work in Hope [closer to home] when I have my certificate." Furthermore, here, "There is a chance for advancement, so I'm not going to go and look somewhere else. I like my job. I'm comfortable." In the meantime, because it was only part-time, she still needed subsidy from welfare. "I'm thankful for the subsidy I do get from them. I am doing everything to get off the system."

One day when we were to meet, Cactus did not show up. That was unusual. When I enquired at the desk in the center where we were to meet if Cactus had arrived yet, the person said, "She no longer works here." I was quite stunned as I knew Cactus enjoyed the job immensely. I left and subsequently phoned her, but it was not until several weeks later I finally managed to talk with her.

I can't believe after two years I was just let go without a reason. I kept asking, but they wouldn't give me a reason as to why I was laid off. They didn't even bother to tell me. They just let me show up for my 4 o'clock shift and told me then. I couldn't understand it. I did a good job. The clients liked me. I worked hard. To this day, I still don't know why I was let go.

Understandably, Cactus was devastated. She cut our conversation short saying she would phone me when she could talk about her job loss. When I next saw Cactus, she said that when she had lost her job, "I could feel myself getting dragged down into that gutter like I'm just going to stay on welfare for the rest of my life." After retreating into her house for 5
weeks to mourn her job loss, Cactus returned to working in Hope as a waitress at several restaurants. When I met her for our closure interview, she had undergone even more changes. “Last year, I met a man who was running a little restaurant in town. I was helping [him, and] I was still working at [the other restaurant], 18 hours a day [between the two]. The restaurant closed March last year.” After that happened, Cactus continued working at the other one for a while, but then she was laid off from that restaurant too. However, while collecting EI, Cactus had time to go to the career center, work on the computer, and “figure out something I want to do instead of things I don’t want. I’m going to get enrolled in that [program like my boyfriend]. We’re thinking of starting a business.” In the meantime, Cactus had had time to reflect on her ordeal of losing her job at the community center. “I still think about that a lot. It still stops me from getting a job or putting an application at the center here. I don’t want to do it. I’m not sure what I’m going to do. I was thinking I’m gonna volunteer [at] Community Services.” As she divulged her future plans to me, Cactus told me she had come a long way since we had met and since her first steps long before the pre-employment program. She also pointed out she was still on her journey of self-discovery.

Doesn’t seem like [I’ve come a long way] because it’s one step at a time. I can’t see all the steps, [but when I look back], yes, I can see them now. They’ve been good steps, beneficial, hard, and easy. I’m trying to think of one of my posters we did at the [program]. I had a never-ending bunch of stairs to the top of anything I can learn. That’s what I wanted for the rest of my life, never-ending amounts of something I could learn.

As we can see, after losing the job Cactus held for two years for no reason, she began another transitional process.

**Vivianne.** Like Cactus, Vivianne also lost her job for no reason. However, her path turned out a bit differently. During my first interview with Vivianne, she said to me: “I work in really good places in a family orientated pub [and] the bingo hall. I’m working to support my daughter. Two jobs - that’s the way it is.” Although Vivianne was working two jobs, she was still subsidized by welfare, and she was continually strategizing how to make ends meet. “I haven’t gotten much money. I got $127 for my first week of work; it was only a week, but it just depends on how much money I’m going to be making with both jobs.”

At the time, the New Democratic government had brought in a transitional allowance to help
people for the first year after they left welfare. Vivianne explained the possible benefits to her: “They’ll give you a year of medical and dental which’ll be perfect, and they give you a transition allowance, which is $150 a month. They just send it out on the Wednesday. You still get your babysitting too. If it’s going to be more money to get the transition allowance, I’ll do that.” Although the transitional allowance would assist her, and she was confident she could leave welfare completely, Vivianne had already begun to think about what would transpire after that year if she did not have a good job with benefits. In the meantime, to get her job at the pub, Vivianne had obtained a reference from her boss at the bingo hall. By working the two jobs, Vivianne further strategized how to leave welfare if she continued working double shifts at both places.

In one two-week period, I end up with 4 shifts from the bingo hall or 4 shifts from the bar. [At] the bingo hall, I get $9.25 an hour, but I can also get more tips from the bar. [Sometimes], I work 4 shifts in a day. They kill me, but I need the money. Friday I work 17 hours cause the bar’s open ’til one. I enjoy work.

During this conversation, Vivianne was quite positive about her future working and eventually being able to leave welfare completely. However, when I phoned her 3 months later to remind her about our impending meeting, much to my surprise, her roommates told me she had moved to Manitoba! They gave me her e-mail address. We communicated sporadically this way until she returned a year later when we met to chat about why Vivianne had left Chilliwack and what she had been doing in the interim. Vivianne described to me the way that she was fired from her job when she went to work for her shift 2 weeks before her 3-month probationary period was over.

They just waited for my shift. They didn’t give me a reason. They just fired me. I went in for my shift. Ten minutes before, the manager brings me into the office, “They told me to fire you today.” I said, “Why didn’t you phone me? I didn’t have to walk in here!” I’m crying. “How dare you! That is more embarrassing than anything. You could have told me on the phone.” I said, “This really sucks. I hate this town. I need to get out of here.”

Similar to Cactus’ case, Vivianne also tried to find out why she had been fired so abruptly. She expressed her surprise: “I asked a lot. Even the bar manager didn’t know I was getting fired. Me and another girl, we were hired [and] fired at the same time. It had nothing to do with money missing. I don’t know what happened. I liked that job.” Vivianne took a different approach when she lost her employment. “I applied for [jobs] for a couple of days, and I thought, ‘There is nothing here. I’m not working at McDonald’s [or] Wendy’s. I am a good
waitress. I’m a good person. I don’t steal, so what the hell am I doing here?” Then, Vivianne phoned her aunt to ask if there were any jobs in Manitoba. Her aunt indicated there were still plenty available, “so I went. I had a full time job in a week, and it would pay me $9 an hour.” A few months later, Vivianne changed jobs, and she eventually became the manager of a 57-seat restaurant overseeing “four girls and three cooks.” Moving to Manitoba, changed Vivianne’s life radically as she explained,

> I got my life together. I met [a man]; we’re getting married. If I can have babies, we’re going to have a baby. [I’m] doing things I really want and like to do. Managing a restaurant is my favorite. It’s me. People come in to see me; people come in to eat my cooking.

While Vivianne was in Manitoba, she had to resort to welfare for 2 months because she had no medical coverage when she became seriously ill with a stomach problem and had to be hospitalized. After she recovered, Vivianne returned to managing the restaurant until she and her future husband returned to Chilliwack. The last time I saw her, she had become the manager of a small retail clothing store. Of her transitions, Vivianne reminded me:

> I’ve bettered myself as a person. It’s who you are inside. With a lot of these programs you just better the outside self. You’re not bettering anything inside. And if you don’t better anything inside, what is the point in bettering anything on the outside. I can get my hair cut and look beautiful every day too, but if I don’t feel beautiful inside, it is not going to help me any.

Vivianne pointed out parts of the system to help women need to do more than medicate them or turn a blind eye to their actual problems. Vivianne stated welfare wants women off the system, but it does not really help.

> They want you to go and get a job, [but they] are not going to help you. “What do you mean you need counseling? I don’t care if you have been beaten 400 times.” You’re just thrown back out to the wolfs. Instead of saying, “Why don’t you try this? Or why don’t we try something else?”

Vivianne concluded by explaining her first outward steps were to enroll in a pre-employment program that was “a stepping stone. I knew exactly what I wanted to do was to look in the mirror and know I am worth something, that I like who I am.” That program eventually helped her take more steps in her transitions. It probably also assisted her to like herself enough to overcome her job loss while inspiring Vivianne to move from BC.

What I found particularly interesting about Cactus’ and Vivianne’s stories was that they were both fired for no reason. According to the two women, they had been doing a good job, and
they appeared to be working hard. Also, they had worked different lengths of time: 2 years for Cactus and 3 months for Vivianne. Why were they not given reasons? If my study would have included employers, talking with them would have been another avenue to explore to see if they would provide reasons. I wonder if the women were not given reasons because of rules regulating employers. Are employers firing people to protect themselves if they feel potential employees do not fit the particular work environment? It seems unusual people were not given a reason for being let go. Although Cactus and Vivianne were quite resilient and moved on to new opportunities in their transitions, they did not soon forget their life altering experiences.

**Pushed Out**

Another category that emerged from my data analysis was how women were “pushed out.” Although the women knew they needed to fit into their work environments, this was not always possible because other employees did not necessarily see or want the women to do so. How could this happen, especially since government says all women on welfare need to do is find any employment, and everything will be fine? However, this was not the case for Advancing/Advocacy, Mary, and Collette when they lost the first jobs they found. Advancing/Advocacy’s story is first.

**Advancing/Advocacy.** After leaving a pre-employment program, Advancing/Advocacy looked around Chilliwack for different types of jobs. She had considered returning to work as an X-ray technician, her profession before marriage. However, at age 54, Advancing/ Advocacy pointed out: “I would need to retrain to go back to X-ray work. That would be 2 years. I would need to be on [welfare]. It would give me a good income when I’m finished, I would have to consider how long I would need to work part-time.”

However, after exploring limited employment options in Chilliwack, Advancing/Advocacy resorted to working in a store since she had previously been a partner and employer with her ex-husband in a similar business. Like Advancing/Advocacy, many women were more than willing to take whatever employment they could. Even after finding a job, women could never be sure if the hours would actually be full time as Advancing/Advocacy described:
When I started, they were saying summertime would be 40 hours a week, but it’s not. They were giving me 40 hours as part of my training for August, September, and October. January and February my hours dropped between 10 and 15. It really was stressful because of the low hours there.

In the meantime, Advancing/Advocacy was able to get a few more hours, but during our conversation, she gave me some hints of underlying trouble that might be developing at work. When another employee resigned, Advancing/Advocacy picked up her hours so that her own totaled 20. Just as she thought she might be able to get more hours, another cashier showed up and took the extra hours Advancing/Advocacy was hoping to acquire. She spoke to her manager, but she was told the other woman had seniority. Consequently, Advancing/Advocacy began thinking about how to supplement her hours to survive because they had dropped to 10 a week when she earned $8.38 per hour. Just as she was beginning to despair, Advancing/Advocacy finally received a pay raise that “came in March, so my wages went to $9.98 an hour. That was helpful. [You] do earn more on welfare. It was a real scrape, but I did not want to go back to welfare.”

After being told by the store manager and her immediate supervisor it would be a while before she might get more hours, Advancing/Advocacy made an appointment to talk to the store psychologist. Advancing/Advocacy wanted to discuss the treatment she had experienced in the store particularly from one employee. In addition to having had several past disagreements with the supervisor, complaining, making backbiting comments, and sabotaging others, Advancing/Advocacy felt the woman might feel threatened. Thus, Advancing Advocacy thought: “Oh, man, there’s a lot of politics going around here. I need to stay out of a lot of crap going on here. Nobody’s going to look after me. I’m in charge of that.” Finally, Advancing/Advocacy told the other employee that her complaining “‘really affects me when I hear comments about people.’ She said, ‘You don’t want to hear about [our supervisor].’ I said, ‘Information I need or is helpful to me, I am open to.’” After this conversation, Advancing/Advocacy decided, “I got to learn to go with the stream; those things you’re not going to be changing. I can’t talk to anybody here because you don’t know if it’s going to get back to them. I’m really careful. I don’t talk to anybody.” She only had so much energy to deal with the unpleasant office environment as her own personal life was difficult because of her reduced work hours and an unpleasant child custody battle with her
Advancing/Advocacy stayed at the job for a few months longer; however, the internal politics and criticism of her performance by her fellow employee eventually were more than she could handle. This combined with stresses in her personal life made her decide to move back to White Rock, especially after she was refused EI. Much to her dismay, Advancing/Advocacy had to reapply for welfare. The next time I heard from her, she called me amidst her packing to leave Chilliwack. When she moved, she reapplied for EI and was finally given a lump sum for the time she had worked, but she still had to remain on welfare due to personal health and stresses. Before moving, Advancing/Advocacy said: “I went to the job club in Chilliwack. It was not the right thing to do. It was a cruel thing to do; you are expecting something of yourself, a career. That dream was going further away because of turmoil I was going through.”

When I last saw Advancing/Advocacy, she was in the process of applying for Disability 2 as recommended by her financial aid worker. She was also doing volunteer and part-time work while trying to get herself together mentally and physically. During our closure interview, Advancing/Advocacy maintained: “There were more things that I could’ve done to [keep] my job except I was stressed out in myself.” To keep her job in the store, Advancing/Advocacy pointed out: “If I had sort of even [been] working with [a] career counselor, or if I had known more that there were going to be so-called this much politics to it. I just hadn’t considered personalities.” Also, Advancing/Advocacy felt that she did not feel as though she fit in with the people working in her department. “There was a staff party a month before I quit there. I wasn’t invited. There was a stripper. I was slotted once again. If you don’t fit, it just seems in their minds there seems to be a big gap. It’s real hard.” Although being subtly pushed out at the time, Advancing/Advocacy was happy when I last spoke to her that she no longer worked at the store.

Mary. Mary’s experience was somewhat similar to Advancing/Advocacy’s. She witnessed office politics in the Corrections system. She was ostracized before finally being accepted by fellow employees. After having worked a number of short-term contracts, Mary qualified to
apply for permanent internal jobs in the Corrections system. However, before her first part-time contract, Mary had to work extremely hard to pass the entry tests that allowed her to be placed on the contract employee on-call list. Mary recounted part of this process to me during our conversation in July of 1999. “I failed the first test last November. It was a speed test. You’re writing, and all of a sudden, ‘Ding. Time’s up.’ It’s a stress test; that got me in a fluster. After, I was trying to do as many as I could.” However, the next time Mary took the two-part test examining her English, math, filing, stress, and comprehension skills, she was prepared: “I wrote it again and passed. This time, I knew what was happening. I did what I knew. Then, I went back and guessed. I just picked a random number, all the same. I passed, but maybe I passed because I was calmer.”

By the time we spoke in February of 2000, happily, Mary had “worked for two and a half weeks in October. It was where they take in prisoners and assess them. I was just doing paperwork and editing court documents so they could go on the disk.” On the negative side, Mary found that “There’s the usual talk at the lunch table, complaining. I don’t understand [office politics]. It’s everywhere. I experienced it before with my other jobs, so you’ll fit in eventually.” Compared to the work Mary had been doing at the retail outlet, she said: “They don’t realize how good they have it! I’d like to put them in [the retail outlet] for a week, and then they’d really appreciate their jobs.” Furthermore, Mary experienced the discomfort of trying to fit into the new social space of an already established working group.

The first week nobody trained me. They just took me around showing me stuff. I was just walking around with nothing to do. I just was going up and saying, “Do you guys have anything for me to do?” After, one girl said, “That’s it. I’m training you, [Mary].” I guess she started liking me the second week. She said they get people, and then [they] are gone. So the girls have an attitude like why should we help these people because they’re just going to be gone after we’ve trained them. The way it’s working, people only get jobs for a few weeks or few months.

In fact, during Mary’s time in the department, the other women began to train her more and more. Mary confided to me:

The very last day they were saying to me, “Haven’t they extended you yet?” Then, I thought, “It’s probably some budget thing. Don’t let it get to you. It’s not personal.” I really enjoyed it. I’m getting discouraged again because they haven’t called me back. It’s just a long haul waiting. I want to get in. It’s good for being a single mom. It’s good for one thing: good money.

During our conversation, Mary was strategizing what she would do if she were not called
back. One of her goals included, perhaps, returning to the women’s employment center to take some classes. Mary even considered other alternatives. “I’m not a pushy salesman. I was going to apply at Abbotsford airport, for something part-time, anything. I’ve worked in a kitchen, so I don’t mind catering.”

When I spoke with her by telephone over a year later, Mary happily told me she had been rehired by Corrections 2 months after our last conversation. “I worked in May for a month [at one facility]. Then, in July, I worked for 4 more months. I quit [the retail outlet]. I’ve been off welfare for 8 months. I’m on the regional list. I’ve been short listed for a full time job.” Mary was ecstatic at the possibility of being hired full time. Moreover, she had very good working relationships with the staff at all the facilities where she had been employed. Mary was a bit worried about the 2-hour personal interview she would need to pass. When I spoke to her a few months later, her worst fears had been confirmed. Mary confided to me: “This woman blocked me getting hired. I just can’t understand it. She doesn’t know me. All my bosses gave me good references. People have been telling me to appeal it, and I think that’s what I’m going to do.” The last time I spoke to Mary by telephone in 2000, she had begun to appeal the ruling of this the woman. Mary was distraught as she was amidst writing letters and documenting her work performance when I asked her to send me her introduction for this dissertation. Mary’s self-esteem was taking a beating, but she was determined to fight for herself and the job she wanted so much. The last I heard from my hairdresser in 2002 was things had not gone well; it appeared Mary had been pushed back to welfare.

Collette. Collette was the last woman in this group pushed out of a job. However, by our final interview, she had been hired in her dream job as an employment counselor working with Natives. At that time, she felt overwhelmed as both she and her husband were working. Collette needed “to learn to live without fighting without going against the current because this was me.” Collette said of her struggles: “I have been fighting, not one year, not one month, not one day [but] for 14 years.” As an immigrant to Canada, she found “how hard it was trying to get a job, get respect, education, fighting for my rights.” Throughout the years, Collette had worked hard educating her children, learning English, upgrading her skills while “I gave back years of my time to the community.” However, because of the closed
community she lived in, Chilliwack, Collette felt: “I did everything expected, but I still wasn’t nothing - [no] respect for me.” By the time our interview had concluded, Collette’s life had changed radically, but she maintained that despite her challenging transitions, “I don’t want to forget what happened before. It was a learning experience. It make me better. Today, I am at peace in a way with Canada.”

Before being hired as an employment counselor for Natives, Collette thought she had found her dream job at a local institution working in a department that dealt with international students. Collette knew she was perfect for the job because of her ability to speak two languages, knowledge of the community, and experiences as an immigrant in the Fraser Valley. However, she was soon to find out it appeared she needed something else as she was pushed out of this job after her 3-month probationary period. Collette explained to me: “I had applied three times [before] I got the job. I am a certified office assistant in English and Spanish [with] multicultural experience, traveling, and what they were asking for.” After being hired, her first sign of trouble occurred when “The manager wasn’t there my first day. Nobody showed me my work, so I never felt I own[ed] a position.”

Collette assumed things would go smoothly. However, from the outset, she noticed differences. “I don’t know if it’s my personality. I am by culture, I listen [and] speak carefully. [They were] very fast, impatient. It is a very beautiful office with a lot of things from Japan and China. There wasn’t anything I can say, “That belong[s] to me.” Furthermore, Collette began to feel unwelcome the times when she tried to become part of the group. Collette described her attempts to fit in:

They have a living room office with a dinner table and chairs. When I start[ed] working there, they used to have lunch, the big people, who has been [there] for long time. I was the only one with no office because I was the receptionist. One day, I start[ed] taking my lunch. I didn’t like to go downstairs. I was alone. I try to be part [of the group]. Suddenly, that finished. All kept in their office[s]. I don’t want to pass as oversensitive, but I start thinking what happened. Usually, they took their lunch, they sit there, and they were laughing, but as soon as I start going, [they] stopped. They put a chair in the kitchen [with] no table. The treatment was different to me.

As Collette explained her experience to me, “[This] never happen before to me. One day [a supervisor] said, ‘You have to clean [the kitchen].’ Nobody showed me my work. They didn’t [tell me].” Collette noticed several other instances where she was being treated
differently. One particular situation occurred when she worked her lunch hour in order to leave early for a doctor's appointment, a customary practice for the other office staff. "It start[ed] getting very difficult. [They said I'd have] to tell in advance at least one week, but I was the one who has to tell in advance for one hour. I didn't understand. People going to take my place that hour say, 'No problem.'"

As Collette tried to determine the "rules of the game" and do her job, other incidents continued to occur. Collette thought part of the problem was because she did not bring in paying students like some of her colleagues. As she put it, "Money counts there." Things seemed to get worse with time. When "There was a staff meeting, I wasn't invited. [They said] because they didn't have anybody to [answer the] phone. There was another person who could help, so those things really push me far apart. I try, but, no, I could see whatever I did was wrong." The situation culminated when after 3 months, Collette was supposed to be evaluated. However, it did not take place until she had been there for 4 months. When she read the evaluation,

I thought it could be bad, but not telling me this is your last day, and you're going that day. I almost pass out [when I read it] because for me [that] was demeaning. I couldn't think about [it] for [a] long time. Later, I start really making sense [of] what they wrote. Nobody explain[ed] what I was allowed, so I got what I got because I say, "I'm going to try."

When Collette received her evaluation she showed it to me as well as to other people she knew both inside and outside the institution. Everyone agreed the report was quite derogatory. It accused her of being totally incompetent with no knowledge of how to fax, file, or even interact with students. Collette is a woman who had trained volunteers, had worked in offices locally and abroad, had set up information systems and had written proposals, and had always been considerate of others. She was dismayed with the treatment she received by staff in the institution and the runaround by the union — even though they admitted it might be harassment — and the humiliation she felt from being essentially fired the day she received her evaluation. Therefore, Collette decided to take matters into her own hands before she resorted to a lawyer. When Collette spoke with the personnel manager, she told him she had received much of her training at this institution. "I have been studying at [here] for 13 years. I'm very proud of my education and what I know. [In career programs], I received the award [for] outstanding achievement." His response was "You know, it wasn't
that professional.” From her own advocacy work, Collete knew, “I had rights. I was going to keep what were my right, [my] holidays. I fought. I was going to Labour Relations to get money [for my holidays].” Consequently, when the institution determined Collette was going to stand up for herself,

They decided to pay me not to work. They [paid] $1200 [for] professional development, my medical, and dental. Because I have to go to the dentist, they give me to the end of February. They gave me laid off as shortage of work [instead of fired]. My evaluation was destroyed. [The personnel manager] told me, “You can apply for any job [and use me as a reference].”

Although the evaluation was supposed to be confidential, someone told students Collette had been fired. It left her feeling: “I don’t trust them. I lost my naiveté. They kick me out; it was unprofessional.” Even though Collette would use the professional development money to continue taking courses to complete her degree, retained medical and dental coverage, and a promise she could reapply for another position, her victory was bittersweet.

My drive, it’s not the same. It’s like they left me with nothing. I need time to think to put things together again to be strong. My soul was broke. It was so sudden; I didn’t have the time to prevent that. When you see something is coming, but that was quite drastic. It was humiliating. It was mean. In this moment, I am trying to build my self-esteem.

Despite this situation, Collette eventually applied and was hired by another education and training institution. The last time I talked with her, Collette was very happy at her job as an employment counselor, and her employers were just as satisfied with her.

The stories of Advancing/Advocacy, Mary, and Collette also raises the question why they were pushed out of their work places even though they appeared to have the skills necessary for the jobs. Was it because people had found out they had been on welfare? Did the experience of having been on welfare somehow influence their inaction or inability to penetrate the games and the new social fields? They all seemed aware office politics had particular “rules of the game,” and they attempted to strategize how to deal with the unwritten rules. However, why did this knowledge not help them gain acceptance to fit into their new social and work environments? Again, these stories leave questions in my mind, for the women strategized how to find jobs as required by government to move them off welfare. The women had the necessary skills and education to work at the jobs they had found. They also appeared to have the necessary social capital. Furthermore, Advancing/Advocacy, Mary,
and Collette were not only ready to work hard, but they were prepared to fit in and even take minimal hours, in Advancing/Advocacy’s case and hang on to a hope and a dream in Mary’s instance. Collette too had tried to fit in by joining the lunch group and then making adjustments when staff was no longer allowed to eat in the office. Therefore, why did women not gain entry into these new social fields as they attempted to make a transition from welfare to paid work? Advancing/Advocacy did mention help from an employment or career counselor might have assisted her in resolving some of her problems at the time. As illustrated by the women’s experiences, they needed to learn the rules of social fields when they worked with other women. However, as Tusk and Ann describe in the next section, women must also contend with gendered rules of the game when employed with men.

Doing a Man’s Job
More and more, government and educators encourage women to enter non-traditional, primarily male, jobs. The findings from my data analysis of women’s experiences in this type of work might add another dimension to this debate. When women, especially women having been on welfare, dare to be different, consequences abound as Tusk and Ann found out when they became employed in primarily male-dominated plants in Chilliwack and Abbotsford. In this section, I will discuss how these two women moved into men’s jobs in communities where the view is primarily women should be at home tending children and caring for their husbands’ needs.

Tusk. At age 33, Tusk joined my study. She had been off welfare for over 10 years after having resorted to social assistance at the age of 16. Because of her successful transitional process off welfare, Tusk asked to participate because she felt she could offer insights and confirmation to the women’s transitions. Also, her experiences illustrate a woman’s transitions and attempts to remain off welfare are continual.

After leaving social assistance and before relocating to Chilliwack from Ontario, Tusk had been a production manager in a very successful manufacturing plant producing elevated platforms. She moved to Chilliwack because she wanted a change, new challenges, and a different environment for her teenage daughter. Because she had a Bachelor of Social Work
and years of working at a managerial level as a production co-ordinator/scheduler manager, she thought she would have no problem getting a job in Chilliwack. However, the reality was quite different when she began looking for work. Being very astute and knowing about self-promotion, Tusk recounted: “I’ll pull a newspaper stunt if I can’t find a job. I’m a qualified person. I want to work. I don’t want to go back on welfare. I’m a good worker. I got skills – they’re all transferable. I want to work. Somebody should hire me.” When Tusk did “pull the newspaper stunt,” she told a local reporter that 10 years ago when she had lived in Chilliwack, she had found a job in 3 days even though she had no credentials. However, upon her return with a degree, after a year and a half, Tusk still could not find work. She continued this discussion during our interview when she pointed out she had been utilizing all local facilities to help her find the job. Tusk felt: “If I would have joined the church, I could have had a job in a week. When you’re in a new community, it’s like trying to crack an ice cube. What is sad is it’s not what you know; it’s who you know. I’ve found that out.”

Tusk told me she had four different professional resumes and covering letters focusing on social work, environment, manufacturing industries, and purchasing. One would think employment could easily be found with a woman possessing so many skills. However, this was not the case, for Tusk had sent out hundreds of resumes for work in Chilliwack all the way to Vancouver. Tusk was extremely worried: “I got 22 weeks left of EI. I gotta find a job. I’ve come full circle. It’s scary if my EI runs out, and I don’t have a job, I’m right back on welfare again.” Undaunted, she continued her search, and she almost became a fixture at the women’s employment center while using their services in her dedication to find a job. “Just having the necessary resources at my fingertips to be able to fax, write a cover letter at a moment’s notice. It was great.”

After spending hundreds of dollars and endless hours searching, writing, and faxing resumes and cover letters, Tusk’s efforts finally paid off. A month after we spoke in August 1999, she was hired as a quality assurance inspector. Tusk later became plant manager, and she stayed for 7 months. When I asked Tusk her reason for leaving, she said that the male employees did not like the changes the company had asked her to make. After Tusk fired an employee, “They wanted to have a union come in.” Before her appointment, “Everybody ran the plant
themselves, so they put me in charge. I had to clean up the place, install the rules [and] make Worker's Compensation Safety Board. There was a lot of stipulations I was given when I was taking over the position.” Despite the regulations, the men continually refused to use safety equipment, so Tusk spent much of her time trying to enforce the rules. “It got so political and stressful as plant manager. I used to walk out and tell people every hour, ‘Put your safety glasses on. Use your rubber gloves. The carcinogenic chemicals in the transformers would give you cancer.’”

Tusk had asked for a raise since she was performing the tasks her employers had requested. Leading up to her departure, Tusk was told the raise “shouldn’t be a problem as long as you clean this up and follow rules and regulations of the company.” For all the changes and increased production, Tusk “was commended on the amount of work they did, the clean up, on putting Workman’s Comp policies in effect, making the plant a safer place.” However, when she reminded the company about the promised raise for the plant manager position, they said, “No. They couldn’t afford it.” Thus, Tusk said, “I resigned.”

Then, the company brought in a mechanical engineer to do the same job, gave him the wages she had requested, truck she needed, and other benefits and perks. Tusk believed, “I think there was a barrier. I was a woman.” Tusk and I discussed that the Chilliwack area is a very closed and extremely gendered community. Tusk described her feelings to me: “I really do believe I was used to a degree. I felt used because I had done all the dirty work for them, and then they hired this other person to come in and do it and pay them, give them everything that I had asked for and more.” When we talked about her quitting as plant manager, Tusk maintained: “That was my choice. But it just got too political. I just said, ‘I don’t need this. I don’t need to be stressed out. I’ve done everything I can. If I’m not going to be recognized, then I’m not staying.’”

When that door closed, new doors opened. Because Tusk had a social work degree complemented by years of experience, a local Native group hired her. Although her wages dropped from $650 to $400 a week, she said,

Money ain’t everything. You’ve got to be happy, to feel you’re worth something. I can be happier and not have to put up with the realization
you’re being used [and] not valued as an employee. I refused to put myself in that position. If I have to take a wage cut to be happy, I’ve lived on less.

Despite her disagreeable experience at the plant, Tusk pointed out: “There’s very, very few women, a very small, small percentage even recognized within manufacturing, let alone being plant manager. I did it.” As this topic came to a close, Tusk confided to me that “I’ve reached all the goals I’ve wanted to.” Now, she planned: “I’m taking some time for myself. I’m reassessing my life. My real goal in my life I’ve always dreamed about going to Australia.” Despite her experiences, Tusk looked at the next phase as a way “to reassess my life and figure out where I’m going. This is a whole new beginning for me. I see myself as making transitions still. It’s just different ones. It’s just as challenging.”

Although Tusk chose to quit this lucrative job, she too was, in a sense, pushed out due to gender bias. Tusk displayed resilience and a positive attitude that a new challenge, a new adventure, or something exciting was waiting just around the next corner. Despite her experience, as Tusk said, she did, in fact, accomplish her goal to become a plant manager. However, her story also points out that women may be willing to quit a job even if they have the skills and can perform the tasks. They may prefer less money and fewer battles although this may not be the case as illustrated by Ann’s experience.

Ann. Like Tusk, Ann encountered gender bias at her job in a plant in Abbotsford. Ann, too, fought to get what she wanted, but when I last spoke to her, she had a slightly different outcome in her workplace. Originally, Ann had started out as a full time student on a student loan in the social justice program at a college, for she had always wanted to work in the legal system. Although Ann was doing well at the college, her plans changed when the part-time job she had held for 8 years while on welfare had the possibility of turning into a full time, well-paying union job. Ann found that “All of a sudden, I have choices, and I’m just happier than a clam.” However, at first, Ann tried to fulfill both of her dreams by juggling “school full time and work full time for one semester.” However, this did not go as smoothly as she had anticipated: “I didn’t get a whole lot of sleep. I didn’t get very good marks.” As a result of the difficulty of working a physically demanding full time job for different shifts, Ann decided to stop out of her college courses for a while as she began making inroads into other jobs at the plant.
Before Ann was given her full time job, she had been working part-time. However, when she had enrolled at the college, she had told her employer she was not available until the summer when she would not be taking courses. When Ann tried to get extra work at the plant during the summer, she discovered her seniority had dropped very low. Originally, she had been number one in seniority among the women, but the East Indian women she worked with had not had the opportunity to take time out to get an education. They had stayed at work. Meanwhile, Ann attempted to leave the processing line by increasing production. She found that her ability to read and write English well helped her. This gained her notice from her supervisors. In the meantime, Ann was trying to regain some of her lost seniority and hours. When Ann discovered the women schedulers were bypassing her for men with less seniority to perform jobs loading trucks with some shipments, everything came to a head. Ann decided to stand up for the rights of the women laborers when she told her supervisor, "I never said I could do [the work, but] I need to be given the opportunity to try. If I can't do it, no problem, fire me. But you have to give me that opportunity." Ann went on to point out that "I can do what the guys do." However, she was told, "No, you can't." However, Ann's response was "'Oh, really? Let's talk to Labour Relations about the difference between guys' jobs and girls' jobs.'" It ended up a huge gender discrimination suit. I won, got 3 months' pay through the union, got me those hours, shot my seniority up."

Un daunted, Ann began to seek ways to advance in the plant and to perform other jobs. Ann had learned to operate heavy equipment, but she did not have tickets to drive. Therefore, after watching men on the job take a course to be trained to drive forklift, Ann decided to pursue obtaining her ticket at her insistence. "You can't tell me girls can't do that! I battled hard." However, some of her co-workers thought, "Who does she think she is?" Despite the intense struggle, her persistence paid off: "I did get through it all."

By seeking ways to advance, not only was Ann working on her own behalf, but she was paving the way for access to different jobs for the other women workers, primarily East Indian women, at the plant. When she won the battle to earn her forklift certificate, her supervisor suggested: "Why don't you ask the ladies if anyone else would like to do this. If enough are, they might have a girls' only class." Ann thought, "Girls' only class. Sounds
good.” However, when Ann approached the East Indian woman next in seniority about the chance, the woman refused even though it would have given her more money and the opportunity to quit one of her two jobs. Despite this and other East Indian women’s initial reluctance to take on these challenges, they watched Ann’s progress with great interest. Furthermore, once Ann had her ticket and had gained more respect from her male co-workers, she shared her success with the East Indian women in the crew.

Whenever I could, I took one of the ladies aside: “You need to know how this works. You can make it go up this way. This makes it go that way.” I showed her two pedals. They were worried. By the time I got the transfer, every one knew how a forklift worked. Had not taken the test [or] become licensed, so hadn’t actually driven one, but they knew all those little levers and were totally capable of using forklift equipment to help their own jobs.

Like Tusk, Ann set changes in motion. I wonder if these changes really benefited the women themselves. Ann proudly described her accomplishment to me: “When I worked blueberries, [I] took the place of two guys.”

Ann continued to make inroads into the gender bias at work by obtaining her industrial first aid ticket. These opportunities led to more responsibilities and 60 to 80 hours of work a week, but they also made more physical demands on her body eventually resulting in Ann injuring herself. Subsequently, after working part-time for 8 years while she had been on welfare, Ann was offered a full time job if she transferred to another plant. This sounded like a great opportunity. However, when she and a male co-worker transferred to the new plant, they discovered otherwise. They would not be able to retain their seniority positions, yet they would receive all benefits in a full time, permanent union job with 4 weeks paid holiday.

Three months later when I dropped by to pick up Ann’s introduction (I still do not have one.), things had deteriorated. The long hours and physical nature of the job were beginning to take their toll on Ann, for she had been off work for a strained cartilage due to lifting 50-pound bags continually and on stress leave for about a month. Ann said things had remained tense at the plant since our last meeting in December. Some of the men were still resentful she had transferred in from another plant even though she had lost seniority by taking the full time position. One particular young male supervisor was giving Ann a lot of trouble although her five other supervisors and male co-workers supported her. However, things came to a
head with her supervisor when Ann accidentally hit a truck door when she was rushing while loading a trailer. “First time I didn’t have to do three people’s jobs. It’s all very physical labour. It’s hard for me. I am 45.” Ann confided to me that many of her male co-workers had done this on occasion. Some had even hit people with equipment, but she had never been that careless. However, her supervisor was furious when she confessed her mistake. “This guy flipped. He spent four hours screaming at me, coming up with now I’m a dangerous driver.”

Ann admitted, she felt underlying gender differences did exist.

Part of the problem was as a female, they’re dumping on me. This supervisor has done the same thing to everybody in the plant. But they’re all guys. They take five minutes of [him yelling], and it’s dudes up, step outside, let’s have a battle. Guys split ‘em up, and everything is dropped. I’m a girl, so I’m trying to be reasonable. I’m trying to deal with it.

Because of the way she was treated by her supervisor, and her fear of his treatment of other women, Ann eventually launched a harassment charge against him. In the meantime, her honesty and her not knowing the unwritten rules of the game had repercussions had not foreseen. The next day, she was called into the office early to discuss the incident. Ann was told: “You’re not allowed on forklift any more. You can’t say anymore.”

At the same time, Ann discovered she had injured some cartilage. She got a doctor’s note; however, the plant people wanted her back because she was one of the few first aid attendants. With her doctor’s note, she was able to take a week off; however, when she returned, they had no work for her. After this continued for more than a week while jeopardizing her benefits from her insurance and Workers’ Compensation, Ann finally went to the top. However, Ann pointed out: “He didn’t want to hear from me. I started banging stuff out about not being allowed to drive forklift. He said, ‘I’ll get your head steward [to] write these grievances up and get something done ‘cause they are valid.’” True to his word, the shop steward managed to initiate Ann’s grievances: “She doesn’t need to go down to packing. She gets retrained on [the more advanced equipment]. She’s got a grievance. In the year and a half, you’ve trained a 100 people below her in seniority, so you pay her salary while she gets her training.” Undaunted now, Ann complained: “You’ve got a guy on forklift that has sent three people to hospital. I’m dangerous because I hit a door! That sounds like
discrimination.” However, despite her efforts, Ann felt: “They’re not going to deal with anything. I’ve been hung out to dry.”

When I last spoke to Ann in 2001, she was still battling this, but she had the opportunity to move to another plant. When I tried phoning her in 2002, her telephone number had been disconnected. That could mean a number of things based on my past experiences with her: she had no money to pay the phone bill, or she had moved.

Ann’s case like Tusk’s illustrates the rampant gender discrimination that still exists in the Abbotsford and Chilliwack areas. It also raises questions for me as to why women are told by government and encouraged by educators to train in the unusual professions, such as the trades like carpentry, welding, construction, and others, when we see these two cases of gender discrimination. I am sure this is only the tip of the ice berg as Ann had told me most women at the plant where she worked never got as far as she did, for they were weeded out long before they even had an opportunity to operate heavy equipment. Furthermore, other women, like the East Indians, had been reluctant to take advantage of the pathways Ann had carved through her struggles. Despite their interest, many women appeared more concerned with keeping their jobs than rocking the boat despite Ann’s encouragement, or, perhaps, they did not want to endure what Ann had gone through in her triumph of becoming the only female forklift driver.

Why after becoming employed were these three groups of women either given no reason for being fired, pushed out, or discriminated against for doing a man’s job? These women worked hard and wanted to stay employed. Although they seemed to have the skills to work in their chosen professions and were aware of the politics, as they put it, what prevented them from either learning the rules of the game or attaining the necessary social or symbolic capitals for entering these new social spaces? These examples of women leaving welfare for paid employment almost raise more questions than they answer, for they are contrary to government policies that say all women need to do to leave welfare is to get a job.
The Exceptions

Three women, Brown Bear, Maya, and Taylor, seemed to be exceptions to what I had observed with the other seven women as described in the previous section. Of all the women going directly into the workforce from welfare, only Brown Bear was still employed without problems at her original job. Maya and Taylor had first taken courses at the college prior to finding employment. These differed from the women’s situations previously presented.

Brown Bear. During our discussions, I felt Brown Bear’s ability to retain her job might have been because her employer, a business woman, actually seemed to be Brown Bear’s mentor. After Brown Bear had completed her pre-employment work experience with this woman, she had figured out a way to hire Brown Bear part-time in her business. When I arrived for the second interview with Brown Bear, she proudly told me: “Great big changes – I’m not on assistance anymore.”

Not only did the woman employ Brown Bear, she also “took me to the hairdresser’s and had my hair cut. She bought me some business clothes.” The stimulus for this had been when the business woman found out that the “$100 for going on [work] bids” welfare would take from “my next check $75. They’ll allow me to keep $25 of the $100.” Brown Bear’s description coincided with the welfare policy at the time regarding work and welfare. However, her employer felt this was unfair that Brown Bear could only keep a portion of her wages. She was also afraid this would set Brown Bear back now that she was emerging from her depression over her daughter’s death and putting her own finances in order. True to her word and using her knowledge as a financial planner and debt counselor, the woman created a job to help Brown Bear.

She said, “You’re going off welfare. You’re going to have part-time work!”
She had to try to find me hours. [One place] is a terrible place to clean; it needs a lot of work, so she thought, “Ok, we’ll do that.” At least, some months, you may only make $600, but it’s more than what you made at welfare - $485 [a month].’ It’s not a hell of a lot, but it’s enough to make you feel like a human being. Some months, it’s going to be much more.

With her employer’s help, Brown Bear found having the part-time job had benefits to her life because “my budget is up to date. We have food. Telephone’s paid. It gives you a good feeling. We’ve struggled with this budget for three months; we’re seeing it work. We
celebrated. We bought this [couch for] $50.”

When I last spoke to Brown Bear during our closure interview a year later in 2000, she was still working for M. and off welfare. At the same time, Brown Bear was beginning to think about applying for daytime work with the disabled. In the meantime, she had begun to help people privately with disabled children and those with adjustment problems. In fact, during our last interview, Brown Bear showed me the newspaper ad for working with disabled individuals in a community care setting. She had submitted her resume and covering letter after having first answered the people by e-mail. Brown Bear told me excitedly, “I’ve got an interview tomorrow. I went through all the planning in my head. I have the pamphlet on their organization. I’m going to read it tonight. It was designed by the people who taught me gentle teaching.” As I left Brown Bear that day, she was still planning for her interview and what she would wear.

Although I had hoped to follow up after the closure interview, I did not have an opportunity to do so. However, the interesting thing about Brown Bear’s experience was she had a mentor willing to help her through the transition process so much so that M., her mentor, made a job for her.

Maya. Like Brown Bear, Maya too found a job with an empathetic employer: a relative. When Maya and I had first met, she had been pursuing more education in hope of learning more about business writing for proposals. However, Maya decided not to return to her studies. After leaving college, Maya revolved back to welfare before finding a full time job.

During our conversation in 2000, Maya explained to me that after making her decision, initially, she had felt “unsure. I felt I was leaving that security.” Maya knew she had taken a huge risk to leave welfare, but she thought, “I have to take this risk. I can’t let this opportunity pass.” Her choice paid off when she told me, “It’ll be one month now [that I’ve been off assistance]!” Her decision had been based on her desire: “I want to contribute, feel a bit different. It felt good dropping off my last stub, and saying, ‘I don’t need assistance anymore. Checking that NO box was good!’ I didn’t realize I was on for 5 years.’”
Maya pointed out her hours were flexible, and she could perform her bookkeeping duties from home while still having time to actively participate in her young son's daily activities and his growing up. According to Maya,

[My relative hired] people to keep him organized, [so] he’s set up my computer with the bookkeeping program. I get to do it at home. The plan is really flexible; sometimes, I’ll put in full time hours, sometimes just two hours a day, or we’d get together over dinner and [have] a meeting. [My son] is in kindergarten, so I volunteer my time there while he’s at school. I come back home, work, do my things while he’s there, so that is great.

In addition to her job, Maya began a correspondence course that would help her with her new job. During our last meeting in July of 2001, Maya shared with me that she was “taking a correspondence course for accounting at home to get my CGA. I started in April; now, I know what to do. I have to change this and fix it as you go and as you learn.” She felt the course was helping her do the books for my work she performed for her brother-in-law.

Maya was quite pleased with the changes. Not only was she working full time, but she was also continuing her education. Only this time, the education was more focused on practical skills and knowledge for her job. Like Brown Bear, Maya seemed to have a mentor lending her a helping hand as Maya made the transition from welfare to work.

**Taylor.** Taylor’s transition was similar to Maya’s in that Taylor too had started out at the college. Also, she found a supportive and welcoming group of employers. Before this, though, Taylor had been taking upgrading courses at the college to keep in touch with the public after her pre-employment program. Taylor confided to me the upgrading classes would be useful for her job as a hairdresser because she would need the knowledge to do her job. “I’m gonna need my math for pricing, adding the cost of a haircut, or you sell products. In English, I’m gonna have to spell stuff ’cause you have to keep records of clients. Most of it’s done on computer, but that’s why I’m taking that computer course.”

However, when I saw Taylor for our closure interview in December 2000, she told me that she had decided college really was not where she wanted to be, so she stopped out. During this interview, Taylor happily told me: “I’m completely off welfare. [It’s been] two months since I’ve gotten any social assistance. I’m working. I feel like I’ve broken free from
something. I’ve been on welfare since I was 19 years old, [and I’m 28].” According to Taylor, “The biggest thing you have to be ready. I’d had enough. I was ready to live a normal life. I’m living a decent life.” Aside from the financial independence, the job provided some flexibility. “I’m 5 days a week, but I asked for four so I have 2 days to be with the boys. I work every Saturday except once in a month and a half, I get a Saturday off.”

Taylor proceeded to explain to me that after our last meeting, she had decided to pursue her lifelong goal to be a hairdresser. Taylor wanted me to know the process she had undertaken when she looked for her job.

It took me going to get it. I got what I needed. I got a resume done, which I never had. I had to do a haircut and be judged. I had to find a model. I was so nervous. I had no nice clothes; I had to get a dress. I had to get a different wardrobe. I went in there dressed up. They said, “When can you start?” I said, “As soon as possible.” I didn’t have daycare, but I took the job.

Although Taylor had started out in Adult Basic Education at the college, she decided formal education was not for her. Taylor’s goal was to put into practice the hairdressing license she had obtained in 1995. She felt the skills she needed were only those complementing tasks for performing her job. An underlying theme from her interview turned out to be the support of the women in the hair salon. They encouraged her to apply for the job and welcomed her into the shop. This along with her determination helped her leave welfare.

From my data analysis, Brown Bear, Maya, and Taylor appeared to be exceptions to getting a job. In their cases, having a helping hand or a mentor seemed to be the important key in their keeping the jobs they found. I wonder if a helping hand or having someone teach a woman on welfare “the rules of the game” in the workplace might be what is needed to help women stay off welfare and not be pushed out of their first jobs like some of the other women in this group were. Again, Brown Bear, Maya, and Taylor’s experiences leave almost more questions than answers. For example, was it the mentorship and flexibility of their employers that allowed them to fit into and keep their jobs? If so, how can these mentorships or helping hand experiences be promoted to help women make transitions from welfare? Was it something particular to these women that helped them find mentors?
Summary Thoughts

Government encourages women to leave welfare for work, and it maintains a job is the solution for women. However, as the experiences of Cactus, Vivianne, Mary, Collette, Advancing/Advocacy, Tusk, and Ann illustrated, just getting a job was not the complete answer to staying employed. That only 3 out of 10 women were able to keep their jobs without problems seemed contrary to what government promotes. As they attempted to make transitions to work, initially, these women appeared to have the prerequisite job skills, social, cultural, and symbolic capitals necessary for remaining employed. They were even aware of the politics of workplaces or the unwritten "rules of the game" and the types of pressures or symbolic violence that could occur at these worksites. Through their pre-employment programs or seminars in women’s centers, the women had been taught that they must somehow fit into their new work environments. However, despite this knowledge, their skills, and the forms of capitals they possessed, they had trouble navigating social structures within worksites. Seven women were either let go for no reason, pushed out, or experienced a tumultuous time in doing a man’s job. Thus, from these women’s experiences and the ability of 3 to remain employed out of the 10, we must surmise there is more to leaving welfare than “just getting a job; any job will do.” Women must be able to actually keep that job.

The 7 women even attempted to enlist the help of supervisors, fellow employees, unions, and managers to help them remain employed in their chosen jobs. Others even sought to advocate on their own behalf. In most cases, they were unsuccessful. However, Ann managed to hold on to her job although tenuously and amidst continuing strained work relationships. Collette, too, managed to advocate for herself by being awarded severance pay, medical and dental, paid college courses, a reference, and destruction of the poor work evaluation.

Government policies do not take into account how women might remain employed after they leave welfare. They even advocate and encourage women to find non-traditional jobs. However, neither government nor programs examine the job cultures they ask women to step into in these traditionally male jobs. The gendered division of labour and underlying gender subtext to some work is ignored in the push and haste to move women into workforce. When 7 out of 10 women lose their jobs, we must question what is it they need to remain employed.
The answer, though, is not a quick fix to work.

Unlike the group of women choosing to go to work directly from welfare or choosing not to obtain a college degree, other women did, in fact, select attending college. They did so even if it meant they ultimately had to take out student loans. These women’s experiences will be discussed in the next section.

**Getting an Education**

People need some sort of education to get by. The world has changed. Women that are getting to be my age [40] and regardless of age are coming out of these programs, and what are we lacking that we all have in common? Education. Education is the key.

_Gloria_

Most women in my study felt education was and is an important key to a woman’s success in the job market. They also believed education opens up options and opportunities leading to a career or good job. All the women indicated they needed a career to improve their quality of life and provide for their children. A career could consist of education derived from a 2-year diploma or a 4-year Bachelor’s degree or even a series of courses that provided improved job skills and training.

During my study, all but four women engaged in some form of formal education or government funded training program or seminars. One of these, Tusk already had a BA of Social Work. Almond was considering a course in designing while Kate Franschild and Lilith were thinking of enrolling in courses if something were to meet their needs. Moreover, they all had taken courses at either a college or a university.

When they joined my research, nine women were enrolled exclusively in formal education. Five (Tumbleweed, Heather, Diana, Scout, and Rochelle) graduated with a diploma or degree. Three transitioned to work (Ann, Taylor, and Maya), and one (Susan) was still working on her BA. Of the group moving directly to work, one (Collete) began her BA in Adult Education. By the end of my study, two (Advancing/Advocacy and Brown Bear) were considering courses, and two (Cactus and Mary) were in the process of enrolling in
government training programs. Of the group appearing to stay on welfare, one (Lovey) had started a nursing program by the end of the study. After my research finished, two (Gloria and Lilith) enrolled in government programs at the college. Two others (Almond and Ali) were considering taking courses related to their jobs, and one (Kate Franschild) wanted to take courses if welfare would pay for her assessment tests. After transitioning from school to work, another woman (Maya), as mentioned in the last section, began her CGA while working. Thus, as illustrated, women were straddling at least two categories and making transitions simultaneously. (See Table 8 in this chapter and Appendix C.) They were not static in their efforts to leave welfare, and they attempted to incorporate education into their transitions to improve their opportunities. Before embarking on a path to formal education, many of the women in my study first set their courses for education and learning through pre-employment training programs. What the women gained from these programs will be discussed in the next section before a more in-depth view of women’s transitions to formal education is presented.

**Setting a Course through Training Programs**

As mentioned, triggering events led the women on their paths of transition. To help them set a course, 14 women chose two similar pre-employment programs, one in Abbotsford and one in Chilliwack, as a form of education to begin their transitions. Although the programs were located at different sites, they both came under one umbrella government funded business. Therefore, they had similar content, and staff even overlapped. Based on their similarities, the two programs will be referred to as the program. I met 13 women through the program. At one time or another, 5 others had attended some form of government training program. Another woman, Mary, chose to attend training seminars at a local women’s center. Based on my discussions with the women, only 1, Rochelle, out of the 23 appeared not to have ever attended a pre-employment program at some point during her transitional process. Only 2 women, Brown Bear and Gloria, out of the 14 felt they were worse off after having participated in the pre-employment program. All the women specifically chose the programs based on at least one of the advertised promises for life skills, career exploration, education, or computers. For many, a program for women only was also appealing. Finally, all the women used the programs as a vehicle for their own learning and as a form of education.
about themselves, their skills, and their potential for continuing on to more formal education.

A positive process. The women’s reasons or motivations for entering the program varied as did their experiences before, during, and after. For many like Ann, the program was the beginning of the process of coming out of a psychological bog. According to Ann, it started with attitude. “I already knew the stuff, but the program enabled me do something about it. Right from the first class, I said, ‘I’ll be around positive people. If it’s not going to be positive, I don’t need to be here. I’ll just walk out.’” However, as Ann found out, people were positive, and they too were on a quest, so she stayed to discover more about herself.

Remembering the forgotten. Cactus stated programs specifically for women help women by providing life skills. Cactus felt a program for abused women would help them “relearn simple common sense they kind of forgot about when you get stuck in a rut.” Furthermore, Cactus believed the program should be mandatory for women because some people may not be ready to look for a job. “They have to do something like that first. You can’t expect anybody just to get a job after being on the system for years and just do a job search.”

Length and intensity gives direction. Due to its length and intensity, the program allowed women to explore more personal issues in depth so women could learn how to make long-term changes. According to Lovey, other centers she had attended were too self-directed, and “They have short little workshops; then, you’re gone. You do your own work. I wasn’t ready. That was too fast.” Thus, for Lovey, and others like her, the pre-employment program, provided time to touch on various personal issues, anger management, job interviews, and dressing for work.

However, Vivianne pointed out she enrolled in the program because “I knew exactly what I wanted to do was to look in the mirror and know I am worth something. For the first time in my life I liked who I was inside.” At the same time, Vivianne said women were given “tools to work at it,” but they also “I learned I can’t save everybody no matter what I try.”
Ali corroborated this by saying that for her, the program provided a sense of direction. "I was just ready to take the next step in my life. I was sent by my worker to the training consultant to help with direction because my communication skills [and] self-esteem was lacking. Did I need upgrading? I didn’t know. What did I want to do?"

**A safe place to practice and look for help.** For some women, the pre-employment program offered a chance not only to regain forgotten skills, but it also provided a safe place for them to practice these skills. Mabel was one such woman. "I wanted structure in my life. I needed to find out who I was again, take control of my life, deal with my past, my feelings, how to communicate to my children. I didn’t need training [or] be thrown into a job." When women forgot their life skills, they also tended to lose self-esteem and confidence in themselves for the decisions they had made resulting in living on welfare. For Mabel, who had previously worked for the Ministry of Social Services, the program was the best thing that could have happened to me in my life. They opened up gates with career exploration, interpersonal skills, to work as a team, good listening skills, different aptitude tests, what kinds of courses you’d like to take, pay for it. The work experience was good. They gave you the tools. They can take a woman with absolutely no self-esteem and teach [her] how to build her self-esteem, gave me my feeling of self-worth back, so I knew I wasn’t a stupid person. I just made mistakes.

Others, like Advancing/Advocacy discovered a pre-employment program could teach a woman to look for help. "If you look, there is a lot of help, more than you could’ve done on your own."

As illustrated by the women’s comments, the program provided women with ways to educate themselves about themselves. They were able to learn attitudinal changes while reviewing and practicing life skills forgotten in the turmoil of everyday living. The program also helped women with career exploration while providing a sense of direction for many of them. It also taught women where they could go for help in their own local community.

**Upgrading.** Like other upgrading and pre-employment programs, this one offered some basic upgrading and educational guidance. Although the main focus of the program was for women to get a job, many women used the upgrading portion as a way to learn more about
how they might fulfill long term dreams of completing an education or point them to an educational course leading to a career. For some like Mabel, the program provided a way to complete the GED (General Equivalency Diploma) recognized by colleges and employers as an equivalency to a high school diploma. This fit into Mabel’s standard way of re-entering the workforce: “Whenever I made the decision I was going back to work, I knew I had to have some kind of upgrading or refresher course ‘cause it looks better, and it prepares you if you’ve been away from work and office machinery.” Generally, when Mabel took refresher courses, “I paid for them [out of my] food [money].”

**First supportive steps.** Often before participating in the pre-employment program, women had tried on their own to enroll in college programs to find a good job. Maya had attempted to apply for the nursing program because she felt it was the career she wanted to pursue. However, after a stressful meeting with a college counselor because Maya had to take her young son with her, Maya questioned her decision to enter nursing or even the college. When she attended the pre-employment program, Maya still held on to the idea. As Maya confided to me, program’s career testing made her realize: “it is not nursing. I have no patience for patients. That’s a service; it’s social.” This was the lowest category on her tests, and the consistency of the testing pointed her to: “I’ve got that creative part of me, and then I’ve got that very organized part, so I’m in college taking courses for proposal writing.” Therefore, Maya decided: “Schooling is the best thing. I need education to get into that ideal job. I didn’t want the waitress job.” Eventually, Maya enrolled in college courses that interested her and drew on her creativity and organizational abilities.

Heather’s exploration of her goals led her to focus on the educational portion of the pre-employment program. This helped her realize: “If it wasn’t for [the program], I would still be sitting at home. The path was excellent. It made me realize what I wanted, and the steps I needed to get there. It’s basic, but I didn’t know the steps to take.” According to Heather, the facilitators provided support, and since “I can’t afford college, not only did they help me make the steps to get to my goal, but about places to help me.” Women might not know what appears to be obvious to those already going to college. Heather pointed out: “College is scary, especially when you’ve been out of school for 8 years. I wouldn’t have known the first
step to [take].” Heather described that entering college had been a process starting with

Getting my self-esteem back was most important. Even little things like picking up a [college] calendar. Before I was looking through the book and not understanding three credits here, three credits there. This is a prerequisite. If you don’t know how to read it. The CPT and studying for that, and I needed my diploma to come down to college, so I had to phone and get my diploma, and even just filling out registration sheet course, program, this, that, Oh, my goodness. When you don't know, it looks French. Then, applying for the grant, and [the program] paid for a course last semester.

Ann also knew she wanted to go to college. Long before going on welfare, she had been enrolled in university. However, as time passed, she forgot some of the processes necessary for applying for higher education. “There was this student loan I had to figure out. It’s silly. Years I have been trying to figure out what I need to do to go to college. I hadn't been in a classroom in 20 years. I needed practice.”

Sometimes enrolling in college or taking a course may seem simple, but as Ann and Heather pointed out, if a person has been out of the system for years, this common knowledge becomes unfamiliar and daunting.

Disappointments for some. Although many women were happy with the educational opportunities and their personal accomplishments, a few women in my study were disappointed with the promises of education and training. Even though other women had some complaints about the program, they often felt the benefits and what they learned far outweighed any negative events. However, Brown Bear and Gloria were extremely disillusioned with their experiences. They felt worse off after having attended the pre-employment program and no further ahead than if they had not ever participated.

Brown Bear had not been required to attend a program for compassionate reasons due to her daughter’s death in a tragic car accident. Even though she was still grieving, Brown Bear wanted to participate in the community and pursue her interests. Therefore, after reading about the pre-employment program, Brown Bear became “excited about it” as she thought: “Education, communication skills, computer, work, all this other,” so I went. [But] they were hesitant.” Finally, after being accepted, Brown Bear became increasingly disillusioned with
the program. As she recounted to me,

What bothers me about programs for women [is] they're not doing what they say. The focus is government funding, not the women getting back to work. Programs start out on the right path because there's a lot of work that has to be done with women. Their self-esteem [and] their confidence are the first things that need to be hyped up. Then, you have to educate and train; there's where it disappears. It's the education and training needed so much.

In order to determine what skills, education and training women needed, Brown Bear believed proper guidance with up-to-date career testing, supported by community market analysis was required to provide women direction. She also pointed out BC is a service economy; however, program staff did not guide women into services jobs the community required. Furthermore, in addition to a general education, math, and English courses, they needed to learn about computers as the program’s advertisement had promised. When Brown Bear started the program, she had been very excited about the possibility of learning how to use computers and upgrading her skills to compete in the job market. Brown Bear maintained: “The Internet is going to just blow us away.” Thus, she felt that “They need computers that did something other than play solitaire. Those computers were so old. The programs are obsolete. You can learn to type. They were too expensive they told us. It was discouraged.” Brown Bear believed she and the other women had been short changed. “They advertise computer skills. Damn it, then, teach computers. Many just needed education; apprenticeship was never looked into.” She pointed out that they had been degraded when the women had been sent into the community to do their work practicums. The women “begged the community to let them play there for 6 weeks or whatever on earth it was. That was degrading. There was no set up. It was like you were exploring careers at one point without any guidance.” Overall, Brown Bear felt her needs as well as other women’s goals had not been met. At that time, he program staff had been too worried about their own livelihoods due to diminishing and tenuous available government funding.

Gloria echoed Brown Bear’s sentiments about the program. She too was disillusioned with the computer training, for they were only taught an old version: Windows 3.1. Furthermore, Gloria pointed out the exercises were too simplistic and discounted women’s life experiences. Gloria felt that she and the other women needed to be treated as though they had lives. “I didn't just fall out of the sky with no life experience. You are not treated like a
grown up. I'm turning 40 years of age. You're treated like you have no skills. You are even accused of having zero parenting skills.”

Gloria was so unhappy with this particular pre-employment program she wanted it investigated.

I'm still puzzled why my worker wasn't more interested in saying, “Okay, let's pursue this. I want you to go talk to [the training consultant]. Why is this happening?” In this case, the boat should be rocked. I don't begrudge [people. They] hit the gold mine! That was an entrepreneurial idea. What is gonna make us money? Women on welfare! Let's go tell government we're gonna give them skills; teach them life skills. We're gonna get them off welfare. The government's going, “Hey, there's a plan!” It was a brilliant idea on the business side. But deliver what you bloody said you'd do!

The only reason Gloria stayed was because she and the other women had signed contracts promising they would commit to the program for 6 months. Thus, when she compared her experiences in other programs she had attended in the community, Gloria believed she had wasted her time in this one.

Alternate programs and workshops. As Gloria had explained, Chilliwack offered other programs and workshops to people looking for work. Sometimes these appealed to women more than training programs. Mary was one of these people, for she did not start out in a pre-employment program, but she did take workshops at a local women's center. “I took the assertive communications [and] interviewing skills – it was helpful studying before you go to the interview that would really make it less nerve wracking because if you study before you go for an interview, at least you’re more secure in what you know.” Later in my study, based on the advice on an employment counselor, Mary too began to consider entering the pre-employment program to help give her more direction.

As described, not all women felt the program was a stepping stone to “setting their courses” of transition. However, some believed it put them on an educational trajectory and provided them with practice, confidence, information, and tools to help themselves and engage in further training and formal education.
Mothering: Choosing to “Stop Out” or Continue Education

Many women attending the pre-employment program were given the opportunity to enroll in college courses before they became full time students. This showed them how they would perform in formal education while they sampled courses that could lead to careers. However, this was no guarantee that they would not choose to “stop out” of the educational path.

Maya: figuring things out. Maya used the career exploration part of the pre-employment program to help her focus on proposal writing and communications courses at the college. Although she did well, she felt pressured to perform for others losing sight of her interests in mothering her son. Therefore, Maya decided to “stop out” of college.

I said, “No. I just want to focus on [my son] adjusting into his school,”
Then, I need time too to re-adjust and see where I go from there, so I’m not trying to please anybody. I just want to figure things out. Everybody asks me, “Why didn’t you go to school this year?” “I just wanted time off.”

Then, after she found work, to complement her job, Maya enrolled in the CGA distance program. She may even return to school in the future when her son attends grade one.

Taylor: that’s enough for me, but my children. Taylor needed basic upgrading, so when she attended the college, she was directed to adult basic education to continue her studies. Taylor said: “I chose to go to school rather than work. It’s a bit of an escape. I go to school because I only have grade 7. That’s embarrassing to me, so if I can get more education, maybe that will help me move on with my life.”

Taylor eventually did stop out to find a job in hairdressing. However, she had gained self-confidence and improved skills from the English, math, and computer courses she took in upgrading. When she stopped out of her studies, schooling did still weigh on her mind as she had two young sons, and she was worried about their school homework in the future. As Taylor confided,

My biggest fear is getting education so my kids see that. I don’t want them not to succeed in school. My boyfriend’s daughter, who’s 10, comes over with homework grade 5, her fractions, “Holy smokes. There’s no way I could help.” What would I do if it came home? I’m going to have to help [my son]. [She] has her dad to help, but who’s going to help [my sons]?

Thus, for mothers, their own success and education was coupled with their desire for their
children to do well in school.

**Vivianne: the juggling act.** Vivianne had also attempted to return to school after the pre-employment program. Although she had done well when she had first returned to college, Vivianne began to overextend herself by juggling motherhood, school, and part-time work. "I remember doing 3 courses, 40 hours of homework, plus working 40 hours. And I have a 4-year-old who is in hospital half the time. I'm doing it all, but I'm still not good enough. I had to stop. I failed one class."

Eventually, based on her priorities, Vivianne too made the decision to stop out, "but that's all right." She later went to Manitoba to work and eventually returned to BC where she became a manager of a retail clothing store. When we last met, Vivianne had become engaged and her thoughts were turning to marriage and raising a family. However, like so many of the mothers with young children, Vivianne too was torn between school and caring for her daughter before she had stopped out of college. Although many mothers chose to stop out of college, others like Heather and Scout managed to continue their studies.

**Heather: good grades or mothering.** Heather also had a young child, and she wanted to ensure she could be part of her son's growing up years. Therefore, when she was able to get the Special Opportunities Grant (SOG) to continue her studies, she decided to go part-time after completing the pre-employment program. During my study, mothers could go to school part-time, stay home with their children, and have their courses paid for until their children turned 7. Since Heather chose the part-time route, this limited her choices, for many programs demanded full time attendance. Therefore, until her son was of school age, Heather chose General Studies.

During our last interview, Heather was in the process of switching to the Social Work Diploma program to complete the core courses for a Diploma. She planned to focus on working with mentally disabled adults, for she had become interested in this area after doing her work experience through a job development center as a result of the career exploration portion of the pre-employment program. Once Heather chose her career path, she decided she
wanted to complete her diploma more quickly. However, this began to impinge on her young son's care as Heather took three courses and tried to maintain an A average. "That's another thing that's been coming up is being a mother as well as trying to make this change, trying to do good grades." As she found herself trying to juggle motherhood and getting good grades, Heather found: "I just start yelling [but] that was so needless just because I'm feeling pressure, and I want to get a good grade doesn't mean I can't give [my son] 2 minutes. But when you're thinking, writing a paper, and somebody broke my train of thought." Heather continued to explain to me how she attempted to cope by questioning sacrificing time between her son and getting good marks. "Am I going to get a better paying job because I got A's? In the meantime, I'm not giving [my son] time. I tried to do my courses while he was in school, so he wouldn't have me gone evenings. It's hard."

**Scout: it's hard but.** Scout, too, had a young son. Like Heather, she decided the time was right for her to pursue her interests in children through the Early Childhood Education Program. Having reliable and safe daycare would make getting her diploma easier. With the help of the staff from the pre-employment program, Scout was able to enter an EI program that would fund her education. However, Scout was made to think long and hard about her interests in childcare for a profession, for the program staff did not want to fund those unwilling to fulfill a serious commitment a program leading to a career. "It was tough. I had to write a letter to get in. Then, I had to get off welfare and explain to them what I wanted to do. We had to write out a budget, so EI could pay us so we could afford school."

As illustrated by the experiences of mothers with young children, they all sought a better life through education. However, they experienced indecision about continuing in school, for they did not want to miss the important formative years of their young children. In part, stopping out of school by Maya, Taylor, and Vivianne was due to this tension. However, all women did become employed after leaving school. Others like Scout and Heather were able to overcome this tension and stayed in school to graduate from their respective programs.

**Stopping Out of College or An Education Against All Odds**

After attending the pre-employment program and deciding to pursue an education, other
women found they had difficult choices to make. These led women to “stop out” or put their education on hold until the rest of their lives were in order or the time was right to return to education. Ann was torn between a union job or college. Tumbleweed found she had to navigate different individuals and bureaucracies before she could pursue her education. Diana discovered she had to take control of her decisions from government employment counsellors. Rochelle, too, found she had to explore alternate pathways to education.

**Ann: union job or school.** Ann too started school with eagerness to complete her degree after she made the transition from the pre-employment program to education. Because of a previous interest in law, she enrolled in the Criminology Program at the local college. However, as mentioned earlier, she also stopped out of college when her part-time union job at a plant turned into full time with benefits. Her ultimate goal had been to find a good job, perhaps, one not so physically demanding. Ann experienced a dilemma when she needed to choose between full time union employment and remaining in college. Undaunted, Ann decided to try working and attending school full time. When Ann’s marks and sleep suffered, she chose to stop out to concentrate on work. Despite this, Ann had accomplished part of her educational goals. “I've got all my first year classes except English. The time I got into English, I just started [to] work afternoons. They could NOT give me Monday off, so I had to drop out. I have done most second year courses [and] three 3rd year courses, but technically bits and pieces have to be picked up.” Although Ann had to put school on hold, she confided to me that she planned to return, for she was close to completing her degree.

**Tumbleweed: the process of enrolling.** Before entering the pre-employment program, Tumbleweed had done her own research by taking a career exploration course at a college in Vancouver. She planned to get a BA in psychology or social work. However, before welfare allowed Tumbleweed to enroll at the college, she had to do more exploration by taking another program mandated by welfare. Tumbleweed felt she was just being made to fulfill government requirements because “I knew I wanted to go to school, so I had already got a calendar, did some research in the Resource Library on programs, schools, and the future in social work.”
In the meantime, Tumbleweed had wanted to deal with some personal issues, so she enrolled in the pre-employment program. Then, Tumbleweed realized that the courses she was planning to take at the college conflicted with the program timetable. However, “They would accommodate me. They knew I’d be leaving for classes twice a week. They encouraged me not to drop it. It would be all part of the program. That’s why this is so great.” Tumbleweed was delighted she could participate in the program and attend college at the same time. Combining knowledge from the college courses, the pre-employment program, information from the financial aid advisor, counselors, and her desire to work with people with mental problems, Tumbleweed changed her goal. She chose to become a recreational therapist.

Diana: taking control and away we go. Diana combined her personal experiences in foster care with her desire to work with children and youth to complete a degree in psychology. As well, Diana had attended a career counseling program in Surrey 6 years before our conversation. After the career testing, Diana expressed a desire to earn a degree. However, the counselors said, “That’ll take too long. There aren’t going to be resources for that.” Diana found: “They try and talk you into some compromising thing, like a 2-year versus a 4-year program. That was my experience. There’s even hurdles, line ups, and waiting lists to spend a week being tested and learning common sense stuff.” Undaunted, Diana did not want to work in the creative arts since she had just left that field. Her goal was to work with child and youth care. Her choice was different from what government would allow, so Diana took control to pursue a 4-year degree.

I said I wanted a Bachelor’s degree and a Master’s. They said, “You won’t find funding.” Welfare has programs for women that allows them to take two courses and stay home with their kids. I didn’t want to take two courses and stay home. That’s when I decided student loans and away we go.

And away she did go, for Diana graduated in 2000.

Rochelle: no programs. Rochelle seemed to be the only woman graduating with a degree who had not attended a pre-employment program at some point during her journey from welfare. Originally, Rochelle had been enrolled in pre-law at a college close to Vancouver. Her own lawyer had even offered to article her. However, even though Rochelle maintained a
3.74 GPA while taking 15 credits, she decided: “I didn't want to argue for the rest of my life. I could do that at home. It used to be conflict was a catalyst. I was just burned out, so I decided this I can remove.”

Therefore, when Rochelle changed her career focus to nursing, she thought that after jumping all the necessary hoops and taking the required courses, gaining entry would be easy. However, “They said to me, “Oh no, I'm sorry – you can't go in the nursing program. There's a year and a half wait list.” Not to take no for answer, Rochelle went home, and

I went home; I flipped open the yellow pages to colleges and universities.
I saw [College B]. I called them, asked them if they had a nursing program.
They said, “No, but [University A] is right on our same campus. Do you want to talk to someone from there because they do?” So I called them. It was two days before the deadline to register, and they jumped through hoops to get me registered in their program, so I've been there ever since.

Rochelle’s perseverance later paid off when she graduated as a nurse.

As pointed out with this group, all but one had attended a pre-employment training program, workshops, or career assessment program before embarking on their educational trajectories. The programs appeared to help them focus on the directions they needed to take. Many experienced tensions between their chosen goals and the opportunities government provided through policies. For some this tension led to stopping out and even making a transition to work. As illustrated by Ann’s experience as a single woman, well paying employment often took precedence over benefits or desire for education. However, other women managed to stay in school to graduate. Their challenge was how to pay for courses. In the next section, women’s strategies for funding their education will be presented.

**Funding Education**

When making a shift from welfare recipient to student, women needed to plan differently. While women were attending the pre-employment program, they attempted to take as many courses as they could, for the program provided a small budget for each woman to take some training or college courses. However, as government funding diminished, these opportunities decreased. Consequently, as women began their shift to education, they worried about how they would pay for their courses. Government had mandated if women on welfare moved to
education, they had to take out student loans. This seemed daunting for many women because they could not afford to pay for their courses. When women on welfare made a transition to education, they were shifted to a student loan, so they left the welfare rolls except for child care subsidy.

**Heather: grants for mothers.** As Heather began thinking about enrolling at the local college, her social worker kept saying,

“If you go to college, you need a student loan.” She didn’t say, “You need to sign the education agreement to get the grant to go to school, and then you can stay on welfare.” A couple of phone calls later, I found out you just need to sign this education agreement. That gets you the grant, and then you get the money, and you can go to school part-time until your child is 7.

However, categories are often not clear cut. Before taking out a student loan, a woman, especially a single mother, may be eligible for grants. Heather found out through the Special Opportunities Grant or SOG, “You’re entitled to $1200 a year, which is $600 a semester, so they break that down to $240 for two classes, and then $200 for books, some gas, some for daycare, but it works out to $600 a semester.” In addition to a grant, a single mother usually received daycare subsidy. Furthermore, a single mother may be able to work part-time while attending school and collecting daycare subsidy.

**Collette: bursaries can be difficult.** Collette, like other women, figured out ways to receive small college bursaries to help fund their courses. As she began transitioning from welfare to work, Collette’s goal was to become an employment counselor, so she wanted to take courses to supplement her knowledge. Since Collette did volunteer work, she was not paid, so she could not afford tuition for college courses. Therefore, Collette went to the college financial aid department to seek out bursaries she knew existed. Collette described how, despite her awards and good grades, obtaining a bursary from a begrudging financial aid officer was not necessarily easy. “Because of my experience, it was possible to get funding. So I apply, but this man, ‘Did you look for work? Where? We have to give money to people who needs the money. How I’m going to know you have finish the courses?’” Thus, finding money, even bursaries, was sometimes difficult as Collette pointed out. Collette felt that it was in part because she was an immigrant and an assertive one at that.
**Tumbleweed: bursaries but no transitional benefits.** Tumbleweed's experience of obtaining a college bursary from the same advisor was somewhat different. Possibly, her treatment was different because unlike Collette, Tumbleweed had the help of a counselor, or maybe it was because she had come directly from the pre-employment program. Tumbleweed felt that she had been fortunate because she knew other women had similar experiences to Collette’s. “I have continually kept busy. I apply for grants for school.” Tumbleweed attributed her success to “The financial guy was just excellent. This guy actually helped me get on the road that I am now.” Individuals like the financial aid officer became internal support networks for women as Tumbleweed found when she applied for a second bursary. “He saw the courses I had taken applying for funding somewhere else, so I wasn’t always draining the government. It depends on people’s attitudes. The government doesn’t have to give it. We shouldn’t expect it. It’s a privilege if we’re eligible.”

Having said that, Tumbleweed, like so many other women constantly worried about her student loan budget and went over the forms and her needs meticulously. One of the things she found quite difficult about being on a student loan was the lack of medical, dental, and prescription coverage she had access to when on welfare. According to Tumbleweed, “My prescriptions aren’t expensive, but still it’s a worry. I have to make sure I put money aside because I can’t function unless I have that prescription.” Unlike people going directly to work, Tumbleweed pointed out she did not receive transitional benefits for medical and dental. Thus, Tumbleweed felt she was being penalized because she was on a student loan. “You have to pay everything. I just find it hard. I’ll manage, but it is not like I’m getting free money. This I have to pay back. I’m looking at 2 years. That’s a long time to have to pay extra.” Furthermore, unlike people going to work, “You have to pay transportation. I applied for the extra benefit because I travel 200 kilometers a day. I didn’t get that.”

By embarking on an educational path, women like Tumbleweed also incurred more costs than they had anticipated. Despite this, Tumbleweed believed that she would manage somehow, and she eventually did.

**Scout: EI funding.** Some women like Scout found other programs to help them make a
transition from welfare to education. “After the program, I started up at the college for my ECE [Early Childhood Education], and then I got into another program that was funded by EI.” As Scout explained, in these programs, women had to make out extensive budgets before they were allowed to continue with their studies. This was helpful in the planning and diminished the financial stress somewhat. Scout said:

[Staff] were very, very careful about us making sure this is what we wanted to do before we made the big, big step because we were going to be paid less. We had to readjust; the lady that did the program was good helping us figure out a budget so we could live and not worry about that extra we were losing, so it worked. It was Family Childcare Business Start Up.

Thus, women had a mix of financial experiences depending upon the knowledge available to them and their own support systems.

**Rochelle: funding during the summer.** Perhaps, the summertime was the most stressful time for women. In fact, a number of women returned to welfare, for they had no money if they could not find a summer job or had pressing personal problems that interfered with working. According to Rochelle, who went directly from welfare to a student loan, “Every April, I would apply. We would be on social assistance for summer. I would have social workers backing me; that’s what I needed to do.” A single mother might be able to return to welfare in the summer, but she did not necessarily have access to other grants unless they were standard college awards.

**Women: now a funding statistic.** When women managed to make transitions to education and figure out how to pay for it, they were quite proud of themselves. They felt they were on a new trajectory and leaving the stigma of welfare behind. However, Heather made a surprising discovery about student loans and women on welfare. She found a stigma was attached to those on student loans. The subject of financial assistance often came up in conversations with her classmates. Heather pointed out that women would say, “Oh, let me guess, you used to be on welfare. They pushed you into school?” [In] a class of 30 maybe three are men. I’d say at least half are single moms once on welfare, [and] some aren’t moms.” Heather found this disconcerting as she thought, “I was breaking the pattern of being a statistic, but I’ve become a new statistic of government’s strategy to get people off welfare and into school. I appreciate where I’m now, but I was just another of government’s statistics
to keep moving.” This made Heather wonder: “Are there going to be jobs available [when I get out]?”

Despite this and other difficulties, women chose to continue their foray into the world of education. In fact, they accomplished the mission they had set out on when they made their transitions to education: to graduate and find a good career as discussed in the next section.

**Mission Accomplished: After Graduation**

Based on watching the women’s transitions from welfare to education to paid work, I found the process took women a minimum of 2 years. Although government encouraged women to get a job quickly, the evidence emerging from my data analysis indicated women’s lengthier process of going from welfare to education to work seemed more beneficial and fluid than those going directly to employment. Confirming this finding, by 2000, Tumbleweed, Diane, Rochelle, and Scout completed their diplomas and degrees. After graduation, they all became employed in their chosen professions. In May 2002, Heather e-mailed me: “I am doing really well. I am graduating with my Social Services Diploma in a couple of weeks.” She was just about ready to find out if jobs would be available in her field as she had wondered in our last conversation. “The same day as my last class the news was covering all the cutbacks. Kind of depressing, so I contacted Windows for Women in Chilliwack. They have been very motivational and supportive.” Like Heather, the other women found support. To understand their trajectories, we must hear from the women themselves about the transitions they made that resulted in jobs.

**Tumbleweed: a job before graduation.** Having gone directly from welfare to the pre-employment program and then to education, Tumbleweed found a job before she graduated with her Recreational Therapist’s Diploma in April of 2000. When I spoke to her during the closure interview, she had just attended her graduation ceremony at Douglas College. We began discussing the end of Tumbleweed’s current transition as a student. “It’s been a journey. It’s been great. School was a bit hard at first, but the fourth semester evened itself out. I didn’t have too heavy a load ‘cause I had communications, so I had classes off. I was ahead of the game.” Tumbleweed explained this as having found a job before she graduated
as a recreational therapist caring for adults.

I was very, very fortunate to get exactly what I wanted to work in the health field with adults with mental illness, mainly schizophrenia, chronic and severe. They don’t accept change very easily. You have to make a small change and wait to see what feedback or reaction. There’s people who are not for Riverview but not for community either. They’re in between. There’s no facilities for them, so group homes, community care facilities are popping up all over. Our goal is to help them live independently. We can help them maintain a good quality of life. I’m a rec therapist, an RT. I work with the manager of care. We do care plans, recreation, leisure, individual program plans. I work with 10 residents, 5 women and 5 men. It’s never the same. I really love it.

Tumbleweed saw this work as another step along the way in her upcoming transitions. She planned to go on to get a degree “in Community Rehab through University of Calgary. I can do it distance. I can’t afford it now. We get credit for the diploma, for work experience, plus past experience [like] my Corrections. You build on prior learning. It would take me about two and a half years.” Thus, Tumbleweed felt she would continue making more transitions in the future. She was planning a break to just work until she saved enough money to continue her education for a degree by distance.

Diana: a job founded on childhood experience. Other women seemed to be able to wait until they graduated before they pursued full time work with benefits. Diana was one of these. At our next meeting in December of 2000, Diana was attending 2 days of training workshops for her new job as a guardianship worker. The last time we had conversed, Diana was just about to give birth to a son and graduate from a university with a BA in Psychology. She said that since August she had been employed

as a guardianship worker. I have a lot of personal experience. I was a foster child [and] a foster parent. It’s always been integral in me to go back to where I came from and change the abuses I suffered while in those systems. I take on a caseload of children in continued custody order. They’ll be in the system for the rest of their lives unless they get adopted, which is highly unlikely because of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome [and] disabilities. I become a legal guardian and make their major choices around what happens. I visit them once a month, so I do liaison between foster care and develop plans for these kids and advocate for them in the school and prison systems.

Rochelle: so many job options. Rochelle also graduated in 2000. When we met for our closure interview prior to this in April, Rochelle had completed her courses at university with a diploma as a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN). Rochelle proudly shared with me: “I have a
full time job at the hospital in Calgary!” This had resulted from a simple enquiry by e-mail about a nursing job. Her query soon turned into something more. All I did was ask about relocation costs to the Calgary hospital because I knew they were offering a relocation package. I called them. I was on the phone with one of the recruiters for Calgary Health Region. Within 15 minutes, she said, “You know what? I have a job for you? I’ll call this hospital, and if they don’t call you by next Wednesday, you let me know.” By Wednesday, I wanted the job. On Thursday, I faxed her a resume. All it said was I had worked as an LPN, I was a single mom. I volunteered at the schools. I’ve worked with alcohol and drug addicted people that were in self-help groups as a facilitator for 12 years, and then I went to nursing school. And they said, “You’re hired! I’ll put a contract in the mail `cause I have a full time line [job] for you [and] the relocation contract.”

Rochelle was excited to learn that she had even more options than she had expected after being offered the full time job in Calgary. “I have to call back Ashcroft Hospital and tell them thanks for the offer, but I’m not going. I have to call Mission Hospital and say thanks, but I don’t want it. I’ve never had the problem of too many job prospects.” Rochelle’s parting words to me were “It’s awesome because you know what? You got to see me in the middle of the crisis stuff too, and it’s come out the other end too!” By 2001, Rochelle had gone even farther by receiving her Bachelor of Nursing degree.

Scout: a job as self-employment. When I interviewed Scout, she had been enrolled in Early Childhood Education at a college. By the end of 2000, Scout had graduated with a diploma in Early Childhood Education. Interviewing Scout was quite difficult. I was only able to meet her formally once as she was always busy with her young son, or she was working two daycare jobs. Most of my interactions with Scout were over the telephone as she would often cancel appointments because of work or problems in her life. Sometimes, she would forget interview dates because some crisis would occur involving her son. The second to last time I spoke to Scout, she was in the process of starting her own daycare business. In my final telephone conversation with Scout in July of 2001, she told me she was getting ready to go into the hospital. Overall, Scout’s busy life and difficulty meeting with me was, in part, illustrative of the busy, complex lives single mothers with young children live while trying to attend school, do mother’s work, and work full time.

After I assessed all the closure interviews, it appeared the women graduating from college programs had an easier time transitioning to work. It could be because they had been
socialized and prepared through their programs for the jobs they would find. Also, their programs may have provided the social networks women needed to find jobs. Aside from education or cultural capital, they may have acquired more social and symbolic capital within their educational programs as instructors could better prepare them for what to expect. Perhaps, they received hidden helping hands or mentorship through their programs as well. However, out of the five women choosing an educational path and staying in school, they all graduated. An interesting point about these women’s jobs is they were all in the care giving field in the public domain. Their gendered work was validated through education and later paid employment outside the home.

**Education in Progress**

Not all women commencing in the “getting an education” category had graduated. By the end of my study, some were still in the process of completing their programs. As mentioned earlier, some had stopped out. Still others were transitioning to “getting an education” from welfare, and some were working and attempting to complete a degree.

**Susan: health affects progress.** When I concluded the interviews, Susan, on a Canada Disability Pension, was still enrolled in college courses. Despite difficulties caused by Lupus, arthritis, Susan remained undaunted in her efforts to complete her education. However, she continually needed to remain cognizant of her health and its affects on her progress.

Quite a big change since I’ve talked to you, I had quite a few surgeries. It was very drastic. All of a sudden, for winter semester, I was flying. It’s so unpredictable with that arthritis, but it seems to be progressing quickly. I’m hoping it slows down because if it changes, it’s really going to stop me. I’m trying to keep that aside and go ahead. I’m full time now. I don’t think I’ll be happy ’til I get a degree. I may end up in a position where I can’t work, but I want my mind active. I’m interested in genetics. Those would require more than a Bachelor’s degree. We’ll see what happens. It’s when you start, “Oh, four years.” Once you get into it, it’s not quite so intimidating.

Thus, Susan proceeded to plan her future to seeking the degree she had dreamed of since graduating from high school despite challenges her health might present to her.

**Lovey: prerequisites for education.** Some women continued to stop in and out of education. Lovey was one of these. Although when I first met Lovey, she was primarily on welfare, by the end of my research, she had transitioned to education. Her goal was to enroll
in the nursing program at a college. In March 2001, Lovey phoned me: "I’m going to apply for the 2-year nursing diploma. I’ve always wanted to be a nurse, but my grades weren’t good enough. I hope to get into the nursing program in 2002. I have a care attendant certificate, so that should help." To prepare, “I’m upgrading my math and taking college English directly from Adult Basic Education. I’m going to the college 3 days a week. In the spring, I’ll take biology and in September chem and math. I’m getting all the prerequisites.”

Before our telephone conversation, Lovey had been attending a pre-employment training program while she was on welfare. Lovey hoped it would help her resolve some personal anger and abuse issues while giving her time to refocus before looking for a job. The program gave her time to think without being forced by welfare to enter directly into the job market. Previous to deciding to return to school, Lovey had sought to avoid taking another student loan. However, by attending the pre-employment program, Lovey told me she now had found her direction as seen from our conversation above. She was continuing her educational journey by enrolling in the nursing program. With this new focus that would encompass her people skills, Resident Care Attendant certificate, and interest in health care, Lovey would be able to make the transition to a well paying career that she enjoyed.

Gloria: age as an inhibitor. Gloria too began on welfare. I watched her go from the pre-employment program to taking to college to becoming disillusioned with education. This had resulted from her struggles in the pre-employment program. Gloria wondered:

If government wanted to sink money into [people] why aren’t they pushing education? [Programs] are not providing what they said they would, so instead of silly life skills, people need education. There’s a lot of women they’re too old. I’m 40 now, so they’re not looking. It’s much tougher. How do I compete with university degrees? What the hell is the point going out there? It used to be you didn’t need that huge education.

Although Gloria believed education was the key, she also felt inhibited by the time it would take her to complete any formal courses. Consequently, Gloria worried about her age even if she were complete a 2-year certificate, she could still not compete with university degrees. Because of her disillusionment, Gloria thought she might try to become self-employed by selling kitchen aid products. However, when I met Brown Bear in August of 2000 for our closure interview, she told me that Gloria was starting a 6-week program at a college. "Social
assistance is forcing her to do it, but that’s Ok. I said to Gloria, if there’s an opportunity to learn about computers, you have to have some computer knowledge behind you getting whatever job. It is going to be a lot more helpful.” At least, Gloria had returned to an educational setting. She had enjoyed her studies and did extremely well. Perhaps, this is what Gloria needed to put her on the path to earning a credential despite her view she is too old.

**Brown Bear: age discrimination.** Unlike Gloria, Brown Bear was in her 50s, and, initially, she believed age was not a problem for continuing her education. She had made the transition from welfare to work. While Brown Bear was in the pre-employment program, she like other women began to investigate returning to school. Brown Bear had years of experience with Gentle Teaching, working with mentally handicapped and special needs individuals, and she wanted to turn those skills into a career through a college education to give her more credibility. Even though she was often asked to speak at different organizations in the community, Brown Bear still wanted that validation for herself. However, her experience was not quite what she had expected after a college advisor had encouraged women at the pre-employment program to return to school.

She made everything sound lovely and wonderful. She set up appointments [so] we could talk to her [and] write the CPT. My appointment, I was discouraged. I thought, “So much for that.” I didn’t care if I took a student loan if I could take write that CPT. I didn’t figure I could do the GED, [but if] I got [it], yes, then I could take courses [to] enhance my knowledge and open doors. I looked at social work with handicapped. I know with what I have, and what they want me to have, the combination, I can’t make a lot of changes, but I can do some good. I don’t think I’m too old, but [she] said I was too old. I was only 54 then, so I’m way over the hill now.

Despite having been discouraged to take courses at the college because of her age, Brown Bear planned to work on the GED with her daughter. Thus, Brown Bear could not let herself be disillusioned by someone else’s perceptions of her age and ignorance of Brown Bear’s past skills and experiences. In the meantime, Brown Bear was still employed and looking for other jobs that would utilize her teaching skills, knowledge, and work with the handicapped.

**Collette: it’s never too late.** Like Brown Bear was in her 50s. However, he experience turned out differently. Although Collette had transitioned from welfare to work, she too returned to college to take courses to become an employment counselor. In effect, she was straddling two categories: finding work and getting an education. Pursuing an education was
not unusual for Collette. Before immigrating to Canada, Collette had taken higher education and training courses in her own country. Once she made her home in Chilliwack, Collette continued improving her skills by taking English as a Second Language, upgrading courses, and finally obtaining her Office Careers Certificate with honors from a college. Then, because she was an immigrant in Chilliwack, to help her find work, Collette enrolled in a pre-employment program. Collette pointed out she had been trained in her own country, but English and her accent, she felt, held her back. However, this did not stop her, eventually, she was hired as a receptionist and translator by an institution. They provided education benefits to their employees, so Collette took this opportunity.

I never stop studying. I'm accustom to study. So I said, "They paying me for one course per semester. Plus I have two hundred bucks per month, per year. This is my time," so I decided to go [for] Bachelor of Adult Education because [it] can open the door for anything you want [like] teaching English as a second language, [or] I can be an employment counselor.

By our last interview, at 55, Collette had enrolled in two more courses. The last I heard, Collette is still working on her degree, "My goal is to get my degree before I die."

Summary Thoughts
As highlighted at the beginning of this section, women placed value on education. For them, it led to opportunities, choices, careers, well-paying jobs, knowledge about themselves, and ability to compete in the labour market. Initial steps in and pursuing an education for the women in this group included: pre-employment programs, workshops and seminars through employment centers, and a lifelong dream. This was often in opposition to government policies that promoted employment as the goal and success of programs. However, the pre-employment program that 14 of the 23 women attended provided funds for academic courses or training at the local college. This not only helped women with first steps in learning how to enroll for academic courses, but it also allowed women opportunities to explore their potentialities and interests while they acquired new skills and knowledge. Some women enrolled in academic programs leading to diplomas and degrees. Others took upgrading or skill based courses. However, others were discouraged from pursuing a career path through education because of age even though they might have had skills and knowledge that could be easily rolled into degrees. Those graduating found jobs easily at the end of their programs.
Once women decided to pursue an education, some did not necessarily complete it. In fact, some mothers with young children stopped out to be with their children until their children began first grade. All mothers felt education was important, and they wanted to be able to help their children in school or instill the love of learning in them. Other mothers and single women chose to stop out of education because they found well-paying jobs. The women stopping out indicated they planned to return to complete their degrees later on. Not all women went directly from pre-employment programs to education. Some went directly to work, and then they decided to pursue an education while working.

When following an educational path, women had to find funding. Generally, this meant taking out student loans. Special Opportunity Grants were available for women to continue their studies part time while caring for their young children. Some managed to find college bursaries to pay for their tuition and books. Summertime was most difficult for women, and some frequently had to return to welfare although this was not the case for all. Despite feeling they had made the right choice to pursue education and leave the stigma of welfare behind, women discovered they had become a new statistic: women shifting from welfare to student loans.

Women chose their educational paths based on their own personal interests, research from career exploration, and information from pre-employment programs, seminars, or courses that could lead to a well-paying career. By the end of my study, a number of women were still pursuing a college education. Some were working at the same time. Still others had transitioned to education after my research through new welfare policies instituted in 2002. A few women remained on welfare for a while as will be discussed in the next section.

**Appearing to Stay on Welfare while Moving to Disability but Still Thinking about or Moving to Education**

This [welfare] definitely isn’t where I thought I would be.

Lilith

When I began my study, I knew women made transitions to work and education and might
have stayed on welfare for a while due to health issues. At the outset, I excluded individuals classified by government as disabled, for policies were different with regards to work and education. Moreover, these individuals had another set of needs. Therefore, they were not included since this would expand the research into another dimension. However, I later discovered some women in my study were, in fact, labeled disabled and collecting Disability benefits. Thus, this category and findings were more surprising and unexpected.

At the beginning of my study, a few women appeared to be strategizing to remain on welfare. However, on closer examination, more accurately, I discovered that they were strategizing to become labeled disabled in order to collect Disability. This was the case with Lilith, Kate Franscheld, and Almond because of health problems inhibiting them from working or going to school. However, by the end of my study, they as well as Advancing/Advocacy and Ali, both who were also on Disability 1, were actually thinking about enrolling in formal education courses. Furthermore, I discovered that while on Disability, Almond, Ali, and Advancing/Advocacy had been engaged in paid work or volunteer work.

**From Welfare to Disability**

This group of women sought to move from welfare to Disability to improve their health through access to more resources available from government. They also viewed Disability as more socially acceptable for being unemployed: they had a reason for not being able to work.

**Disability: best choice for health.** From the outset, through my conversations with Lilith, Kate Franscheld, and Almond, I thought they might have sought to stay on welfare due to their health problems. According to the women, their health interfered with working full time or even part-time jobs. Kate Franscheld had a myriad of health problems including diabetes, liver, heart, and allergies. Lilith experienced severe anxiety attacks, and she had an eating disorder. Almond had severe and chronic tinnitus (ringing in both ears) and suffered from irritable bowel syndrome. Therefore, as the women revealed, they felt strategizing to acquire Disability 2 would be in their best interests because it would give them more options. As Kate Franscheld said,

*With Disability 2, you’re allowed to work and go to school. In fact, social welfare system’ll pay for some of your schooling. Through Disability 2, I*
would be allotted around $200 a month for someone to do lifting for me, the medicine, the food supplements that I need, the transportation needs, or whatever that would help me be able to keep going as my illnesses progress.

Consequently, Kate Franschild pointed out her health affected her employability and ability to retain a job because her health fluctuated so dramatically.

**Support from Disability.** Lilith was also labeled as unemployable because of her anxiety attacks and her eating disorder. With more support through Disability, Lilith believed: “There are ways of managing a lot of high anxiety like I have with diaphragmatic breathing and stress management. I have really high anxiety levels. All that needs to be done with that, though, is proper stress management and diaphragmatic breathing.”

**Disability as socially acceptable.** In addition to added benefits, Disability 2 relieved the stigma of being on welfare because it provided a valid, socially acceptable health reason for being labeled unemployable. Thus, individuals derived their income from Disability, not welfare. Because of her irritable bowel syndrome and the constant tinnitus in her ears, Almond pointed out: “Since I have a disability, there’s no real demand for me to look for work.” Also, employability could be affected by a woman’s grief over losing her children like Almond. “I realized that emotionally I was not stable yet because every Wednesday when I saw the children, I came home, I cried, cried, cried.” Furthermore, Almond could not concentrate because of the continual ringing in her ears. “My problem is that I have to read something three or four times.” The ringing in her ears also affected her sleep patterns leaving her too exhausted from the lack of sleep to work.

Thus, sometimes women appeared to choose to stay on welfare, particularly if it meant being labeled disabled. The label had more social and symbolic capital associated with it, for it provided a reason for their inability to work in the labour market, seek employment, or attend training programs. Government policy and people, in general, tended to be more sympathetic to individuals with disabilities. Furthermore, it labeled women as “unemployable.” Then, they could access more benefits from the welfare system to help improve their health.
Disability to Thinking about to Moving to Education

Through my conversation with the women, I discovered remaining on welfare was not necessarily their goal or desire. All the women appearing to remain on welfare revealed they had, in fact, been thinking of returning to education.

Advancing/Advocacy: courses build confidence. Advancing/Advocacy said to me, “I'd like to go back to school or take some courses come September.” Before actually returning to college, though, Advancing/Advocacy sought to build her own skills and confidence further by attending programs after she moved to White Rock from Chilliwack. Advancing/Advocacy believed taking more programs would help her work through her own disability.

I went to mental health in White Rock last August. I took some courses, like assertiveness skills and Change Ways. The Change Ways program was 2 hours, 9 to 11 for 8 weeks. We were working with disciplining ourselves to do small amounts we could accomplish, rather than things may have been too much. So say, somebody in the group wanted to start regular exercise, the goal for that week would be to have a walk or walk for 15 minutes twice a week rather than walk half an hour 5 times a week. The procedure was to set down something you can complete, teaching yourself to do that. That was very positive. When you accomplish things, you build your confidence.

Advancing/Advocacy was like so many of the other women seeking to return to education eventually to help put them on a career path.

Ali: programs provide opportunities. Ali, too, expressed her desire to return to college for a career program. “It's 33 weeks, and 85% of people [have] a job before the course is done. Hospitality management can get you into hostessing, front desk, or a hotel. It's working with people. I love people. I wanted to be a social worker, but I have a criminal record.”

Kate Franschild: other factors for education. Digging deeper, I discovered other women had been thinking of returning to education. For example, Kate Franschild believed education was very important, but other factors were necessary for getting an education to find a well paying job. According to Kate Franschild, “I have a social formula: Money = health = school = job = money. This is actually a dilemma because how do you get money if you don’t have health, if you don’t have schooling, if you don't have a job?” She believed the answer was not simple to getting off welfare. Just because an individual wanted to return to school did not mean she could. Kate Franschild pointed out that it was not necessarily money that held
people back. “It's getting the health to do it. It's getting the time away from being ill and dealing with mundanities to be able to do my research to get the pieces of the puzzle together. That doesn't sound like much, but it's health.” Furthermore, Kate Franschild pointed out that if she were on Disability 2, government policies would provider her with more options. “If I can go to school, I can have a job unless I'm labeled Disabled 2. You're allowed to work and go to school. Social welfare system'll pay for some schooling, so you don't go the lone route. They understand your health fluctuates.” This made her work for Disability 2.

**Almond: eligibility for education.** During my first interview with Almond, she expressed a desire to return to college. However, this was not as easy as she had thought it would be after phoning Canada Pension to find out about funding. “There is disability schooling, for people [with] disabilities. I could go part-time. [But] the guy says, ‘No, not if you're a first time Canada Pension Disability. At your tribunal, you'll just get wiped out,’ so that's held me from going to school.” This was not the first time Almond had attempted to enroll in school. When she had first resorted to welfare, Almond tried to explore going to school in a different way by attending a short government program, Destinations, to find out more.

They'll do resumes, help you find out what kind of a job you're good at, direct you to courses in school, and maybe try to get you a job. That's a good program for somebody that's been on welfare for quite a while. I'm eager to go to school to find an education, but I was not eligible because I had only been on welfare for 5 months. You have to be on for 6 months. At the time, Almond was also going through a stressful divorce, and she had a 5-year-old daughter still at home, so she was not required to work or attend school.

**Lilith: mentorship and education.** Although Lilith valued education, and she had initially expressed a desire to return to university, she did not do so while she was participating in the study. However, in 2002 through a woman I knew at one of the counseling services in Chilliwack, I learned Lilith had enrolled in a program at the college. The person was not sure which one, but she said Lilith seemed quite happy and excited about the program. I found this heartening because during our last interviews, Lilith provided her opinion: “I didn't go to any programs, and I wouldn't go anyway because most of the programs are useless. If they had a good program, I might go. Something that would get me off for the long term, would stimulate, and challenge me.” However, Lilith held education in high regard, and she saw it
as an avenue for acquiring a well paying job. “Get yourself some education if you can to
make yourself more employable, whatever it is, whether it’s a trade, a diploma, or if you can
go to university.” During our last conversation, Lilith also indicated:

Probably, it would help if I had a mentor of some sort. I would like to go to
university, but because I failed almost everything when I went back last
time ’cause I had that eating disorder, and I have a withdrawal on my
transcript. It looks really bad. They’re really fussy about that and GPAs.

Perhaps, the program she was enrolled in during 2002 will be her first step to continuing the
education she put on hold when she stopped out of university. Like Lilith, women saw
further education as a pathway to leaving welfare and obtaining a well-paying job ensuring a
good quality of life.

Disability and Paid Work
Although women sometimes did not divulge or discuss some of their work activities, I did
discuss women on Disability did, in fact, engage in paid work and paid volunteer work.
Almond, Ali, and Advancing/Advocacy described the jobs they held and their affects.

Almond: “undercover work” and employer flexibility. Before her death at the end of my
study, Almond expressed a desire to return to the college again as mentioned. This was
actually precipitated by the work she performed on a part-time basis. Almond recounted she
had been working for a fellow designing signs for a number of years as she put it, “Not on
paper - sort of under the cover.” She enjoyed her job because it stimulated her.

Because of the desirability and her interest in her job, Almond expressed her goal: “I want to
go to school to take designing. I am into that already. I am working. I am feeling great. I am
making signs. I did Liquidation World sign. We do all those signs. I like it.” Almond liked
the job because the employer took into account her disability and allowed her flexibility.
Also, she was able to be creative. “I have been with them for 3 years now. I like it. I like it
because I get to do my thing, designing, figuring out the font and using the computer and
what not.” However, Almond still needed to consider her health despite her interest in
designing. “I am not working that much, like once a week. I can’t work that long. I try my
best to keep healthy.” Thus, although some women were working, this was still constrained.
At the same time, women continually had to consider their health problems.

**Ali: paid volunteer work.** While in the pre-employment program, Ali did an informational interview with a local community organization that provided her with more opportunities and choices. After the program, Ali began paid volunteer work for Community Services while she was still on welfare. She learned a lot about the organization and enjoyed the jobs she held immensely. Through the Volunteer Incentive Program, Ali learned new skills.

You are volunteering your time like I did it at Community Services. It's for 6 months to a year. My first 6 months was with the Volunteer Bureau. My next 6 months was to be trained for front desk. I did database entry. I learned some new computer skills, and forgot some. It can be extended to a year if you're learning new skills to bring you closer to a job. It didn't get me a job, but it brought me more skills to put on my resume. It got me a couple part-timers. It got my foot in the door.

The volunteer experience also gave Ali other ideas about where she would like to work and learn new skills in the community: front desk in the local welfare office or as a financial aid officer for welfare. Throughout my research, Ali continued working for Community Services. During our final interview, Ali confided to me she had been preparing to enroll in the Resident Care Aide Attendant Program at the college when she broke her leg. The break was so serious Ali had to banish her thoughts of attending the program, for she would not be able to do the heavy lifting required of her. This accident also moved her status to Disability 1. Despite the accident, she was still volunteering at the local Community Services. As Ali proudly pointed out, “This will be my fourth year there now.” Ali worked distributing toys and food hampers every Christmas, and she thoroughly enjoyed the experience. This work also encouraged and motivated her to think about enrolling in another program at the college as mentioned. At the time, Ali was also seeking Disability 2 because her leg would never get better. It would prohibit her from performing certain jobs. This was not going to be easy even though Ali would never get better. However, with Ali’s determination and experience, she will probably get what she needs.

**Advancing/Advocacy: minimum wage work.** Originally, Advancing/Advocacy made the transition from welfare to work. However, after moving from Chilliwack back to her hometown of White Rock, Advancing/Advocacy had revolved back to welfare. When “I went to apply to Social Services and told them I wouldn’t be ready to work, I had a form
from my doctor, right away they gave me Disability; [it] came through - Level 1. My financial worker [said] to apply for the second level.” Being on Disability also aided Advancing/Advocacy in getting into subsidized housing. “I don't feel right now I could work. I know I could not work 40 hours a week. It really has worked out better. So the idea of working through disability has been I can get into subsidizing housing.” However, Advancing/Advocacy had not been idle; she had continued her quest to find out what she should do. In the meantime, Advancing/Advocacy volunteered for pay in the community.

I go there now; that facility is with mentally handicapped people. While I was at mental health, I saw one sign Buttons Plus; I picked this up. It said jobs available. I thought I wonder what this is about, so I made contact with a group home for mentally handicapped people. So what you do is help someone, and they pay minimum wage to help someone do their one on one sewing project, so it's just a couple hours a week. I do my Thursday volunteer work- folding clothes in the morning.

In addition to seeking Disability 2 since it could facilitate other opportunities, Advancing/Advocacy, like other women, chose to work part-time to learn more skills. When I discovered this final category of women seeming to stay on welfare, I learned from their stories about their health problems and how they were strategizing to move to Disability 1. Once they received Disability 1, some chose, and others were encouraged by welfare workers and advocates to seek Disability 2. Initially, it was not apparent to me why. However, as I dug deeper, I found, in part, if they were labeled with Disability 2, the stigma of welfare was removed. Then, it became clear they had more opportunities and flexibility to accommodate their health problems when they had Disability 2. Their health issues were hidden ones: stress, eating disorders, bowel problems, and a steel rod in a leg. These made working long hours difficult for women. As the women explained during our conversations, Disability 2 would also allow them to enroll in education programs leading to careers. They all felt education was important, and they also believed they needed it to find a career that would result in a well paying job. Thus, although the women may have appeared to be staying on welfare and moving into Disability, they were also strategizing to return to college to complete their education for career employment in their chosen fields. Furthermore, they engaged in paid volunteer work enabling them to learn new skills while honing those they had already acquired. Paid volunteer work also helped them establish networks while providing new ideas and opportunities for women.
Summary and Concluding Thoughts

The purpose of this chapter has been to provide a base for defining women’s transitions from welfare. As discussed throughout the chapter, women’s initial steps off welfare began with a triggering event (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980), and most attended a pre-employment program. Their transitions were extremely complex, and they demonstrated a continuing process. As women’s stories depicted, they did not just move in progression direct from welfare, point A, to work, point B. They took many side roads and circuitous routes to education, volunteer work, poverty, Disability, and back to welfare sometimes before reaching their end goals of work or education. Moreover, they straddled various activities and categories while attempting to move from welfare completely as depicted by Table 8 in this chapter showing women’s beginning, mid, and “end” points.

As illustrated, getting a job was much more than simply becoming employed and leaving welfare. It also included the dimensions of paid employment where women were subsidized by welfare while working part-time and receiving child-care subsidy or medical benefits. The discussion also explored how women may keep a job instead of being laid off or fired for no reason from the job, being pushed out of the job, or doing a man’s job. The majority of the women going directly to work from welfare appeared to have a more difficult time staying employed at their first jobs despite what government policymakers would have us believe. Those remaining at their first jobs almost seemed like exceptions rather than the norm. Women had an easier and more rewarding experience remaining employed when they had mentors or support from others as they entered the workplace.

The pre-employment programs did help them with self-discovery, skills, career exploration, and knowledge of the workplace and how to fit in. However, even when women sought to fit in and build social and support networks in the workplace, others were not necessarily willing to let them in. Perhaps, women did not have the capitals necessary for remaining or entering into the social field. Sometimes, women became isolated; therefore, they appeared to need understanding mentors or support networks. Thus, finding a job and going directly into the work force even after having attended a training or pre-employment program was no assurance women would stay employed despite their attempts and strategies to do so.
Women making a transition from welfare to education and then to work seemed to have a better experience of keeping their jobs. It appeared education smoothed the transitional process into the workforce. Through education, women may have acquired necessary capitals and understanding of “the rules of the game” not only to enter the social space, but to also remain by knowing how to establish commonalities with others in the new social field of work. Most women taking the educational path graduated with a degree or diploma. Almost all women in my study said education was an important component in making transitions to work. However, some commencing an educational path, stopped out because they found a job or wanted to devote more time to their children. Others hoped to return to complete their education while a few were still in the process of completing their degrees.

Finally, some women stayed on welfare to elevate their status to Disability 1 and 2 due to health issues they needed to resolve before they could enter the workplace or education. In addition to enhancing social and symbolic capital, the label of Disability gave many more freedom to use their time to accommodate and strategize their own choices and desires while providing them with benefits. The women also illustrated they wanted to return to education.

Most women found they had choices despite being bounded by “rules of the game” within different social environments. Women discovered they had to choose or take a chance to leave the rut or security of welfare. Some, like policymakers who shape women’s identities, needs, and life opportunities, would think all women needed to do was just find a job. However, as women illustrated through their transitions, this was not the easy answer government hopes for. Most women did, in fact, leave welfare but it was on their terms.

In the next chapter, through the analysis of women’s stories, I discovered how women perceived their needs and how their everyday lives constructed those needs. I found women strategized and made choices about how to leave welfare to fulfill their unlived potentialities.
CHAPTER SIX
WHOSE NEEDS?:
GOVERNMENT'S OR WOMEN’S

Let them [the policymakers] walk into a welfare line. Let them stand there and beg for money.

Vivianne

The goal of this chapter is to illustrate the inadequacy of government policies. To do this, I build on Chapter 3 where through Fraser’s (1989) needs discourse, I presented how government, policymakers, interpreters of policy, and experts’ perceptions differed from women’s lived needs while on welfare. These differences created misconceptions about women’s needs as they will attest through their conversations in this chapter.

Women’s Challenge to Government’s Perceptions

Government’s Short-Term Solutions to Women’s Needs

As described in Chapter 3, in responding to women’s needs, government shaped the identity of women on welfare by recategorizing and labeling them as “unemployed workers” (Premier’s Summit, 1993, p. 19). Government believed the solution to women’s unemployment was better access to programs, relevant training, and skills. In fact, all women needed were “real skills for the real world” (Skills Now, 1994, p. 1) as training and skills would help move unemployed individuals from welfare to work. Therefore, through BC Benefits Renewing Our Social Safety Net (1995), employable individuals were expected to attend some form of welfare to work program to move off welfare.

All but one of the women in my study attended some form of government pre-employment training program or workshops as they attempted to return to work or education. Some women chose to attend these to build self-confidence, practice and learn skills, explore careers and education, or find direction. Thus, the needs identified by government appeared to coincide with the women’s: they found a job. As policy dictated, that was the primary goal and means to move women off welfare: finding any job and becoming employed. However,
as pointed out by Brown Bear and Gloria, this was not true in their cases. They felt they had not received training in computer skills or been guided through career exploration leading them to well-paying jobs or careers in Chilliwack as had been promised.

Despite some attempts by government to identify women's needs and implement policy to fulfill these needs, more could be done. As Fraser (1989) maintains, the welfare system and policymakers do not deal with women's needs based on women's daily lived experiences (p. 149). As illustrated, how women are making transitions from welfare is not examined. Even if policymakers are aware more is needed than just getting a job or putting a person in programs or workshops, they seem not to be doing anything about it. Furthermore, women are treated as beneficiaries without social rights (p. 152). Thus, government can implement and mandate policy that sends women to training programs, provides short-term transitional benefits, punishes women for working while on welfare, and discounts their need to keep money earned while attempting to leave welfare. Government policies appear to deal with the short-term: to get a job. According to some of the women in the last chapter, no provisions were made for their long-term needs that may have forced them to welfare in the first place. Medication and short-term programs will not necessarily help women if their issues are not resolved before returning to the workforce.

**Women as Oppositional Agents Defining Their Needs**

As more women leave welfare, the social spaces of work may become more "the site of discourse about problematic needs" (Fraser, 1989, p. 156). Thus, policymakers and employers will not always be able to ignore the needs of women transitioning from welfare as they become more critically aware of their needs and their role expectations (Kerans, 1994, p. 51).

Acting as oppositional agents, the women in my study demonstrated critical awareness by defining their transitional needs (Fraser, 1989). They discussed the areas downplayed or ignored by government as important for women to actually leave welfare. Furthermore, they pointed out that government policies often hindered women's attempts to leave welfare more than they assisted. The women acted in opposition as agents making their own choices while refusing to be shaped, identified, and constructed according to government one-size-fits-all
policies. In the following sections, these 23 women describe their needs and the choices they made for their benefit despite government policies. These include: taking time for themselves, choosing when to work or go to school, defining survival needs, attending to their health needs, focusing on their children’s needs, and learning about their own rights as they sought to meet their needs on their terms.

**Need Time for Self, Time to Reflect, and Time Free from...**

One of the first ways some women illustrated their oppositional agency to government policy was to make choices about how to use their time. According to Fraser (1989), because women are beneficiaries of government largess, women are expected to conform to policies for receiving benefits. One of those requirements is to work or be on a trajectory to work or education for a job.

**Scout: transitions more emotional for women.** Changes and transitions may affect women differently, for they are usually the primary caregivers of children in all types of families. According to Scout, “It’s easier for a man than for women or single moms to be walked on. There’s more emotional difference. It affects women more emotionally than it does a male, especially when it comes to welfare.”

**Almond: time for self care.** Women tended to realize this need, so they decided to take some time for self care. Women told me they needed time to care and groom themselves, for often they neglected themselves due to stressors, demands, and changes in their lives. As Almond explained, “Before, I let myself go. I didn’t really care. I took care of the kids, house, and ex-husband. I’ve helped so many women too. Now, I take care of myself, make sure I’m clean, dressed, well-dressed, dental floss, whatever.”

**Heather: trusting self.** Once women began changing, they needed to become more confident about their decisions. Heather viewed this as taking charge of yourself. “Number one, I’ve learned you can’t really, really truly rely on anybody but yourself. To do that responsibly, you have to take care of yourself well.”
Maya: perceived as doing nothing but figuring things out. Once a woman began to trust her judgments, it was easier not to succumb to social expectations and perceptions. Maya began to question the pressure she felt in not being perceived as productive while on welfare. “When I was going to school, I wanted to look like I was doing something instead of staying at home and doing nothing, not contributing anything. I thought that was that stigma of welfare – you just stay at home and do nothing.” However, as Maya realized, women are, in fact, doing something when they take time to figure out, plan, and make choices for their futures.

I challenged that belief, “Well, I am just going to do nothing. I’m going to see what it feels like.” Then, when I did it, in my mind, I thought, it wasn’t doing nothing. I was doing something. I was thinking how my life was, looking at it from a different perspective, and appreciating the little baby steps, little things, even spending a little more time with [my son] and how I interact with him and changing things in our lives, different parenting. This is all something. I am actually doing something with my nothing. I made myself feel better because I wasn’t bowing to what society wanted. I said, “I’m doing something when people think I’m doing nothing.” As long as I know, that’s fine with me, so that was a leap for me too.

Advancing/Advocacy: reevaluating roles of wife and mother. Furthermore, when Advancing/Advocacy, like other mothers, lost custody of her children, she needed to reevaluate her roles as mother and wife. After Advancing/Advocacy’s divorce, her daughter decided she would prefer to live with her father and his new wife in her old neighborhood to attend her old school as opposed to living in Chilliwack on welfare with her mother. This devastating event forced Advancing/Advocacy to rethink her roles. “The children and to have a career [are] very important. In marriage, I allowed myself to be a doormat and give, give, give. I had not developed my own identity and my own values. You have to take care of yourself first; that is a reality of life.” Although extremely difficult and painful, Advancing/Advocacy came to terms with the loss of her daughter and not returning quickly to work.

Brown Bear: being at peace. Brown Bear attempted to use the reflection time to put balance into her life to decide her future directions. While grieving for her disabled daughter’s death, Brown Bear pointed out. “I’m trying to learn more about myself and become peaceful, just get in a nice ebb and flow, harmony. It’s the basis of gentle teaching: doing the have to dos, the can dos. It’s very, very simple. We don’t need to make things real, real complicated.”
Brown Bear approached all of life in this way of what is it she needs to do, has to do, and would like to do. Also, she ensured she passed this message on to the women she knew.

**Mabel: getting situated and doing it.** Other women talked about receiving welfare as time out to regroup and gather strength and determination for their transitions. After having been out of Canada for 2 years, living in an abusive relationship, and having only the suitcases she and her daughters brought back, Mabel resorted to welfare and used the time to help herself get situated. Mabel pointed out:

> When I get serious enough, then, I’ll just start pumping the resumes out. I have a lot of options; I really do. All I need is sit down and write out a list of places to phone or go look. It’s just a matter of doing it. I’m fairly independent. I’m a very resourceful person, so that makes it easier for me.

**Rochelle: time free from.** To engage in new transitions, women must also have time free from encumbrances. Women told me they continually needed to make time to go to court to resolve issues with ex-partners and fathers of their children. Rochelle's ex-spouse was constantly dragging her back to court. She pointed out, legally, ex-spouses are not supposed to take women to court more than once a year. However, if a judge is unaware, and if the man paid the $60 court filing fee and can afford a lawyer, he could take a woman to court as many times as he chose. To make matters worse, during my research, government decided, according to Rochelle, “legal aid women and child support issues were no longer part of their mandate. Custody issues are. You have absolutely no legal representation and no way of getting it.”

**Lovey: the right time.** Because of the new government policy eliminating legal aid for child support, women now spent even more time out in court to represent themselves. Then, if their cases were passed on to Supreme Court, they needed lawyers in Surrey or New Westminster to defend them. Even before a court date was set, Lovey pointed out a woman must travel back and forth to the city 2 days prior to court hearing to ensure the affidavits were in order. Then, when they finally got a court date, Lovey explained the complicated juggling:

> Basically, I'm always worrying about court. When you have a court harassment, you're always going back to court. And it's on his behalf. Court is during the day. You're in Chilliwack; you got to go to New West. at 9:45, so if you haven't been in court the past 2 weeks as a review, you
could be pushed to the afternoon. Court is from 9:45 until 11:45; there’s break until 2:00 o’clock. So you have somebody look after the kids after school, so you pay babysitting. You pay your way there. It’s constant dish out money every time you turn around. It may be free because you’re unemployed, but you still got expenses. You come back during rush hour.

Therefore, without free time, when will women be able to work? As Lovey, said, “I’ve got tons of skills, but can I put them into practice? No. I would like to. I would love to, but is it the right time?”

Despite the insistence of government for women to enter the workforce quickly, the participants in my study acted as oppositional agents by choosing when they would return to work. They knew that to meet their needs, they required time to reflect, care for themselves, and time free from encumbrances. They also felt the time needed to be right for them to make their transitions. Thus, they would have time to devote to other needs once survival was accounted for as described in the next section. Although these needs may appear to be dealt with sequentially by the women, they were generally resolved simultaneously, at different times, or in bits and pieces. They were not as clear cut as they appear to be here. Women’s lives tended to be “messy” with many events and needs occurring at the same time.

Need to Survive: Role of Food, Clothing, and Housing

According to Swift and Birmingham (2000), current discourse and government policy do not attempt to examine how women meet their needs with the minimal resources they are allocated by government (p. 93). The women’s experiences throughout my study supported this as they attempted to survive on the benefits provided by welfare through BC Benefits (1997d). In keeping with what women told me, BC Benefits: Income Assistance Act (1997b) allocated to a single woman on welfare $221 monthly for food, clothing, and transportation and $325 for shelter or a total of $546 (p. 68). A single mother with one dependent child received $325 for food, clothing, and transportation and $520 for shelter or a total of $845 (p. 68). Government workers tell women they must make ends meet on this monthly allowance. However, the women in my study continually acted in opposition to government policy as they attempted to meet their needs to survive. Throughout this section, the women discussed issues about food and clothing that often alienated them from the mainstream or relegated women to the margins. Through their conversations, the women divulged how they
managed to meet their needs. They suggested that their survival needs should be made known to policymakers as they explained throughout the following conversations.

**Tusk: basic survival.** Survival needs are important if a woman hoped to make transitions from welfare. To do this, they also had to juggle other needs. These included food, clothing, and housing. Before women could make transitions to meet their higher goals, they felt they had to have the basic needs at least covered and under control. After having stayed off welfare for 10 years, Tusk said, “The basic bottom line in life is survival. How do you expect someone to survive on welfare? It’s all about survival, or how people survive without giving up.”

**Kate Franschild: subsistence surviving.** The general public tends to believe that women have an easy life receiving “free” money. Kate Franschild described surviving on welfare: “This is subsistence surviving: to be proud you’re surviving. It’s hard when you’ve lived that way for a long time to feel you can get anywhere else other than just surviving. It takes a lot of energy and time to actually dreaming you can be anywhere else.”

**Ann: food - reinterpreting policy.** Often life circumstances put proud, intelligent, and extremely capable women into situations they would never have dreamed of finding themselves in, especially those coming from wealthy backgrounds. At one point while Ann was on welfare, she related how as a single woman she managed to get food. Ann pointed out even though a friend of hers was the assistant manager of the Abbotsford food bank and knew her situation, he refused to even help her by slipping something for her to eat out the back door. In order to survive, Ann explained how she had to convince welfare workers to help her by reinterpreting policies:

I had nowhere to live, no kitchen to cook food. I was hungry, but [welfare] won’t give you money [for] Macdonald’s. They give a voucher [for] shopping. I said, “This is ridiculous. Give me $25. I’ll spend $20 on tobacco and $5 [for] a roast chicken I can eat out of my hands. Tomorrow. I’ll need another one.” She says, “No, you spend the whole thing.” I says, “What do I do lug it around? Think about it.” Finally, she says, “How much do you need?” I said, “Give me one for $10, but make sure it says tobacco so I can get cigarettes. I’ll come back to get $10 tomorrow. You’ll have everything sorted out so I can move into my new house, right?”
Tumbleweed: desperation and then to budgeting. After leaving long-term relationships, mothers not only worried about how they would survive, they also had to care for their children. They felt they needed to get established as quickly as possible. Many were too embarrassed to impose on extended families or even to ask welfare for help until they were almost desperate. This happened to Tumbleweed after 2 days of attempting to get an appointment at the social assistance office. When it looked as if she would be turned away a third time, “I started crying.” Then, the welfare worker saw Tumbleweed’s desperation and said, “Was it an emergency?” I said, ‘I think so. I don’t have any food. I have no money. Is that considered an emergency?’ She said, ‘I’ll get you in to see someone right away.’”

Even though government allocates extra money for women with children, it is minimal. “They give a maximum amount for shelter, for a single mom and one child is $520. I get $359 for food, expenses, and bills, so you pay your shelter, your hydro, your cable, telephone, whatever it is that you have.” Therefore, to make ends meet, Tumbleweed explained. “We use coupons; we budget. I go from store to store, watch sales, plan ahead, so you buy bulk. If it’s on special, it might cost you 30 bucks today. That’s going to last a month, even 6 weeks. I’m going to get five or six meals for three of us, so all I buy is potatoes and a vegetable.”

Ali: desperation to embarrassment of food vouchers. Despite their ability to stretch their monies from welfare, periodically, women ran out of food in the middle of the month. If they were desperate, they were “allowed” to ask for food three times a year. This could come in the form of a check or a food voucher, but this was not as straightforward as shopping with cash. As Ali pointed out,

You’re standing in line [with] your piece of paper. You’ve got five people behind you going, “She’s got a food voucher.” Say your voucher’s for $75; you still have $5 left. You have to spend the whole $75. You can come within a $1, but you still don’t get that $1. [If] it would go $74.21, you have to go back to up that bit, it’s embarrassing. They suspend your order, or people are, “Hhho,” doing stuff like that. My kid’s got to eat! So don’t begrudge me. I’m sorry I don’t have a job, but I applied at what’s there.

Advancing/Advocacy: food and children’s social relationships. The policymakers and general public seem to have no conception that women’s inadequate food allowance might affect the social lives of women and their children. Through their interviews with me, some
women added a new dimension to thinking about food aside from survival. For example, Advancing/Advocacy, referring to her daughter, said: “It affected friends, not that she didn’t have [any]. I was not able to provide for her having friends in because if a friend comes in, you want to have food. But in one afternoon, kids can eat a whole week’s worth of food.”

**Brown Bear: food and holidays – the worst.** Through gatherings around food, we focus building social relationships and networks. Food is generally the centerpiece of many holidays as people enjoy festivities. Brown Bear described how despite the efforts of churches and the Salvation Army in Chilliwack, there just was not enough food. Even when a family was sponsored at the Salvation Army at Christmas time, they may not get the food. Food allocated for one family’s hamper is often divided between poorer hampers to ensure everyone received a fair share of food. Also, Brown Bear said despite the generosity of people, “Christmas, that’s just one day. Boxing Day is celebrated by a lot of people you visit. Can you have people over? No, what are you going to give them?” Not only was Christmas time demoralizing, so was Easter and Thanksgiving because people on welfare receive no extra food allowance. Even other celebrations were difficult. Brown Bear maintained: “Halloween’s terrible. You’re sending your kids out to get candy. What do you do? You hide in the dark so the kids don’t come to the door. They egg you or wreck your property.” Welfare stigma continues from holiday to holiday because “You have nothing to give, so you’re cheap, no good.”

**Ali: just another day.** Added to the stigma of welfare is that holidays are like just another day. From charitable organizations women receive “generic food in the hampers. People on welfare buy no-name all year. [Holidays are] special. You would like to have Kraft Kraft dinner, Del Monte fruit, Christmas cake, not a slice wrapped up in Saran Wrap.”

**Ali: clothing.** Besides food, women also had to think about clothing for themselves and their children. Even buying clothes at places, such as Wal-Mart or Zeller’s, could be a stretch for women’s budgets. Ali pointed out:

> Welfare doesn’t provide a winter clothing allowance. I was told, “You’re supposed to save money out of your check every month to buy that.” I said, “You tell me how I’m gonna save. You give me $21 a month to pay my hydro, phone bill, and buy groceries. You tell me how I’m going to save to buy myself a winter coat.” I can’t afford a coat. The cheapest I found that
fit me was $125. Although I’ve lost 91 pounds, I’m still a big person. I need the specialty shop to buy clothes. I don’t have a coat. I have a sweater.

Susan: housing and welfare stigma. Another worry for women was housing. They had to ensure housing needs were met so they might begin to think about making transitions. Often women told me they had a hard time finding reasonable accommodation because they were living on welfare. As Susan said, “It’s horrible because it’s really hard when you’re on welfare to get a decent place to live. There’s so many things against you. You’re single. You have children. You’re on welfare. You don’t have enough money; it’s hard.”

Maya: subsidized housing. However, if women hunted long enough, they might find a safe, clean place to live. Maya discovered scarce subsidized housing in Chilliwack, She was extremely pleased when welfare paid for the move. The rent was much cheaper for Maya.

I [got] a phone call, “You’re accepted into BC Housing in Chilliwack.” Before I had filled an application. I waited; nothing came of it. Six months before I did move, I thought, “I’ll fill that out again; my application is old and thrown away.” I was in an apartment that had a toilet leaked into my apartment. There was mold on the walls, so that helped my application get on an emergency list. That’s what I attribute it to. It just came up.

Often women attributed these positive events to luck. As illustrated, the women in my study were extremely busy and strategic in fulfilling their needs for food, clothing, and housing in order to survive despite meager allocations through welfare policies.

Health Needs
According to Edin and Lein (1997), women on welfare know the value of benefits they would lose if they left welfare (p. 63). Loss of medical, dental, and prescription paid by welfare often make women think twice about taking a job without benefits or enrolling in education. Women explained the need for good physical and mental health as an important component that could help facilitate their transitions from welfare. Frequently, health problems resulted from poor nutrition caused by meager food allowances dispensed by the provincial government. In this section, women’s actions depict them as oppositional agents as they challenged government policies by attempting to ensure their health needs were met.

Brown Bear: prescribing drugs instead of food. Brown Bear pointed out that health
problems are exacerbated while people are on welfare. Before Brown Bear’s diabetic daughter
died, the family received additional monies to upgrade her daughter’s diet. Since Brown Bear
and her other daughter were also diabetic, they ate the same food provided by the extra
supplement. However, after her disabled daughter’s death, the government discontinued the
subsidy. As Brown Bear claimed, instead of prescribing extra food allowed by government
policies, “A lot of doctors keep giving you drugs; that’s the prescription drugs people on
assistance are on. [My other daughter and] I’ve gained 30 pounds since [my daughter’s] death
because we cannot afford to eat the way she’s supposed to."

**Almond: hidden health disabilities.** Policies determined how much time individuals are
allowed to take to get well from illnesses or physical debilities. Women had to continually
prove to government that an illness was long term and would not disappear overnight,
especially if women were on Disability I. Some women had physical ailments that affected
them in other ways. For example, Almond, after having jumped in a swimming pool,
developed tinnitus making it “difficult to keep a job and go to school.” Even after eight
operations and trying acupuncture and meditation, Almond reported that according to her
doctor, “I couldn’t keep a permanent job because it’s not just concentration. Once in a while,
it’ll go really loud, and I get headaches and fatigue.” Almond also suffered from hidden
disability: irritable bowel syndrome. “That kept me in bed. I can’t eat sugar [or] milk. That
makes it difficult out in society [or] to keep a job if I’m in pain one day, the next, I’m on the
toilet with diarrhea. It’s a hidden disability.” Almond told her doctor: “I find eating high
protein doesn’t irritate my bowels as much,’ so I get an extra little $40 a month.” As dictated
by government policies, even conditions such as Almond’s must be reviewed yearly. As
Almond attested, “I have to fight for my Disability again. It’s a yearly thing, so I have to get
[my advocate] to fight for me. I’m not proud that I’m on Disability.”

**Kate Franschild: government decides health.** Kate Franschild, too, indicated that health
problems were often invisible making them difficult to diagnose. Furthermore, the state, via
the medical and mental health professions, decides what conditions are worthy of time and
money. The medical conditions must fit a prescribed approved government model. If
individuals do not fit or question these, they are immediately suspect. Of this constant
invasion, Kate Franschild said, “I’m sick of being tested, poked, prodded, and made ill by their diagnoses. I’ll only let them go so far just to prove to them I can’t [work]. The social system relies on physicians to decide what I’m allowed and not allowed.” Kate Franschild, like other women, challenged government’s demands that doctors document and prove that she was unhealthy and unable to work full time.

**Lilith: controlling own health.** Lilith too emphasized good health was an important key to making a transition from welfare. Despite having “ended up with an eating disorder [and] been diagnosed as schizophrenic.” As a result, at 21, Lilith “ended up on assistance.” Due to anxiety, her “panic attacks were exacerbated.” Lilith said, “I’m in control now. There are ways of managing high anxiety like I have.” Therefore, by “starting to channel my anger in positive ways [and] trying to recover my brains, to calm down. I’ve lost too much time. This definitely isn’t where I thought I would be. I’m trying to recover my dreams and stay healthy.”

**Heather: throwing away prescription drugs.** Another hidden health problem for women in my study included different forms of substance abuse: prescription drugs, drugs, or alcohol. Many of the women in my study confided to me that due to financial, emotional, spousal, and other stressors, they became dependent on prescription drugs much to their surprise. Often, they did not even realize they were becoming dependent until they tried to stop taking the medication. As Heather pointed out, “I had been on Paxil for, I believe, five and a half years, and there is Adavan, and sleeping pills somewhere in between - just a loonie bin.” Not only did women discover their overuse of the prescription drugs, but they also were astounded at the cost. “When you’re on welfare, it’s just so easy to continue taking because you don’t have to worry about the cost. I don’t think I ever saw a bill until I started paying myself.” Heather also felt that often the medication was over prescribed although she did not blame her doctor or think she was a bad person. Heather felt: “She just started writing these prescriptions. Had she just asked one question, ‘Why are you depressed?’ she may have been able to direct me to get help rather than just numb me to what was going on.”

**Ali: healthy lifestyle over alcoholism.** A couple of women in my study had become alcoholics although initially they did not realize this. However, they chose to overcome this.
When Ali “went to an AA meeting to figure out why my boyfriend was such an idiot when he drank. I had no clue I was an alcoholic. When I joined AA [7 years ago], I decided this is what I need to improve my life” in order to engage in a different lifestyle.

**Susan: the visible health problems and the welfare system.** As illustrated, some women had varying types of hidden health issues. However, Susan had visible health problems as she suffered from the progressive effects of arthritis that necessitated frequent surgeries on her hands and feet. This limited her ability to perform tasks, so Susan had to be continually cognizant of her health condition. “My biggest struggle is my illness and my body. I just push everything else aside. My main concern is am I healthy enough to do it? I try not to think about it.” However, she tried not to let depression overtake her by continuing her lifelong goal to complete her education. “I think about a lot of things I like to do. There’s so many areas, Maybe, I shouldn’t think in that area ‘cause it’s something I wouldn’t be able to do later.”

Although some women were hindered as they attempted to qualify for Disability, others like Susan, sometimes found the policies more penetrable, especially if they had an obvious physical disability. The penetrability also depended on the woman’s choice to ask for benefits and the social worker’s willingness to help. According to Susan, social workers are reticent. “Nowhere did anyone say to me, ‘Oh, there’s an extra amount you can get.’ I heard it through another woman who had to fight and fight. I don’t understand what makes one person get it. She had the same thing as I did.” After learning about the handicap benefit for her arthritis, Susan discovered: “There’s a lot of help. Because of my illness, I’ve gotten a brand new bed, a foam mattress, and a sheepskin because I was sick for a long time in bed. I had no problem [because] my doctor recommended it [and] sign[ed] a note.” Susan learned that “You have to ask even if you think, ‘They’re not going to pay for that. You never know.’ That’s something I had to have, and I really couldn’t afford.”

Whether health issues were obvious or hidden, women had to find ways to meet their needs to live a healthy lifestyle. Women struggled with doctors and social workers over control to identify and label their own physical ailments. When women considered leaving welfare, they described hidden costs like medications, potential loss of medical, prescription, and dental
benefits. They needed to think carefully about this in their trajectories from welfare, especially if it meant sacrificing their health and that of their children. Women worked in opposition to these challenges and costs by choosing to take a path to leave welfare on their terms. They also contested social workers’ and doctors’ reticence in sharing information or giving permission for benefits that would improve women’s health.

**Children Have Caring Needs and Basic Needs**

According to Baker and Tippin (1999), many single mothers would prefer to stay home with their children to ensure their children’s needs are met. As women left welfare, they considered and evaluated the needs of their children in relation to the benefits and losses they received in transitioning from welfare (Baker & Tippin, 1999; Edin & Lein, 1997). Not only do women seek to balance their own lives, they also attempt to provide for their children’s necessities. The single mothers in my study constantly worried about how to be a good parent, to provide food, a better life, safe daycare, emotional support, stability, and time for their children. Their caring work was often indistinguishable from their other activities, for the children were always in the background.

**Mary: being a mother and a father.** Mothering was a 24-hour a day job for most of the women in my study. Upon examining the women’s stories, I discovered one of the needs they faced in juggling the role of a single parent was being a good parent. They often performed dual roles as Mary said: “It’s hard to be a father and a mother.” By performing both roles, Mary found it hard to be consistent because “You can’t say, ‘Wait ’til dad gets home’ or call dad. When you don’t have that, you have to say, ‘I said do this. Get in the house now. Pick that up.’ Then, you do it yourself. It’s constant.” To celebrate her father’s role, Mary pointed out: “On Father’s Day, I just felt so guilty. All the kids are doing things with their dads, so we went bike riding. It was pouring rain. We got muddy, and then, we phoned his dad.”

**Mabel: making time.** While interviewing the women, it became apparent to me mothers attempted to remain involved in their children’s public lives as well as their lives at home despite what government policies allowed. Even though women were expected to be in the workforce once their children reached age 7, many of my participants felt their children
needed them to spend time together because of disrupting experiences children had endured. Mabel told me,

What I needed to do was just get the girls settled, back into school, and make a home for them again. That was my first priority, not to go job chasing. [My girls] had been through so much turmoil the 2 years prior. I owed at least that much to my children to get their feet back on the ground and get them into schools so they could start meeting new kids.

According to Mabel, spending quality time with children was important despite their ages.

Maya: mother-child bond versus social status. As well as spending time with her son, as a mother, Maya felt another quality was necessary: a mother-child bond. “Letting [my son] know he has personal security instead of status security, like my mom is a nurse, but to have him know I was there for him, like a close companion in the very first years was more important. He’s 2 years old.” As a result, Maya did not accept government policy dictating she should quickly get a job to become a working mother as a nurse or other professional just to leave welfare and put her son in public daycare under the supervision of paid care workers. Maya challenged government by deciding what values and roles she believed to be most important for her young son.

Vivianne: quality time. Although Vivianne’s life was very busy, she ensured she nurtured the bond with her daughter in other ways. Vivianne described this: “I do spend lots of time [with her]. She’s so comfortable at [the babysitter’s]. It’s nice, but usually, I get at least a day where I can just let her run and spend time, cuddling and doing what we need to do.”

Tumbleweed: children’s nutrition. Mothers not only cared and nurtured their children, but they constantly worried about providing nutritious food. Often, single mothers put their children’s needs before their own even though they realized their health, well-being, and ability to provide affected their children profoundly. While on welfare, women frequently became even more focused on children’s nutrition because of the lack of food. Tumbleweed stated: “My main concern is [my daughter] has good shoes, a winter coat, and food. She takes a lunch every day. We have at least one good balanced diet meal: meat, potatoes, vegetables, salad. The rest of the week, we can have leftovers and less expensive meals.” Tumbleweed, like other mothers in my study, confided to me, often she would forego her own portion of
meat so her daughter might have the protein so she could think and be healthy for school.

**Heather: children’s clothing and the extras of childhood.** When children are young, and they are growing, necessity seemed to be constantly pressing on single mothers as Heather pointed out.

[My son’s] just growing. It’s just a non-stop spurt. I bought new clothes; they’re already too short. He’s just getting bigger like stockier, but now he’s just growing lengthwise. And socks – I’m always buying new socks. He’s put holes in them; they’re not big enough. I’ll shop at Value Village and places for some things, but for socks and underwear, you got to buy new. They’re expensive when you’re doing it often.

In addition to basic necessities, single mothers were concerned about providing the extras not covered by welfare that children needed and expected for Christmas, birthdays, and just the simple pleasures of being a child. Heather worried about this. “Everything is paid for except extras like the little ball caps he needs, and the cool things he wants. I want to be able to give him what he wants, and I can’t do that on welfare.”

As these single mothers have explained throughout this section, they played different parenting roles in their children’s lives whether their children were younger or older. These mothers represented their desires to ensure their children’s nutritional, clothing, health, and emotional needs were cared for in their everyday lives as the women strategized to make transitions. These mothers also found time to provide companionship, involvement, love, and security in their children’s lives while planning a better quality of existence for themselves and these children they had brought into the world. They also challenged government policies by choosing how and when to mother their children.

**Children’s Daycare Needs and Government Policy**

Mother’s work did not stop with providing care, food, and clothing. When single mothers considered getting a job, getting an education, or even attending appointments without children, they continually thought about daycare. Frequently, daycare policies meant to help a woman enter the workforce could be even more intrusive as women worried about the safety, type, accessibility, and affordability of daycare their children received.
Mary: daycare and creative juggling. Mary pointed out finding daycare was an ongoing issue if she hoped to work. Also, Mary said that the paperwork required by the welfare office created even more problems for her. “I’m paying the babysitter over and above what they subsidize me. My teenage babysitter, I pay because she doesn’t know how to fill those subsidy forms. I was gonna do it, but she didn’t seem interested, so I just pay her.” Thus, not all daycare was subsidized because women could not always find daycare when they needed it, so they relied on teenagers or others. Mary said she would have liked to use her daycare workers, but “My regular lady only works till six. She’s got a family to be with.” Mary, like other parents, had been promised another alternative: “I’m waiting – the school is supposed to have an aftercare school daycare. I haven’t heard, [but] I’m on the list.” Because of the complications with daycare, Mary said a woman must juggle child care and shift work.

Being part-time at [the retail store], you have to let them know a week ahead and tell them which days you’re going to be there. They call me in randomly too. A couple of times, I’ve said no because they’ve called me and said, “Be here at one ’til nine.” I can’t call my teenager babysitter; [she’s in school]. My other babysitter sits ’til six. My teenager babysitter babysits ’til nine. [My son] gets off at two, so my teenage babysitter can’t. There’s an hour in between; she gets off at three. It’s so complicated.

This was just one example of the complicated juggling feats some women engaged in to accommodate their children while the women attempted to work part-time shift work to get their foot in the door for jobs. Policymakers and daycare workers often discounted the women’s need for 24-hour provincially funded daycare for mothers, particularly single mothers. Furthermore, just because some daycare existed did not mean it was the kind that would fulfil a woman’s needs or her motherly worries.

Lovey: ex-spouses and babysitting. Frequently, government and the general public wonder why single mothers do not recruit the help of their children’s fathers for child care. Lovey, like other mothers, attempted to rely on her ex-husband to assist her with babysitting so that she could work. However, when Lovey’s ex-partner was supposed to help out every second weekend, “He chose not to show up, so I had to find babysitters for those times.” As well as an unreliable ex-spouse, Lovey found no nighttime babysitting existed in Chilliwack. “If I have no babysitter, how could I work? There’s no nighttime babysitting in this town. There’s absolutely none unless you go to the other side of Chilliwack. Maybe, there might be a spot.”
Lovey pointed out other complications existed as well. “When you’re on childcare subsidy, you have to have an adult supervise to babysit to receive the check, so you can’t get a teenager.” Frequently, women are told new daycare centers open all the time. However, as Lovey countered: “I get furious when people say, ‘I’m opening up another daycare.’ Goody two shoes, big deal, add it to other preschools [that don’t have nighttime babysitting or flexible hours].” As Lovey explained, finding daycare could be extremely challenging. Furthermore, they were forced to juggle their schedules to 9 to 5 traditional office hours.

Scout: daycare – systemic problems. In addition to daycare availability, women continually had trouble with the daycare system itself. Due to internal problems like short staffing, only one part-time employee handled daycare queries a few days a week. Moreover, this sole daycare person was only available during business hours, and so the women trying to access daycare were constrained by this schedule. Scout described what many women in my study encountered when attempting to deal with the daycare system.

Daycare’s always been a problem. Daycare has always been either they don’t have enough information, or the licensing number has changed. Then, I end up being told they’re not going to back pay me for the time I’ve missed, and it hasn’t been even my fault, but they send you letters saying you have to be in the office at a certain time. I start work at 7:30-8 o’clock in the morning, and by the time I finish, it’s 5 or 6. They’re closed, so they’re not open when I go to work, and they’re closed when I’m done. If you’re not in at a certain time, they just go, “Phhhff, Oh, well.”

Since government’s goal was and is to get women into the workforce, one would think its daycare providers might try to accommodate women attempting to work. However, in her case, Scout tolerated disrespectful treatment as she was given the run-around from workers. Despite the problems she encountered, Scout felt:

But I have no choice. I couldn’t afford to pay $250 [for daycare] plus my rent, my bills, plus live. By the time I’m finished paying everything for the month, [my son and I] might have $10 or $20 for a special night, which is not enough. It’s tough, not easy. Once I finish school, it will get better, but a lot of the people down there just don’t realize it’s just not enough.

Scout continued to search for daycare and eventually found one. “I went through a lot of different daycares. I was lucky. Finally, I got one, so I had somebody I trusted watching my son. The hours [I needed] were the same hours the daycare was open, so it was quite good.”

Diana: Family Maintenance Program. Lack of available daycare and inaccessibility of daycare workers were not the only issues confronting women to meet their children’s needs.
Women, like Diana, found welfare policies further impinged on women and their children when women were expected to sign over their rights to government. This occurred even when women had reached an agreement with a spouse about support payments and child custody. Government policies through programs such as the Family Maintenance Program intervened and revoked these adult contracts if a woman tried to collect welfare. Diana felt government sought to control and make decisions about a woman’s life often to her detriment. “That doesn’t matter at all. If you have a system in place like a child support system with the arrangement that works, then, you’re targeted as somebody who they’ll go after because you’ve already done the work for them.”

Diana found out the hard way that her honesty was more of a problem to her and her ex-spouse. After she had signed the forms and given her ex-spouse’s address, the Family Maintenance Program began investigating her ex-partner’s finances despite having been assured they would not assess Diana’s case for at least 6 months. The excuse used by staff was they might get more for her even though as Diana pointed out she and her ex-partner had reached an amicable agreement that worked for both financially. Diana was told she must comply by signing the Family Maintenance forms; otherwise, “They can’t give you any money unless you sign this paper to have an agent look at the child support you get and reassess his finances to make sure you’re getting the right amount. Now, we’re in charge because we’re paying you. We want to make sure, so when we’re acting on your behalf.” When Diana saw the impact this would have on her children’s well being, she stated: “My ex wasn’t very happy because now he’s scrutinized, everything about him is. It’s you’re both intelligent people. We know what we’re doing.” Diana saw the potential consequences of interference by government policies because it meant her ex-husband would not “be able to use that tax deduction. Then, he won’t buy the shoes anymore, or he won’t pay for lessons anymore. We have this [agreement]. This works.”

This was just one more policy intervention in Diana’s life that propelled her into choosing to leave welfare quickly. Despite government’s belief policy changes have benefited women, I found this was not necessarily so as portrayed by these women’s experiences. Policies still are gendered. Even though some women may have benefited, often, policies created more
problems. Frequently, even women agreeing to all the conditions of the Family Maintenance Program received little or no money at all from ex-partners. Men often quit their jobs or worked under the table so the now single mothers could not get money from them. The problem was not resolved as was the goal of the policy creators. Thus, women chose to act in opposition to those in power by making their own choices as illustrated by Diana and others.

Many women struggled to find daycare as well as meet with the daycare worker at the welfare offices. However, it was very difficult, especially for women in low paying jobs, to go to the welfare office because generally in low paying jobs employers were not as willing to give women time off work to go resolve their daycare problems. Furthermore, daycare office hours were based on the traditional 9 to 5 timetable that has generally been associated with men's work, and this restricted single mothers further. Thus, we see gender embedded within the systems women are expected to enter. Evans and Swift (2000) point out single mothers are labelled as problems because they do not fit traditional roles. Furthermore, single mothers' lives are extremely complex because they are the sole caregiver for their children. As pointed out previously, most policies and work schedules are based on the male model of human capital (Evans, 1996). Sometimes, women's basic needs for daycare so they may work are considered as wants by policymakers (Neysmith, 2000). The assumption seems to be daycare is readily available, convenient, and at one's fingertips.

These pressures from government workers also seeped into private spaces with government requirements to have even teenage babysitters fill out government forms as Mary noted. Despite, perhaps unwittingly, government’s attempts to further limit women’s choices and have women comply with government policies, led women to seek to circumvent these frustrations and social interchanges. Despite government’s view and identification of a “fit” mother as a paid working mother outside the home (Evans, 1996, p. 18), government policies acted against its own views. However, as illustrated, the state did not make this an easy task for single mothers. As the women explained, policies limited daycare accessibility as well as making it difficult for women to use teenage babysitters because of excessive paperwork. Other policies like those enshrined in the Family Maintenance Program hindered women and even endangered their survival, children's necessities, and opportunities. Diana encountered
policy interferences when she was expected to sign over her rights to the Family Maintenance Program. If she did not, then she could not receive welfare.

**Protecting Children’s Educational Needs**

In addition to providing for their children’s emotional needs at home, single mothers also were aware they needed to ensure their children’s needs in school were addressed. Mothers expressed their surprise and dismay to me that school policies like government policies often encroached upon the women’s lives.

**Gloria: school policies entering the home.** My research demonstrated that the school system entered the private realm of the home. According to Gloria, the public school policies impinged on her rights as a parent. “From the first week, school administrators were targeting my son to get rid of me because [of] the trouble they had with [my daughter]. I’d worked with the school because the best interests of the kids were always at heart. But they came into my home between me and my kids.”

Gloria expressed her call to action when she recognized a game was being played (Bourdieu, 1977). A class struggle for power had developed between Gloria and school administrators over whether her children would be allowed to stay in school to acquire an education, a high school diploma, and other attributes schooling would provide to a teenager. Gloria realized this, and she was determined to engage in the “game.”

I was pissed off they could bring their policies into my home and affect my family. They underestimated me. It’s more than understanding it’s a game. It’s developing willingness to play the game. These are our children, so why instead of arming and preparing them to get out into the world and be good decent productive people, why are we around with damn games?

Gloria advocated on behalf of her children to ensure her son not be expelled from school and his record be cleared. In an attempt to resolve the issue that had started the sequence of events, Gloria requested a meeting with the school administration. She took Brown Bear with her as support. Since Brown Bear had a background in gentle teaching, she was adept at assessing situations. Brown Bear felt: “With everything they were throwing at [Gloria], they were doing the poor welfare mom: you must comply. This is a man’s world. This is the board of education. These are the rules. We’re the law.”
Brown Bear knew the rules of the game, status, and respect one must possess to be considered as an equal. Furthermore, she said to Gloria: “My presence would be uncomfortable because they wouldn’t know who I was. I wasn’t going to give them any information.” During the meeting, the administrators began to berate Gloria’s daughter in an attempt to attribute the same behaviours to Gloria’s son. The administrators had reduced Gloria to tears when Brown Bear said: “‘Look, I have to step in here. I work with John McGee from Gentle Teaching International.’ The vice principal had been to one of John McGee’s conferences. So I immediately got respect.” By intervening, Brown Bear’s goal was to illustrate Gloria was not just another welfare mother with welfare mother friends. Brown Bear was astute enough to know if she drew on her knowledge and on her social networks, she would gain respect for Gloria’s case indirectly.

**Vivianne:** “welfare child.” These struggles over children’s well-being were omnipresent and affected even younger children. These games or labelling may occur as early as grade one. Because the first grade teacher knew Vivianne’s daughter came from a single parent home, the teacher began to treat Vivianne’s daughter differently than the rest of the children. Moreover, she took a dislike to the little girl. Vivianne could not understand why her daughter became disillusioned with school and grew quieter and quieter in the classroom as a reaction to the teacher’s treatment. Enlisting the help of her babysitter, Vivianne tried to find out what the problem was in school. When the babysitter took Vivianne’s daughter for hot chocolate and a donut, the young girl said, “You and Mommy are worried about me, aren’t you? I just get sad at school sometimes. I don’t like my teacher. She’s not very nice to me.” After Vivianne spoke to the teacher, she eventually enrolled her in another school with more caring and unprejudiced staff towards lone parent children.

**Heather:** children not fitting in. Vivianne was not the only single mother in my study to witness how teachers could label children negatively as outsiders. Heather recounted a story to me about her son’s teacher and Halloween where the teacher ultimately said there was something wrong with Heather’s son because he did not fit in by accepting what was going on. Heather said the very first time she had had a problem with the teacher occurred at Halloween. Until that time, “I had [my son] in public school. He absolutely loved it. For
Halloween, his teacher dressed up as the devil.” When her son came home from school frightened, he said, “Teacher’s the devil.’ He was 5 at the time, so I called her. I said, ‘I just wanted to let you know [my son] is really scared of you now.’” Then, the teacher accused Heather of being religious. Heather’s response was “No, I’m not religious, and I really don’t know what kind of teacher would dress up as the devil in front of a bunch of 5-year-olds [with] the red face paint, red costume with the horns with the tail [and] with the [pitchfork].” Not to have her position, control, or power challenged, the teacher proceeded by saying, “Well, I’ve done it every year since I’ve been a teacher, and I’ve never had a problem with it.” Then, the teacher accused Heather that her son’s “imagination wouldn’t allow him to realize that she just dressed up, and she wasn’t the devil. I was like, “Whoa! I’m just letting you know you’ve really frightened my child. He’s scared to come to school. He thinks his teacher is the devil.” Then, Heather chose to decide what sort of experience she wanted her child to have and the types of social relationships he should possess. If her son’s ideas were different, then Heather was prepared to find another school where her son would feel more comfortable.

“Religious or not, I don’t know who would dress up as the devil for 5-year-olds. I hold that as some sort of value or a right or wrong thing to do, but I can’t. [My son] doesn’t want to come back. I’m gonna pull him out.” Then, he was left without his school, and he started saying he wanted to go to school where they talked about God, so I checked out [one]. They have subsidized tuition for single moms, so he’s there. He loves it.

As illustrated by Gloria, Vivianne, and Heather’s stories, women not only struggled for themselves, but they also fought for their children.

Gloria was quite astute when she pointed out to me a game was going on between her and the school administrators over the struggle to keep her son in school. It all stemmed from the problem the school had identified related to Gloria’s daughter. Thus, the school planned to target all the children as undesirables. Gloria recognized this form of exclusion and fought to keep her son in school and prevent her other daughter from being labelled uncooperative as well. Vivianne found, surprisingly, she had to intervene on her daughter’s behalf when Vivianne discovered her child’s teacher had taken a dislike to the child because she came from a single parent family. Heather encountered similar pressures from her son’s teacher when Heather was accused of having an unimaginative son unable to differentiate between an imaginary devil and a real one. Heather was also questioned about her religious beliefs and
pressed to feel if she were religious this was undesirable. Women constantly struggled to oppose policies and individuals interfering with their lives and those of their children. Women took control by acting as oppositional agents as discussed in the following section.

**Oppositional Agents: Need to Know Rights**

To meet their needs, women in my study made choices they felt best for themselves and their children to help them leave welfare. Often their choices, based on their everyday lived experiences, were in direct opposition to the opportunities government policies and experts shaped for them. To help women critically evaluate their needs, they frequently chose to learn about their rights and government policies so they could make informed choices. By becoming knowledgeable and drawing on their life experiences, the women challenged the identities government had shaped for them and the opportunities government thought best for the women (Fraser, 1989). By becoming an oppositional agent, although a woman might not have labeled herself in this way, women took control of their lives and made choices even though they were constrained or bounded by government policies. In this section, I present some of the conversations with women illustrating their actions as oppositional agents. By analyzing their stories, I discovered women felt they needed to know their rights and took it upon themselves to learn them. They also used their past life experiences to guide their decisions — something government workers often seem to discourage.

In making transitions, women encountered a variety of institutions, agencies, individuals, and policies before they left welfare. Initially, women may think or buy into government rhetoric of all women needed to do was get a job — “any job will do.”

**Diana: not knowing the system to the system.** The process of making a transition from welfare was more complex than Diana had expected. According to Diana, formerly a successful private designer, found she was dealing with people in the welfare system with different values from those of business people. “[It] hindered me. I was used to dealing with people in terms of reality, deadlines, and negotiations. You negotiate.” However, with the welfare system, Diana discovered:
You're put into this position where you have absolutely no power. Anything you say gets turned around and held above your head. It's, "Nana boo, you just said something wrong," the begging process continues. It was hard. I wasn't humble or used to that. I just wanted simple plain answers, not "Well, this is the process. This is what we do, never had that before."

Because of some serious health problems, Diana had to resort to Employment Insurance, and when that ran out, she was forced to turn to welfare. She and her young children were on welfare for approximately a year. Looking back, Diana reflected: "There's a whole system to using the system. I had no awareness of that, no friends to help me. I knew there were people who knew what to put down, what to say, not to say. It seemed everything I said was causing me more trouble." Diana felt she was being continually interrogated with such questions as "Did you dispose of anything?" 'I sold a dining room suite.' 'Oh! Ohhhhhhhhh!' Then, everything stops. It's a big inconvenience. There's a system of knowing what not to say and what to say. Now, I have these crises, stress, and worries, and will I be able to get by?" As a result of her experiences, she took control of her life and left welfare in less than a year.

Ann: knowing the rules of the game. The system within the system may not always be apparent. However, to those previously on welfare or those having worked with government agencies, the existence of a system was quite obvious. At one time, having been an advocate for disabled people in BC, Ann knew the system's policies, rights, and rules intimately. She pointed out if women on welfare were told they could not do something, it was more than likely because government wanted to stay within the budget. Ann was adamant: "If you really want information, then it's probably important you research it yourself thoroughly. I'm intelligent enough. I have the cognitive thinking ability to be able to do that. I see lots of girls can't. I really resent that. To me it's discrimination." Ann proceeded to say that she believed women needed to be taught what she had learned. "I get what I want, what I know is possible. Just let me know the rules, and then I'll know what I need to do to get stuff." Ann pointed out that once women learned the rules, they had to continue researching them: "But I have to know the rules first, and if you keep changing them on me, how am I ever going to get what I need?"

Rochelle: knowing your rights. Not only do women need to know the rules of the game, but they also needed to be aware of their rights. According to Rochelle, based on her experience
as a pre-law student, “Most women have no clue of what their rights are.” Women should be informed that they are no longer allowed legal aid for maintenance. However, “There’s legal aid for rapists and child molesters, [and] if you put a gun to a cop’s head, you can get legal aid.” To Rochelle, this seemed strange because women just “want maintenance for your children so you can feed them. If you want to go and appeal a welfare claim that they’re not giving you welfare, but you can’t get legal aid to get money from your ex-husband.” Therefore, women must know their rights, particularly because ex-spouses were usually in a better financial position to hire a lawyer. Rochelle pointed out her ex-husband chose not to assist her financially. Because of her law background, Rochelle could look at papers to be presented in court and discover where problems might occur. For example, something may not even be relevant for court because “Stuff from Family Act aren’t part of the Divorce Act he’s bringing in. One is provincial. One is federal. One is family court. One is Supreme Court. Family court stuff doesn’t transfer into Supreme Court. It’s such a bloody waste of time.” Rochelle recounted an instance where an empathetic judge (not all of them were sympathetic to a woman’s plight) was going to make a ruling in what seemed to be her favor. Because she knew the laws, she prevented a possible appeal by her ex-husband based on the judge’s potential ruling. Rochelle pointed out to the judge the arrears in child support he was going to make her ex-husband pay: “It could’ve been appealed because everything was based on federal child support guidelines, so I told him this is how much according to federal child support guidelines he should be paying me with two kids.” This lack of knowledge could cost women even more time in appeals in court; therefore, Rochelle was wise to have informed herself about the difference between the federal and provincial guidelines.

Collette: sharing resources and informing others of their rights. In addition to information about the system, rules, policies, and their rights, women also needed to be able to access the information. This could be done through community resources as well as support networks. More and more communities have local services for information distribution: the library, welfare office, community services, a variety of employment centers and programs, charitable organizations, churches, the local college, and other agencies. In Chilliwack, a resource facility centralizes information on government policies, local services, and helping agencies. This was not only a new approach, but it was also a unique approach. Collette said: “What is
good the resource center [has these] things, so people can go there and know where to go. They say, ‘Thank you. We just needed to be told where to go. Thank you so much.’ That is [a] new approach.” Before the resource center, Collette pointed out that people had to run all over Chilliwack to find information. The women I spoke to throughout my study confirmed this had been the case before this resource centralized government policies and other information they needed for their transitions. Locating information in one place was useful for people because it saved time, resources, and money. Moreover, they were able to talk to knowledgeable people about government policies, soup kitchens, emergency shelters, transition houses, and other services. In addition, the resource center provided a location where women, particularly, could volunteer their time while getting some office experience and learning some new skills. Collette pointed out the volunteers were able to help people with their rights and welfare policies. Collette believed if a person did not know about entitlements, such as for clothes, shoes, or gas, then the woman could not ask for them when she met with her social worker. Collette said the resource center provided many services. It is a place people “can help [others] and surf [the Net]. At the same time, they educate themselves. They help other people because the information is not only for this person because they share with others, [thus, helping to educate others].”

Thus, through their descriptions, the women illustrated knowing rules and rights, having access to information, and drawing on past experiences were extremely important. As they navigated their transitions by becoming informed, women acted in opposition to government policies and experts if they chose to. In the next chapter, these will be examined in even more depth.

**Concluding Thoughts**

Through policy, government constructs and frames women’s needs on welfare, but frequently its perceptions and women’s lived experiences come into conflict. Thus, an underlying tension is set up through government policies that are meant to help women leave welfare. This tension results in a struggle between women and those interpreting and implementing policies that define women’s needs and future opportunities. Consequently, government policy has relabeled women as unemployed workers. Therefore, the focus has been for women to leave
welfare for paid employment – any work – just as long as it is a job. Part of the process may be to “encourage” women to attend pre-employment programs, job seminars and workshops, and employment counseling. Although these are helpful as the women pointed out in the last chapter and may even be the first steps to education and getting a job, these do not necessarily take into account women’s everyday lived needs. Even if they do, the agencies offering services constantly experience dilemmas in providing for individual needs that may, ultimately, conflict with how the agencies are funded and government policies.

The women’s transitions were not all the same: they could be messy, lengthy, complicated, serendipitous, and challenging. This resulted from different perceptions and interpretations of women’s needs by developers and implementers of policy. When policymakers shaped women’s identities in a particular way — as unemployed workers — this determined and constructed what policymakers perceived women’s needs to be — skills and training necessary to enter the labour market to become taxpaying citizens. Government provided only minimal transitional benefits, not enough to pave the way for a smooth move off welfare encompassing the lived needs as women discussed throughout this chapter. Furthermore, even when women began their transitions to work, government policies and agencies complicated women’s lives by providing only meager daycare subsidies, inconvenient hours, overabundance of paperwork, and unhelpful workers. Moreover, these policies only assisted women going to work, not to education. Shaping of women’s identities and their needs, then constructs their life choices in a particular way – getting a job quickly.

By shaping the women’s identities, needs, and life choices, policymakers and others, ultimately, attempt to depoliticize women and strip them of their sense of agency and their ability to make choices to control their life opportunities (Fraser, 1989) and their unlived potentialities (Alheit, 1992; 1994; 1995). As the women inferred, they were constructed as not able to make sensible choices, or they had made bad choices (Kelly, 2000; Solinger, 1999), or they were presumed to be unable to make a decision. No acknowledgment is granted to women that they make complex bounded choices from the opportunities constrained by government policies and their interpreters to meet their needs (Dobson, 2001; Kelly, 2000; Riemer, 2001). However, as the women illustrated throughout their conversations, they
strategized what needs were important to them and their children and attempted to fulfill them. A constant struggle and tension existed between the women's everyday needs and those needs the government constructed – training or skill acquisition for paid employment. Women's skills and actual needs were not really identified or taken into account. Perhaps, this was caused by government budgetary and administrative requirements as women continually pointed out. However, the women were not consulted about their lived needs.

Despite the efforts of government to implement a one-size-fits-all policy, the women in my study have illustrated they challenged this. Some took time to reflect, care for themselves and their children, and planned their choices. Additionally, many of the women challenged the system by refusing to train for particular low paying jobs or be forced quickly into the labour market. They strategized how to take time to make space to think and to plan for their futures while taking time to meet their children's needs.

These 23 women pointed out women require good jobs, enough to live on and to truly improve their quality of life. In the meantime, they needed to be able to do more than just survive. They had to be able to feed and clothe themselves and their children. They also required adequate and safe daycare with consistent funding for child care. Not having legal worries pertaining to child custody or support would free women to keep a job instead of continually wasting energies and resources in going to court. To actually leave welfare, women require health, dental, and prescription benefits for themselves. Policies do cover some of these for their children through the Healthy Kids program, but they say their children need full coverage. Finally, the women pointed out that they needed to know their rights to help themselves meet their needs and make choices to leave welfare.

In the next chapter, I will present how women strategized to meet the needs discussed here and their processes of navigating social structures. To make the transitions described in the last chapter, women had to make choices by examining their options in order to take the opportunities that were most beneficial to them and their children.
CHAPTER SEVEN

BOUNDED CHOICES:
STRATEGIZING TO NAVIGATE THE EVERYDAY TO....

I'm lucky.
Almond, Ann, Diana, Heather, Kate Franschild, Lilith, Mary, Maya, Scout, Susan, and Tumbleweed

I'm a resourceful person.
Collette, Mabel, and Tusk

The purpose of this chapter is to explore how the 23 women in this study strategized and made choices, albeit bound, to navigate their everyday lives as problematic. By analyzing their stories, I found they used two strategies to meet their needs different from those of policies, systems, programs, and social relationships: support networks and self-directed learning projects. By using these, women acted as creative political agents constitutive of citizenship.

Navigating the Everyday as Problematic

Strategic Choices

As discussed in the last chapter, women acted in opposition to government policies, programs, agencies, institutions, experts, and others they encountered. As creative agents, women sought to take control of their life opportunities by making their own choices, not necessarily sanctioned by those in power. When making their choices, the women critically analyzed the situations they found, thus, contesting those government provided. Although women strategized their best choices leading to opportunities benefiting their transitions, these choices were still constrained or bounded by what government allowed.

Women on welfare are often accused of making bad or not sensible choices (Kelly, 2000; Solinger, 1999). However, these women were much more strategic in making their decisions. They used life experience; attributes, such as communication and behaviors; and knowledge of self, rights, and rules of the game. By problematizing their experiences and reflecting critically on their decisions, the women learned how to navigate systems to improve their social positions and opportunities resulting in an enhanced and transformed quality of life (Lave &
Consequently, women took more socially conscious actions for themselves while sharing this knowledge with other women. They critically strategized these transformations through support networks and self-directed learning projects.

**Strategic Bounded Choices through Support Networks**

**"I’m Resourceful"**

As previously discussed in Chapter 2, the women’s choices were bounded or constrained by welfare, legal, and medical systems as well as social relationships with their families, friends, employers, and others (Riemer, 2001). As the women strategized for different forms of capitals (they may not have labelled them as such), they just knew something would help them meet their needs if they gained access to particular resources, knowledge, or social networks. Some saw themselves as “lucky” as illustrated in the quotation at the beginning of the chapter. When they became aware of their choices and capitals they sought, they recognized themselves as “I’m resourceful,” as so many stated at the beginning of the chapter.

**Acquiring Social Capital**

As I conversed with the women and analyzed their stories, I discovered they often consciously and strategically sought to acquire various forms of capital. One way they did this was by building and sustaining social networks providing them with social capital through support networks I had not considered within the community, whether it was with bureaucrats, politicians, social workers, doctors, family, or friends. Through these networks, a woman might advocate for herself because individuals might open doors to new contacts, resources, or just provide emotional support for women as they made their transitions.

**Social Networks Provide Status**

Many of the women in my study wanted me to know about their social support networks and what these support networks could do for them: provide status or symbolic capital.

**Rochelle.** Rochelle articulated clearly her efforts to create networks for herself outside the welfare system that constantly accused her of wrongdoing.
I have wonderful supports. There was no support system in place. I created my own support system by being involved in a community of people that are clean and sober. It took a long, long time. I have supports of doctors who are personal friends. My support system was created by people I got involved with. I was so sick I had to go somewhere. If I had to have relied on social services, I would still be going. “I can’t do it. I can’t get a job.”

**Unlikely Support Networks**

Some women, cultivated support networks in the most unlikely place: the welfare office. This support not only gave women social capital, but it also imbued them with symbolic capital.

**Ali.** Not everyone on the welfare system was able to do acquire social capital, in part, because of the number of welfare cases. “Your worker’s number 300. They don’t go by names, so when you get a new worker, you don’t know; it’s still worker 300.” Ali’s experience was different because in another office where the caseload was smaller, the workers were “friendly and helpful. If you’re kind and patient, they are [too]. When I called my worker, ‘How’s it going, [Ali]?’ It’s like we’re friends. It’s nice. Even the reception person [says], ‘How’s it going?’” By having these supports and social capital, women already had relationships established for when they actually needed help. Ali drew on this established relationship sometimes. “The worker I have is awesome. I’ll phone her and say, ‘I need a food voucher. The bills are a little high this month.’ ‘Ok, pick it up at 3:30.’” This type of support enabled women to meet their needs more easily and navigate structures they encountered.

**Cultivating “Right” Support: Advocates**

The women in my study were quite astute in the social support networks they nurtured. From what they divulged to me, their networks always provided access to resources and other forms of capital. With this capital, women openly planned how to navigate and oppose oppressive social structures they encountered. Some did this by strategizing how to move from welfare to Disability 1 or 2 or Canada Pension. Disability allocated to them more status and benefits.

**Almond.** For example, Almond utilized the support she had cultivated when she told her advocate, “I found I couldn’t survive. I said to my advocate, ‘We need to fight for more money,’ so finally we got Disability 1.” However, Almond’s doctor was not as helpful when
he said, "You need to be in a wheelchair to be getting Disability." Because of Almond's severe tinnitus, her advocate fought for her and "did a very good job on my behalf and got me Disability 1. It's only $100 bucks more." Almond knew how important her networks could be, for they had symbolic power and capitals to navigate structures she did not. Almond used her social networks employed by the system to assist her with her choices even though these were somewhat constrained.

Cultivating Community Wide Support Networks
Some used a wide range of networks within the communities they lived. Lilith illustrated this through her actions.

Lilith. Lilith was one of these. She continually cultivated her extensive social support networks in Chilliwack. It ranged from local psychologists, the MLA, and Chilliwack and Vancouver health advocates to the support she garnered from family and friends. In addition to phoning and faxing her support networks, Lilith would visit them and keep them apprised of her needs and how she too advocated on her own behalf.

After a negative experience with the health care system, Lilith had created this support network and continued to evaluate it carefully. "I ended up with an eating disorder [and] revictimized by the medical profession. I got this from this network of people who are supposed to be helping me, a patriarchal capitalist system." As a result, Lilith became even more cautious because "The bureaucracy feeds on the poverty of people. They have policies. It has a trickle down effect. [Women] have to really access their support and advocate for themselves to improve the situation because it isn’t right you have to live this way. Tell the bureaucrats what’s going on." Lilith’s strategy was to carefully select social relationships to assist her in fulfilling her needs.

My mom and the [MLA's] office [and my friend] phoned the advocate [and] took a different approach. She said she's concerned about me and why isn't there more professional support for me here, so they explained the politics. The region tends to be autonomous in health, so they make their own little policy, budget their money.

Lilith was happy the way her friend handled the situation. She "did a good job. They didn't tell me anything. They probably should’ve done more work for me. That’s why I had to ask
someone else to back me up.” Not only did Lilith’s friend get more information about health care regionalization, but she assisted Lilith to navigate the medical system. Once Lilith had the information, she later convinced the mental health advocate to help her obtain entry into an eating disorder clinic in Vancouver and a yoga class in Chilliwack. Lilith wrote her local MLA and politicians in the health ministry to engage their support for her needs.

Doctors Can Help
After classes were over in the spring, women revolved back to welfare for the summer. This gave women and their children medical, dental, and prescriptions coverage. During the school year, the lack of benefits could create difficulties resulting in crises caused by children requiring monthly prescriptions.

Rochelle. As a student, Rochelle went onto welfare during the summers. Therefore, before she returned to school in the fall, she planned how to meet her needs and those of her children so they did not have to pay for costly prescriptions during the year. To do this, Rochelle enlisted the support of her doctor: “You don’t have emergencies. You can’t afford them.” Rochelle’s doctor knew that “I have 2 kids that take different medications. One has chronic pain; the other has ADD and ODD. I take medication.” Rochelle said that because her doctor knows her situation, “I go to my doctor’s, and I get prescriptions. My doctor is very good about writing prescriptions that appear to be [for] 3 month[s] that are actually for six months.” In addition, because head lice are so prevalent in public schools, and the shampoo is so expensive, “He also writes us a prescription for RC for four 200 millilitre bottles [for] head lice. It costs $96 for four 200 millilitre bottles. I can’t afford to buy that.” Therefore, for September, “I have my supply of drugs and lice killer, compliments of the government.” If Rochelle did not have this help, she explained: “My son wouldn’t be taking medication. He can’t go to school if he doesn’t take his medication cause they know he’s on it. They won’t allow him in the school even if I can’t afford to buy it.”

As Rochelle’s story exemplifies, women created support networks to help them meet their needs so they might continue to make transitions. In Rochelle’s case, if she would not have strategized in this way, she might have been relegated to welfare for a very long time.
Using the System Itself

Some women used the welfare, medical, government, and other systems to help meet their needs. Lovey depicted this through her actions.

**Lovey.** Lovey used the system whenever she could. What served as a support network for one woman may not have met the needs or provided another woman with opportunities she felt were in her best interests. As mentioned, Diana left welfare because of the intrusions of the Family Maintenance Program (FMP) attempting to control her previous child support arrangements by having her sign over total control to them, and investigate her ex-husband’s finances. However, unlike Diana, Lovey found the Family Maintenance Program as a means to facilitate her own choices. As Lovey said:

I finally got onto the Family Maintenance Program, [but] it took me 5 years. When you go on assistance, [the FMP] takes over dealings with my [ex-spouse]. If the stub [I submit to welfare] shows he did not pay me [child support] that month, then they act on my behalf. I don’t have to. They’ll be dealing with my [social] worker. They can give me information, but dealing is with the Ministry, so if there’s any court action, they go.

In Lovey’s case, through its representatives, the FMP took on the responsibility of appearing in court. This freed her from having to commute to the courthouse 100 kilometres away and finding child care while she was away. By choosing to engage the Family Maintenance Program, this relieved her of the burden of continually appearing in court at the whim of her ex-spouse, and it facilitated getting child support. It also freed up valuable time so Lovey could go to college to study for a career in nursing.

**Social Worker as Mentor**

Other women found mentors to help them in their transitions although not all women were so fortunate. A mentor from her childhood shaped Tusk’s experiences.

**Tusk.** In her transitions, Tusk believed not only were support networks crucial to women, but these relationships could open up new opportunities. While on welfare at the age of 16 in Ontario and commencing her own transitions from welfare, Tusk talked about a social worker that she had known ever since she had been about 10.
This social worker said, "You can be anything you want to be; you can do anything you wanna do. I have faith in you. You're a smart girl; you can do it." That stuck in my head. Since, I always had this big dream to succeed and become a social worker, so I ended up going to the college. They had Ontario Basic Skills Program.

Not only did Tusk find support from an early age, but she also encountered individuals along the way to assist her. They could be considered mentors. Years later, after enrolling in the Diploma for Social Work in Ontario, with the help of her supervisor at the Ministry office, she managed to get permission to do her practicum in social work in the welfare office. Later, when her car broke down, she was able to get transferred to an office closer to her home. Initially, her request to do her practicum had created an uproar because individuals on welfare were not allowed to work in the Ministry offices. However, once she was approved, for 9 months, Tusk worked closely with all the workers to learn about maintenance and disability pensions. During that time, Tusk explained:

I was taken under my old worker's wing. He showed me everything! As soon as I walked in the office, he says, "Tusk, come here. You're gonna be working with me." He was my very first worker when I was on welfare when I had my baby. He came and [did] a home visit with me.

This relationship continued even after Tusk finished her practicum and returned to college to complete her diploma.

Not Accepting the Support

Most women wanted support from networks and the system itself. However, at other times, women might not want the help, or they might not recognize when someone was attempting to offer support.

Diana. This may have happened to Diana. She knew: "There's a system to using the system" she had not figured out. During our first conversation, she told me about a financial aid worker living across the street from her. Diana was not sure if the man knew she was on welfare, but she did not want people to find out since she saw welfare as a shameful setback, particularly after having been an independent businesswoman. The man, her neighbor, was a financial aid worker on the local welfare office. Based on what she knew about him and his stories, Diana took a dislike to him because "He would tell me about his clientele. His attitude was, 'They come in, they want it, I give it to them; they go away. I can't fit them all in.
Government’s downsizing our office. There’s 5 people doing the work of 10.” However, this man tried to divulge information to Diana to assist her. “He would say, ‘If you ask them to pay for shampoo for lice,’ which was really expensive every time his kid brought us lice but the thought of telling someone about head lice. You could ask for these things, but I didn’t.” Thus, sometimes, women chose different solutions for issues presented to them when interacting with others in the everyday spaces of their lives. Again, their choices were bounded by the options they say, and the feelings the women held at the time.

Not Successful in Navigating the System

For some women, although they built support networks and wanted the system’s help, sometimes, they were not successful in navigating social structures they encountered. They could, in fact, be severely constrained until they found other social support and made alternate choices.

Kate Franschild. This happened to Kate Franschild as she attempted to recruit her naturopath to move her to Disability 2. Her recalcitrant naturopath further bounded her choice by forcing her to find a new naturopath and a doctor to create alternate supports. Kate Franschild noted she was capable of doing this; however, her health did not necessarily permit her. “I have networking skills to unmuddle that and get it across to a shrink what I’m going through is affecting my health mentally and physically. [But] they want me to just go get therapy.” Kate Franschild protested: “Sorry buster. I need food, clothing, and shelter on a reliable basis, plus things that help me maintain my health.”

This setback in her attempt to have others advocate for her medical condition actually pushed Kate Franschild towards talk of despair and suicide, both forms of pressure other women described. Kate Franschild was not alone, for Almond, Lilith, Moe, Ali, and Brown Bear, told me they had thought of committing suicide when systems they encountered had been too much to bear until they made a choice to fight back anew and find support to do it.

Summary Thoughts

Throughout this section, women described how they cultivated and used support networks to
navigate ever-changing constraints (social structures) hindering their needs. These networks provided women with valuable social relationships or social capital that assisted them in navigating policies, systems, stereotypes, or their social relationships. By acquiring social capital, women gained respect or prestige in the form of symbolic capital that assisted them in their transitions (Bourdieu, 1977; Harker, Mahar, & Wilkes, 1990).

Not only did women use support networks, but they also used self-directed learning projects. In the next section, I discuss these projects women engaged in to help them leave welfare for education and work or to obtain Disability.

**Strategic Bounded Choices through Self-Directed Learning**

**Self-Directed Learning as Strategy**

In addition to support networks, women used various forms of self-directed learning projects to facilitate their choices in navigating different policies, agencies, systems, and social relationships as structures to meet their needs. Such projects included self-directed research through reading, visiting libraries, surfing the Internet, and obtaining information from others. The women also engaged in self-directed learning projects as self-knowledge about their own needs, skills, and abilities or improvements in the form of social, cultural, and symbolic capital.

Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) maintain the structures individuals encounter in their daily lives whether it be culturally, globally, or locally act as catalysts for individuals to engage in learning projects to circumvent these situations. Brookfield (1993) contends that when individuals take control of their learning, it will likely bring them "into direct conflict with powerful entrenched interests" (p. 237) and structures. Brookfield states that individuals strategize against those appearing repressive or seeking to limit or constrain their choices.

Thus, self-directed or informal learning may be added as a strategy for individuals to acquire resources and improve relationships to make choices for opportunities to benefit their lives. In fact, despite different pressures or symbolic violence or entrenched authority as the apparatus of ruling within institutions, many women did choose their own opportunities as will be illustrated. Therefore, they frequently engaged in self-directed learning projects to help them
make the best choices they could under often oppressive and inhibiting circumstances within their lives. The women also chose self-directed learning projects to find out more about themselves to increase their self-esteem and self-confidence. In doing so, they learned more about policy and educational entitlements, medications, laws, skill building for employment, self-employment, and eventually helping others. Although women's projects may seem straightforward and objective, self-directed learning was fraught with emotions, and the path was circuitous and lengthy at times.

**Using Self-Directed Learning through Programs to Find out about Self and Resources**

As mentioned in Chapter 5, many women sought to rebuild their self-confidence and self-esteem, for they knew these were necessary if they hoped to find a job and keep it. They did this through various self-directed learning projects to find out about resources and opportunities as they navigated systems to enrol in programs leading to education or work.

**Tumbleweed: learning to research and navigate the system.** For example, after having resorted to welfare when she came to Chilliwack, Tumbleweed knew she eventually wanted to go to college. Before she could do that, though, Tumbleweed needed to take the first steps in rebuilding her self-esteem and in deciding upon an educational path. One of the first things that Tumbleweed did was to research the different types of careers that might be open to her, education she would need, and the length of time it would take to reach her goals. As part of her self-directed learning initiative, Tumbleweed decided to enrol in a 6-week career planning course to give her a direction. During that time, “I did a lot of research thinking about what I’d like to go into on different careers, personality typing, what jobs you’re suited for, research in the library,[and] informational interviewing.” Tumbleweed said, the course also “made me think was there going to be jobs available, so you look at forecasts, books, and research whether there’s an increase, steady, or decline in those jobs for the future.”

While Tumbleweed was doing this career research, she saw an ad in the newspaper for a pre-employment program for women. She felt this would provide the next steps off welfare. Although she had taken other programs, they had been co-ed. As suggested in Chapter 5, a supportive, all women’s program could help women resolve personally constraining issues
while they practiced new skills. To do this, women needed to build self-esteem and self-confidence while exploring job options. Tumbleweed knew that she had skills and knowledge; however, the length of time it was taking her to leave welfare made her feel: “The light at the end of the tunnel was diminishing. Everything I felt for the last two and a half years, I was struggling to overcome, get myself out of that situation, was starting to diminish. I was just ready to give up.”

Once the pre-employment program staff had admitted Tumbleweed, she found she had another constraint to navigate various structures. Instead of being able to go into the offices and make an appointment, Tumbleweed was told that the training consultant made her own appointments, so “You have to call and make an appointment. I couldn’t just walk in and make an appointment. I had to go home and call. The receptionist doesn’t take bookings.” Three days later, Tumbleweed encountered another constraint limiting her choices: the training consultant and welfare policies. Because Tumbleweed had only been on welfare for 4 months, the training consultant said, “We don’t have a file on you. You have to come in and get a file going.” Tumbleweed already knew that she wanted education, but “Before they could do anything I had to take Starting Points. It’s a 2-day program to find out what you want to do.” Even though Tumbleweed tried to convince the training consultant that she already had her goals planned, “You have to take this program to be eligible. It has to be on record, on file, you attended. For them, it’s attendance. It’s numbers. To be eligible before she can Ok anything or give me permission to attend schooling [I had to attend the program even] after I took the career program at Douglas.” Tumbleweed complied. However, when she attempted to register for Starting Points, Tumbleweed found again that she had to go home, call, make an appointment, return, and put her name on a list. Luckily, she had asked what else she needed to do. She was told she needed a form from her training consultant. This meant another trip to the offices, for the training consultant (TC) would not take the form next door to Starting Points. Tumbleweed wondered how single moms without transportation would have managed to run around and jump hoops that had been presented to her if they were not as self-directed and motivated as she was.

Tumbleweed thought once she attended Starting Points everything would be resolved.
However, “to attend Starting Points, I was supposed to be on welfare for 10 months. I had to convince my TC, ‘No, I really want to start now. I don’t want to wait ‘til next year or for 10 months.’” Government policy dictated that an individual had to be on welfare “before they’ll actually waste their time or money. To me, they’ve already wasted ten months of money on this 2-day program.”

Not only did Tumbleweed depend on her own self-directed learning projects, but she also relied on the support networks within the community and even casual conversations with others. Her experiences made Tumbleweed wonder why such a struggle had to ensue with the different staff at the various agencies after she had done all the research to determine what she needed to do. “They won’t give you information. They won’t share it, [so] it’s like it’s top secret stuff. They expect you to find out yourself. It seems if you’re not working, then you need to work for information you get, and you do work for it.”

Even after women had done their own research, sometimes, as in Tumbleweed’s case, women were made to feel inadequate or like children despite their extensive life experiences. The training consultant probably did not expect Tumbleweed to choose to follow through on her well-researched project about the pre-employment program.

You need permission. I felt like a 2-year-old kid asking my mom [for] a cookie. She made me feel [I] didn’t know how to make a decision. Then, if I didn’t attend programs, I wouldn’t know how to make a decision. I didn’t know how to set goals because I’m on welfare, I must be stupid. I had to argue with her. I explained calmly and diplomatically, “I understand you have this ten month thing, but if I wait 10 months, this is the time of year it’s going to be. It would be too late to start in the program. I want to be in now so I’m finished by September. I will be able to go to school full time. It’s very important I do the program for me to accomplish what I need to do for myself. I know I can do school. [and] do one right after the other. If I wait ten months, I’m looking at two years. That’s 2 years extra of collecting welfare.” If I start now, I’ll be off two years earlier.

Tumbleweed felt like a struggle was developing between the training consultant and herself over Tumbleweed’s choices and decisions Tumbleweed felt “She didn’t like I knew what I was talking about. Her body language was, ‘Well,’ she sat back and twisted her pen as if, ‘I have to make a decision. Can I let this person actually make their own decision?’” Although the training consultant did not give Tumbleweed credit for her decisions and the research she had done, the training consultant did concede: “I’m going to have to talk to my supervisor.
Maybe we can make an exception.” I was still made to feel stupid [and] to feel it’s their decision. I could not make that decision although I had done all the work, planning, research, legwork in 5 months.”

Embedded within the training consultant’s job and supported by government policies (Smith, 1987), the consultant had the power to determine Tumbleweed’s life opportunities by approving or disapproving of Tumbleweed’s choices she had provided for herself through her own self-directed research. Tumbleweed also understood although she had made a choice, it definitely was bounded or constrained by the will of the agents of the systems. However, this did not stop Tumbleweed because “I didn’t want to miss the window for [the program]. My TC probably wasn’t very comfortable with that. But she could not deny what I said was untrue. She did call me back the following day and say I did have permission [for] school.”

Not only did women need to undertake their own self-directed learning projects, but they also needed to have the determination to follow them through when they encountered the structures Tumbleweed did.

**Cactus: learning new skills.** Tumbleweed was not the only woman to have conducted this type of research. Other women had nudges or help from people that gave them incentive to begin navigating their way off welfare through self-directed learning projects. Through this type of investigation, they chose to enter programs to learn more about themselves and new skills. Cactus was one of the many women using a program as a learning project to acquire more skills. “If you’ve been out of work, or you haven’t gone to programs for a while, in a year’s time, you wouldn’t believe the new technology, those programs [have]. Maybe I can get one more step ahead, learn something else, or the next step, especially with computers.” Cactus, like other women, chose learning projects to provide an edge in the workforce.

**Advancing/Advocacy: learning about community resources.** Advancing/Advocacy often undertook self-directed learning projects to uncover available resources within the community that could help her navigate different situations. This could be programs, volunteer centres, counselling, women’s centres, clothing for work, or just information listing community resources. After moving from Chilliwack to White Rock, Advancing/Advocacy quickly began
going around the community to identify and locate these local resources.

Surviving, I didn’t know there was that kind of help, but the Women’s Place has a lot of material. You can go for help to apply for assistance, disability, housing, or legal help, or whatever. They’ve got job postings on a board. They have a very good resource library. They [have] free clothing. If you are going to [a] work interview or starting a job, you can pick up three free outfits. They have quite a good selection. They’ve got accessories. They’ve got counseling there. I have been a few times using their telephone ‘cause I was looking for housing, and I really didn’t want to say anything to [the woman I’m staying with] about it.

In her research of the community, in addition to free clothing at the Women’s Place, Advancing/Advocacy found other community resources. She said with her new knowledge, she approached problems differently. She also now knew that each community had more resources available than women might know about to help them with their transitions.

Through these types of self-directed learning projects, the women, then, chose the means to learn about themselves or acquire skills despite having their opportunities bound by experts interpreting policies. These women and others in my study improved their choices for transitions through research, programs, and knowledge, and self-respect as they opened more opportunities for themselves through their decisions.

**Learning Policy Entitlements and Rights**

Other women discovered if they learned about entitlements provided through welfare policies, they could navigate structures more easily to obtain their needs. They engaged in self-directed learning projects to find out their rights to use policies to their benefit.

**Mabel: educating self about entitlements and rights.** Mabel undertook self-directed learning through her own conscious effort to educate herself by reading all the pamphlets on rights, entitlements, and policies she found in welfare offices. “I read every bit of literature they put into the [welfare] office. You can pick up the little folder they’ve got on [the wall] about your rights, obligations, benefits, and I read them, keep them at home. Why shouldn’t I?” Ultimately, Mabel believed by knowing her rights and entitlements, she could meet her needs. Also, she understood she must navigate the power struggles she encountered in social relationships that inhibited or repressed her choices (Brookfield, 1993). As Mabel pointed out,
"If you don't educate yourself and say, 'I believe I'm entitled to this, or I'd like to apply for this.' I'm not doing anything illegal. I'm exercising my rights. I think with most clients, they don't want you to do that 'cause it means money from government." By doing this, Mabel was able to meet her other needs through her research. One time, "I applied for a furniture grant; [I] had to write a letter explaining why I needed furniture. Then, I had to get estimates from three different furniture places. I did. I took them all in." Although her choice was bounded by government policies, Mabel complied, for it would give her the opportunity to fulfil her needs. As a result, she said, "I picked up the check for $500 in my name to spend on furniture."

By reading and researching, Mabel became informed about her entitlements and rights. She felt this was extremely important, for it helped her make choices to obtain welfare entitlements and services. Mabel described this form of self-directed learning as being resourceful. Additionally, whenever she found an opportunity, Mabel shared her findings with other single mothers within the community (Dobson, 2001). "I've even told other women about things they can get like the woman I met on the bus. I told her to go to the welfare office to get help. She has rights as a single mother. I told her to go to the transition house."

**Ann: learning to expand policies' meanings.** Ann had worked as an advocate for the mentally handicapped, so she was aware how to navigate different tensions and hindrances she encountered in social relationships. Ann used her own knowledge and previous skills to expand policy definitions in her favour and for her own protection. As Ann related her story to me after commencing a relationship with a man, "I knew what I needed. I had an IUD 10 years ago. [I] haven't had need of birth control, but down I trundle. Doctor takes the old one out: 'You need a new one.' Medical doesn't pay for it because I'm on government medical."

Undaunted, Ann drew upon her knowledge of the law. She refused to let government policies bound her choices and decision to control her body and her health.

So I call my social worker. I ask. He says, "No. You have to go on the birth control pill. We won't give you, well, your medical will cover your birth control pill. That's the only [one]. It has to be a prescription." I said, "I got the prescription for the IUD." He says, "No, we don't cover it." So I said, "Are we talking age discrimination here?" This guy went, "What?!" I said, "I can't take the birth control pill. I'm 42 years old. You want to spend $25
a month on me doing that, fine. Why not spend $50 now and have it good for six years?” He said, “No, we can’t do that. It can’t be done.” I said, “So you’re telling me you are discriminating against me because of my age?” He says, “I need to talk to my supervisor.” I said, “You do that.” He phoned me back ten minutes later. He says, “We figured out a way. You’ll get it.” Of course, it could be done. They just didn’t want to bother.

As Ann repudiated allowing those in power to inhibit her choices, she, also, planned to share her knowledge so other women knew they too had these options (Dobson, 2001). Ann was not afraid to push social relationships to ensure she had choices in her decision making. “Once I find out, I spread it around a lot. I make sure other people know. It’s stupid things like that. Do you know how embarrassing it is when your social worker’s a guy, and you’ve got to talk to him about this IUD?”

Ann believed self-directed research was extremely important.

Any time someone in government says, “No, you can’t do this, or no, it can’t be done, or no, no, no, no,” they say that ’cause it’s easier. If you really want true information, then it’s probably really important you research it yourself really thoroughly. I’m smart enough. I’m intelligent enough. I have the cognitive thinking ability to do that. Lots of girls can’t. Lots of women can’t. I really resent that. To me, it’s discrimination. I found screaming helps. The more noise you make, the more likelihood you will be looked after. The squeaky wheel gets the grease.

Thus, through their self-directed research on policies, the law, and entitlements, women like Mabel and Ann navigated different interpretations of policies they encountered. Through their actions, women challenged gendered policies and gendered notions of sexuality and women’s health. At the same time, these women sought to share the results of their self directed learning projects with other women they encountered in their communities (Dobson, 2001).

Learning for Healthy Living

I found most if not all were taking or had been prescribed medication for depression or anxiety at some point during their time on welfare. Many women in my study told me that doctors tended to prescribe medication instead of exploring the underlying problem making a woman feel depressed. Some women like Tumbleweed and Lilith began to question the medications they were prescribed, and took it upon themselves to learn more about these.

Tumbleweed: learning about medications. Tumbleweed, for example, undertook her own
self-directed research in the library to understand the type of drugs she had been prescribed. Tumbleweed described what she learned. "I did my own research. When I moved to Chilliwack. I sat in that library quite a few times going through medical books and making a list [of drugs' patented and] generic name. I have two-page, regular school paper, both sides full of drugs and medications I've been taking the last 10 or 20 years for depression, anxiety, panic attacks." By doing her own research, Tumbleweed wanted to be prepared if she needed to make choices about medication in the future. She discovered she was taking:

mixtures of different drugs, cocktails. They give you two, three different kinds at a time; then, you wonder why you were a walking zombie. That's what I was, just a walking zombie. Couldn't even think for myself. When I started going to the library to find out the side effects, what these drugs are really used for, and what they're supposed to be used for. They're anti-convulsive medications! I don't have convulsions! I'm not epileptic.

Tumbleweed compared her findings about the drugs she was taking to those prescribed to the clients she interacted with on her job as a recreational therapist. She believed psychiatrists were just medicating her patients to keep them passive just like they seemed to do with women on welfare. She questioned her depression and the label doctors attached to her: unable to cope.

Lilith: using resources to learn about health alternatives. As Lilith had mentioned to me, the helping professions diagnosed her with a mental illness and then overmedicated her. Thus, she was more apprehensive about conventional medicine, so she took an alternative more natural route to controlling her anxiety and eating disorder through diaphragmatic breathing, yoga, and calming techniques. Lilith discovered these alternatives to medications when she undertook extensive Internet research daily at the library. Through these Web searches, Lilith also engaged in self-directed learning about local services available to her and innovative research being done elsewhere. For example, Lilith found educational academic reports with answers to her questions about her anxiety disorder. Thus, through her own inquiry, Lilith sought to help herself as well as circumvent decisions made by others over her health, particularly those constructed by the mental health care system. In addition, Lilith shared this information with her support networks and other health professionals in Chilliwack. She felt obligated to help educate her networks so they might support her better in the choices she would make (Dobson, 2001).
Furthermore, through her own self-directed learning, Lilith gained more knowledge about herself, strengths in communicating and interacting with others, and ability to gather information for community action. She was also aware of her weaknesses in the form of nervousness and anxiety and her attributes and the unlived potentialities she possessed while still being controlled by these health issues.

Learning about Entitlements for Funding Education

Often policy has hidden entitlements that could help women in their transitions. Even welfare workers may not know about these benefits. Thus, women must diligently research them. Sometimes, they discover these by accident or word of mouth. Then, like Tusk and Susan, they use self-directed research to find out more about these policy entitlements so they may strategize how to pay for opportunities, such as education. The policies Tusk and Susan found gave them choices they might not have thought about otherwise. By acquiring an education, this would give them other options to explore some of their unlived potentialities an education could provide.

Tusk: learning about hidden entitlements. In Tusk’s case, she was pursuing a diploma in social work and doing her practicum in her old welfare office under the tutelage of her first social worker. While on her practicum, Tusk made sure she became familiar with policy and entitlements. “There was a lot of different loopholes I had no idea about what you could do, what kind of monies you could access, funding requirements, fundraising, and just eligibility requirements were phenomenal.” As Tusk put together a resource booklet on eligibility requirements for other welfare recipients during her student practicum for social work at the Ministry (Dobson, 2001), she made a surprising and little known discovery. She found a clause within the income maintenance for “the Ministry of Community and Social Services that stated they would help sponsor an individual to go to university. That was very unknown. I read the rules, the legislation. I read it cover to cover.”

After finishing her social work diploma, undaunted and armed with her research, Tusk went to her old social worker, her mentor. She stated: “I’ve applied for OSAP, but I’m still on mother’s allowance. There is a clause within the Income Maintenance Act that states that
Income Maintenance Department, the Ministry of Community and Social Services, will sponsor a person on mother’s allowance to continue their education.” Questioning the veracity of Tusk’s findings, an interesting struggle over opportunity presented itself to Tusk when her mentor said:

“‘No, there is no such thing in the Ministry’s handout [Tusk], I know the system; I know the rules. I’m sorry, but there’s no such thing.” I said, “Let me show you.” I pulled it out of my briefcase, handed it to him, and I said, “Does that clause not state that you will sponsor me?” He just didn’t know what to say. He looked and said, “You’re right! Let me do some investigation for you.”

As Tusk saw an opportunity for her choice to be fulfilled,

I gave him a copy of my McMaster acceptance letter into the Bachelor of Social Work program. I said, “I really want this. I want you to help me. It states you could help someone. Well, I want the help. I deserve that much. I’ve been on the system too damn long. I want someone to fight with me, not against me. Help me get off the system.” Four days later, he calls me back: “[Tusk], we’re going to help you.” I got $10,000 from the Ministry of Community and Social Services to help me continue my education.

As illustrated, 19 years prior to our conversations, Tusk’s research provided her with new opportunities to investigate her unlived potentialities (Alheit, 1994). She chose to pursue them with the hopes of more opportunities opening up for her as she sought to leave welfare.

Susan: learning the system for funding education. In my conversations with Susan, she was just beginning to explore options that might be available to her in British Columbia’s economic and social welfare climate. During the late 1990s, when Susan began to explain to me her decision to pursue a Bachelor of Science degree, Susan had already been receiving the Student Opportunity Grant (SOG), now called the Canada Study Grant. For her upgrading, Susan had also been eligible for another grant, but as she was going to move into college level courses, she had to begin to think about how she would pay for her education.

I’m on Canada Pension Disability. It’ll work two ways. They’ll either pay for your schooling for two years. They’ll only pay for up to 2 years ‘cause they figure after two years you’re employable, so I could go for 2 years, get a diploma, and go work. They would cut me off. Or I could go for 2 years, have them pay, and finance my last two years myself. But after that 2-year period, then I’m completely cut off for disability. That’s scary because they figure you’ve gone to school, so you’re rehabilitated after 2 years, you’ve gone, and you’ve made yourself employable.

In addition to strategizing how to pay for her education, Susan continually thought about how her health would affect her education. Since her arthritis was progressing again, Susan began
to consider her choices for funding her 4-year degree: “I would rather keep collecting Disability. It works out better just to stay on Disability for that extra two years as opposed to getting cut off. I don’t have to worry about working and supporting myself. I just have to pay for my education.”

Although women in my study may have had similar goals, they had to strategize their opportunities to fit their lives. To Susan, obtaining an education was extremely important. She knew and felt it would provide her with other opportunities she might not foresee as she was working her way through college. Susan also alluded to the fact that education would bring her new respect and status with her family and others.

Learning for Entering the Labour Market

Not only did women engage in self-directed learning projects for strategizing how to get an education, they also did so for entering into the labour market. When I spoke to Lovey, Mary, and Gloria, they were in different phases of their own learning projects.

**Lovey: learning new skills.** First of all, Lovey sought to acquire up-to-date skills. However, as mentioned, Lovey found it harder to work because she needed time off for court. Employers usually found this difficult to understand. Despite this hindrance, Lovey chose to provide herself with another opportunity to learn new office skills by volunteering at the local Resource Library. “I wanted to do something to keep my skills up as far as office work.” Therefore, Lovey decided to go to Community Services to find out, “If I could get some recent office experience on the resume, then maybe, I can get some work They sent me a few places. I like the Resource Library.”

While volunteering, Lovey helped welfare recipients learn about their rights and resources, such as the food bank, legal services, advocates, and other services, available to them in Chilliwack (Dobson, 2001). She felt this was a good way to improve her office skills as well as gain more knowledge about services, rights, and entitlements for welfare recipients while she was waiting to get into a pre-employment program. Like other women, Lovey decided to enrol in a pre-employment program for self-improvement, acquire more skills, and learn more
about creating social networks. Through her own self-knowledge and self-directed learning about the Chilliwack community, Lovey could obtain more capital in the form of skills and experience, but it would also provide her with more career choices for future employment that led her to enrol at the college to pursue a career in nursing.

**Mary: learning through workshops and self-education.** When Mary first began her job search, she too had been out of the labour market for years even though she held a part-time low paying retail job while on welfare. When I met Mary for the first time, she was beginning her quest for a good job with benefits. She started her learning project by deciding to take some workshops at a local women’s employment centre. “Applying on my own isn’t helping, so I may as well do a few things [like] this course [and] going to the [women’s centre] helps you know what’s in the real world. It makes you think, ‘You can do it!’” Furthermore, Mary developed networks with the staff: “The ladies are nice. They give you their time; they remember you.” Also, they told Mary about other resources like counsellors and programs available in the community. To help herself become more marketable and gain self-confidence, Mary enrolled in some of the workshops at the women’s centre. “I just finished Communication and Assertiveness. I found that was really good - just how to speak your piece and not be insecure about it. Say, ‘No,’ nicely instead of yelling or getting upset.” She planned to take “another one I’m going to do is Interviewing Skills. It builds your confidence. They even have clothes you can wear if you have to go for a job interview.” Mary understood how important networking skills were, and she felt she was creating new job networks just by attending the seminars. In essence, Mary strategized how to update and improve her skills for employment while acquiring more knowledge and creating wider social networks through the workshops she attended and by participating in the women’s employment centre.

As mentioned earlier, Mary applied to the prisons with the goal of getting a job, but she failed the entry test. However, undaunted, she began to prepare to take it a second time and pass. I was quite amazed with the learning project Mary described to ensure she was eligible for work at the prison. Mary explained her strategic process in preparing for the test:

I thought, “I’m going to retake this test, and if I fail, I’ll just do it again until I pass that test!” I got my old GED book and just brushed up and went through all the most frequently spelled words [to] see which ones I
couldn’t [spell and] didn’t [know] and just brushed up a bit. [I reviewed] math and English because I can’t remember fractions. I [did that] ‘cause I know what you need to do for a test. I knew what it had in it before. Even before I did it too with my little tape recorder, I had said the words, and then I wrote them. [I studied] for about 4 days. I passed. I was happy.

Mary’s determination and hard work through her learning project to pass the test paid off despite her initial feelings. Mary believed she could teach herself what to learn and plan the strategies for passing the test to become employed within the prison system, and she accomplished her goal. Furthermore, Mary’s attitude had changed based on what she was learning about herself and what she needed to do in to make inroads into the work world. “I know I’m not going to get anywhere if I don’t, but it’s hard when you’re that kind of person.” This experience had also transferred to other parts of Mary’s life as she began a new learning project. “I’m reading this book that I saw on Oprah: *Life Strategies*. It’s a self-help book. You have to make your own life. Pick your choices. Stick by them [even] if they don’t work out.” She went on to say, “When things happen to make you change, it’s so hard on you. [I’m] just trying to [change].”

Through Mary’s efforts of becoming employed in a job with good wages and health benefits, she divulged to me through explanations of her experiences the hindering situations and relationships she had found. Additionally, Mary alluded to the attributes, social relationships, and status necessary to penetrate new social environments. Moreover, through her choices and her learning projects, Mary illustrated how she decided to open up new opportunities for herself despite her choices being bounded at times. Mary consciously chose to navigate the experiences she encountered no matter how difficult they seemed.

**Gloria: learning about self-employment.** Unlike Lovey and Mary, Gloria attempted to enter into the work world in a different way after reflecting on her strengths and weaknesses. She also considered the community where she lived: Chilliwack. Gloria believed age, particularly in a place like Chilliwack, could be a drawback. Therefore, Gloria insisted a woman should be creative and learn new ways to earn money by taking all factors into consideration. “There are different avenues of making employment – like [kitchen products]. Why am I doing [the Pampered Chef products]? I like to cook. You have to eat.” In her plan for earning an income, Gloria also factored in the caring work for her family.
I think women are getting smart and looking at self-employment. Women are going back to the sixties; we want to be at home. We’re good at home. It’s been hard and frightening out there. But what can we do from home and still be a viable part of our family, a productive part of our community. We’re getting smart. Let’s take a look at what we’re good at, and let’s do it. Women are looking for different ways.

Gloria had researched her social networks and the gendered community as well as her “station in life” to determine the opportunities for the products she was thinking of selling. “Whether or not you like to cook, you gotta do it.” She believed that the Pampered Chef has “affordable quality products, earning potential [and] might get me off welfare if within the year I can be earning $1000 a month. With this, I can do a part-time minimum [wage] job, 13 hours a week, and this on the side. I’ve got my first party Friday.”

During our conversation, Gloria discussed at length her own research on the kitchen products as a possible means for choosing self-employment to lead her off welfare. By investigating those selling the products, the market of other women, and the earning potential from the product, Gloria came to the conclusion not only might it be a good business venture, but it would also allow her flexibility in performing her caring work for her children. Thus, Gloria’s self-directed learning project provided her with the choice albeit a risky one.

Summary Thoughts
Only 3 women clearly identified themselves as resourceful agents of their own choices and opportunities whereas 11 women attributed their successes in making choices to “I’m lucky.” However, their actions actually depicted their strategic resourcefulness. While discussing and describing their experiences, the women told me incredible stories of strategizing to navigate structures as experts, social relationships, policies, systems, and institutions, to name a few, to provide themselves with opportunities to meet their daily needs and to make transitions to new social environments or social spaces: employment, education, or disability. As they sought to navigate the structures the women encountered, others imbued them, or the women acquired social, cultural, and symbolic capitals to facilitate their entry into these new arenas. Although the women certainly did not identify education, skills, social networks, respect, and other things as types of capital, they did, in fact, know they needed certain intangible attributes to help them get where and what they wanted. As they navigated the structures,
they sometimes found themselves in conflict and struggling for power with agents of the state, family, friends, institutions, ex-partners, employers, and policies. The women's interpretation of their needs created collisions within and between social relationships and policies women critically examined to determine what was in their best interests (Fraser, 1989). Other agents sought to bound women's choices through various types of social pressure, or treatment as symbolic violence that confronted the women's knowledge of the "rules of the game" within social relationships and spaces (Bourdieu, 1977). When the women encountered opposition to their choices or opportunities, they stepped back, learned from the situation, and restrategized other options (Alheit, 1994; 1995; Bourdieu, 1977; Brookfield, 1993). Their initial choices may not have been the exact ones they had foreseen, but they were flexible and had learned enough in their transitions to make other choices by selecting other opportunities or unlived potentialities (Alheit, 1995). Consequently, they made bounded choices (Riemer, 2001) with the help of support networks and self-directed learning projects as strategies.

Often, women on welfare do not have characteristics, such as political agent attributed or attached to them. However, through their stories and by watching these women for over 2 years, I disagree as would Bertaux (1981), Bourdieu (1977), Brookfield (1993), (Dobson, 2001), Fraser (1989), and Riemer (2001). I saw and heard women become strategic political agents for themselves and for others through problem-posing and self-directed learning. Thus, despite what some may think, based on what emerged from the analysis of the women's stories, I believe these women acted as and navigated their everyday worlds as strategic political act-ors or citizens. This will be discussed in more depth in the next section: women as political agents and as citizens.

**Women on Welfare as Political Agents in the Everyday as Problematic**

Whom we recognize as citizens depends upon what qualifies as the behavior of citizens. (Jones, 1990, p. 783)

**Worker-Citizen or Mother-Citizen**

Efforts have been made to construct welfare policy in BC on a citizenship model. However, despite attempts to incorporate life cycle activities and needs into it, the current policy was based on a gendered model of worker-citizen. This citizen works outside the home and pays
taxes. Consequently, welfare policy in BC has identified and defined women as non-participating, unemployed workers, not performing their civic duty of paying taxes (Kerans, 1994). This discounts unpaid caring labour of dependency workers and of mothers, thus, disregarding the important work mothers perform.

Even though Maya’s son was only 4, she had attended a pre-employment program in preparation to look for work intending to buy into the importance of being a taxpaying, paid worker-citizen.

Maya explained caring for her young son was caring for the next generation of citizens. She believed this was just as worthy as paid labour outside the home and should be considered valid work. “I’m working to produce a citizen here, a responsible adult, and so I look at it as a job.” However, before she had reached that conclusion, she said:

   I felt like I had to go out and find job, or I had to prove I was doing something. I didn’t even appreciate raising [my son] before. I’d just say, “Oh, I’m just a mom.” To society, it wasn’t enough just to be a mom just for my son. I’m choosing to be on [assistance] right now. I use it as a stepping stone. It’s a choice to go up to that desk and say, “Well, I’ve got these priorities now, and this is what fits for me, so I’m applying ‘cause this is the best way it’s going to work.” I made the choice to stay home with my son and raise him. I look at it as a job as like I’m working to produce a citizen, a responsible adult, and so I look at it as a job.

Heather pointed out that there is more work to being a mother than caring work. It was becoming part of one’s public community. “When there’s little community events, I like to take him and let him be part of life.”

Almond hoped “that mothers will be recognized as a job and not just a thing they got stuck with. Most mothers are not just meant to be mothers; they’re more than mothers.”

**Age Limits on Mothering**

Even if women such as Maya, Heather, Taylor with their pre-schoolers wanted to stay home and care for their children or “do nothing,” the public welfare state policies had limits dictating how long a woman could stay home to care for her child, for it is not “real work” (Baker & Tippin, 1999). As Taylor put it, “People think, other women, it’s really so easy to stay home
Today’s welfare policies identify and value individuals as those working outside the home engaged in “real work.” However, during my study from 1998 to 2001, government deemed it permissible for women on welfare with young children to stay home to care for them until they attended first grade at age 7. (By 2002, women could only stay home until their children turned 3-years old.) Taylor disagreed her activities were not “real” work.

Welfare policy requirements were omnipresent moulding women into particular types of workers as the clock ticked away for women and their children. Always at the back of the minds of preschoolers’ mothers was the pressure of limited time during their children’s early years to teach them and engage in different forms of mother’s work. At the same time, single mothers navigated these pressures created by social relationships by making their own choices and defining their options, and resulting actions even if they were bounded. Women chose to explore their unlived potentialities they deemed important (Alheit, 1992; 1994; 1995).

Mothers’ caring work is not considered “real” or legitimate work (Baker & Tippin, 1999), for it produces no product or paid labour, despite attempts to alter social policy to include caring work. By valuing caring work, women could be recognized as contributing, taxpayers. This still appears to promote the gendered view of citizenship. Although adding this dimension to work and citizenship is important, the women in my study pushed the definition even further with their strategic choices as they navigated transitions in their everyday lives as political, social agents, and, ultimately, social activist citizens. I lead up to this by illustrating how the women embodied criteria associated with citizenship within their everyday lives.

**Other Qualities of Citizenship**

As mentioned in the literature review chapter, citizenship is based on civil, political, and social rights (Marshall (1983) as cited in Gabriel, 1996) and participation in the public community (Dietz, 1987; Lister, 1990).

**Place of birth.** Citizenship also includes place of birth as in the case of Almond as an East Indian woman born in India and the privileges of immigrating to another country. “When I
came into this country, we thought the move was going to be helpful, but we became [farm]
labourers. We were very lucky to have an East Indian teacher hired for my family to learn
English. People say I don’t have an accent.”

**Particular status.** Maya also had particular privileges allocated to her through the Federal
Indian Act’s Bill C-32 granting her some rights of a full status native Indian. However, her
son was not entitled to these rights: “Because my son’s father was non-native, my son has no
status at all.”

**Freedom from.** Not only does citizenship by birth or naturalization enshrine rights, privileges,
and social programs from the state, but it can mean independence and freedom from state
programs and making contributions like other citizens. Maya spoke of the freedom she had
felt as she checked off the “No” box on her welfare pay stub, indicating she would no longer
be collecting welfare. Cactus had expressed “feeling light” when she did the same. Taylor had
explained she too experienced a sense of “freedom” when she left welfare for a full time job.
When Diana and Taylor made transitions from welfare, they believed they had regained their
privacy from the constant questioning and prying eyes of government workers seeking
answers about the women’s activities. Thus, citizenship may be more than place of birth or
birth rights. Citizenship can also mean freedom from state intervention.

**Gendered citizenship.** The concept of citizenship seems to be equated with and valued as
paid work in the public domain, particularly by men able to support a dependent wife (Fraser
& Gordon, 1994). Thus, citizenship has acquired a gendered dimension to it as traditionally
men have been the breadwinners. Now, even if a mother is single, she too finds she is
expected to work in the public domain for pay in addition to performing her mother’s caring
work in the home. Not all work has equal value. It is the type that is valued. This has been
determined by the state and society as waged work outside the home. Citizenship is much
more, though. It includes choices (Horowitz, 1995).
Citizens Make Choices: Women as Oppositional Agents Make Choices

Citizens as Political Agents

As mentioned, a citizen is defined as a taxpayer. Economic independence provides power by allowing individuals to make choices (Bourdieu, 1977; Lister, 1990). By this definition, women on welfare do not qualify as citizens. However, this study suggests another dimension of women on welfare as citizens: strategic political agents acting in opposition to policymakers and experts by making their own choices, albeit bounded ones (Fraser, 1989).

Forms of Control or Symbolic Violence

By challenging construction of their needs, women often encountered forms of control or symbolic violence embedded within the system that tried to direct their choices and opportunities.

Diana: control over decisions. Diana noted: “The system takes over your life [and] decisions. They make you fill out forms because they’re paternalistically taking over your control.” Thus, a tension developed between those in power and the women as they chose to fulfill their needs based on their daily experiences. Diana wondered about government policies and workers: “Why do you think after 2 days you [welfare] can come in and change what I had working in my life for years? So we had this big fight. Legally you have to do [what they say]. That’s when I went down there and said, ‘Phhh, forget it! [I] don’t want your help, so no help [for me from you].’”

Kate Franschild: scrutiny and threat of losing a child. As the women challenged and struggled with individuals and institutions possessing real or symbolic power, Kate Franschild pointed out: “Because you’re in a social welfare system, you are more accountable than anyone else on any economy level. You are watched 24 hours a day and judged for every move you make, every breath you take.”

Women continually experienced overt and covert pressures or control as symbolic violence imposed upon them if they did not conform to the rules of the game or possess particular attributes. According to Kate Franschild, “You are likely to lose your child or die of fear of
them taking away your child. It's all justified under ‘nobody should damn well get anymore than they deserve.’ You're assumed to be a criminal because you have less.”

**Strategic Choices**

These women made complex and strategic choices for opportunities. Through their actions, women extend the “good choices/bad choices” (Kelly, 2000) and “sensible choice” (Solinger, 1999) discourses. Inherent in controlling choices and, therefore, life opportunities is citizenship. To make choices, women used two strategies: support networks and self-directed learning. By creating social networks, women accrued social support and status through association with more powerful individuals to help them leave welfare. Through self-directed learning projects, women acquired education, knowledge, and relationships by attending programs or courses to build self-esteem and practice skills. They researched policies through the Internet and libraries to learn rights and plan careers to meet their unlived potentialities as citizens (Alheit, 1994).

**Oppositional Agents Make Choices**

As illustrated throughout the thesis, struggles ensued within social relationships between those in power and the women. Through their efforts to take control of their choices, the women became oppositional agents to the structures (Brookfield, 1993; Fraser, 1989). Even though experts bound the women’s choices, the women, like the participants in Riemer’s (2001) study, made their own decisions even though these were constrained by the opportunities presented to them.

**Gloria: taking a stand.** Gloria’s story, for example, illustrates a woman taking a stand against social control (Horowitz, 1995) and making her own choices. When she was in the pre-employment program, Gloria also “took [a] class at the college in Abbotsford. I was told: “You're not doing enough. You're just taking one course. You should be able to do a work experience in too.” However, according to Gloria, she was doing much more than she was given credit for by the program staff as Gloria commuted to Abbotsford twice a week.

I had to leave no later than quarter to ten. The class started at 1:00. I would leave my house in Chilliwack, catch the bus to the Greyhound, catch the Greyhound to Abbotsford, wait for the bus, catch the city bus, go to the
exchange, transfer, and that bus came in around noon to the college for a 1:00 class. Class is over at 4:00. I'd get home at 7:00. Also, I was dealing with my ex-partner, my kids, [and] a hell-raiser of a 17-year-old daughter. So I was told I wasn't doing enough.

This made Gloria feel that she and the other women were not recognized as adults able to make their own choices or given credit for all they were doing while trying to make transitions from welfare. According to Gloria, even when women were encouraged to make their own decisions, this was not the real intention – to have women choose. "You're always in that push pull. It's like we need permission for someone to say, 'You can do what you want.' [Then], you go into programs, and there's this hoopla, 'You can do it.' And then they say, 'Hold it.'"

Despite being treated like a child in the program, Gloria acted as an oppositional agent by strategizing to get to Abbotsford and by not dropping out of the college course as she might have normally done when she was treated disrespectfully. Gloria contested the trainer's interpretation of Gloria's choices. The experience left Gloria with bitter feelings about this particular pre-employment program. Even though it had been recommended highly, Gloria felt women on welfare were being exploited.

**Collette: getting what you want and need.** Although other women in my study agreed that women were being exploited, they chose to use the program to their benefit. Collette confided to me that she felt the people in the community would not hire her because of her accent. "I had to pass that barrier. I got into a program because I knew it was going to be difficult to get [a] job. I have to spend 6 months in a training [program] I didn't need. In my case, I was totally trained [and] educated." Collette believed she was admitted to the program because "They know I was going to get [a] job. It's a business. They work with statistics, so they try to get into the program women they feel are going to find a job at the end. [They took me] because I was going to be [a] success; that means success for them in statistics. [I was] used."

On the other hand, Collette strategized to use the program. Despite being exploited, Collete said, "Yes, I got a job out of it." Even though Collette found a job,

When we left, women were going to [other programs]. There were women who succeeded, but even though some got training, they later [went back to welfare]. They get out of the program with high self-esteem. They learn how to dress up; they get to know how to comb their hair, but as soon as
they feel, “I’m pretty,” [some] get into a bad relationship; they get into [a] pattern. I don’t know what they need in there.

Some women, like Gloria, struggled against structures, such as programs, and demanded their choices as citizens not be exploited. Others, like Collette, saw exploitation and thought about it slightly differently. They used the structures to gain social, cultural, or symbolic capital to help them meet their choices through opportunities they might not be able to access alone. They too acted as political agents.

Patterns of Practice
If we examine the women’s patterns of practice within their everyday lives as problematic, we can begin to understand the relationship between social structures and individuals to navigate these (Bourdieu, 1977; Smith 1987). Individuals’ everyday habitual patterns of the social link them to collective relationships thereby joining public social relationships with private ones (Bertaux, 1981; Bourdieu, 1977; Olesen, 2000). Thus, women’s everyday experiences can be connected to private structures and then linked to the larger public structures. The choices women made in the private everyday spill over into the public sphere affecting the structures inhibiting women. Strategic choice and action women take within the community imbue them with social citizenship, not dependency.

Citizens Creating Social Policy through Community Action
According to Horowitz (1995), it is “possible to change” individuals’ “social worlds and to play an active part in creating new ones” (p. 254). Individuals have these options through the choices they make in “working with and toward one’s dreams, community, decision-making, taking the perspective of the other, dealing with emotions, and making one’s own path in the social world” (pp. 253-254). As creators of culture, citizens participate actively by making choices and taking stands on issues within their communities and families (p. 228). Additionally, political citizenship includes “the collective and participatory engagement of citizens in the determination of the affairs of their community” (Dietz, 1987, p. 14). This encompasses being “speakers of words and doers of deeds’ mutually participating in the public realm” (p. 14). Women on welfare can and do act as citizens in this manner. They
practice social citizenship within the private everyday realm that overlaps into the public domain. Through sharing of "kitchen-table policy" in buses, over coffee, around the kitchen table, through casual conversations and exchanges of ideas, in welfare line ups, community resource centres, and other locations, women learn from others that policies, like choices, are not black and white (Dobson, 2001). Through their lived experiences, women may judge and oppose policy through their choices that serve to rewrite social policy that make it work in their lives. With the choices they make, women can change policy and call for social justice through their actions. Sharing these decisions and actions with others to teach them what they have learned in their transitions emerged as "lessons around the kitchen table" (p. 186). The 23 women in my study, did, in fact, become creators of policies as social agents acting as social activists to change their communities.

"Lessons around the Kitchen Table"
Not only did the women problem- pose and critically reflect on their everyday experiences to make choices, they also shared information on rights and entitlements with other women. They did this by taking responsibility for their own actions while teaching others about policies and laws. Sometimes, the women in my study took action by attempting to rectify social injustices they observed in their communities, especially towards more vulnerable populations. Finally, other women promoted social justice by creating places where individuals could educate themselves and learn to take control of their lives to become oppositional agents to the various types of oppressive structures they encountered.

Kate Franschild: socially responsible and accountable. Kate Franschild emphasized this by pointing out not only does she have the tools to survive in a class structured world, but she also feels accountable and responsible for the interests of the collective of individuals within a community.

I believe in being accountable for my life. I love I've been able to live. Probably, I should've been dead four times over if we didn't have the second class health care system we do have. I'm grateful for that. I feel a civic duty. I have a social obligation because I have even survived. I was brought up Protestant and Episcopalian. The Protestant side is if you have tools, you have a gift. It is your responsibility to use it not only for your own interest, but the collective interest. I believe as a citizen I have certain responsibilities. I take them seriously, and I expect the same, but that's very
idealistic. But they're also illusions. There isn't any such thing as equality; you are dealing with uneven players.

**Almond: helping women of culture.** Almond also took a stand to help East Indian women leaving their husbands and culture by sheltering them and telling them what she had experienced as a woman outside her culture.

I've helped so many women too. I had a couple of East Indian women that couldn't handle their lifestyles at home. One girl decided to get the hell out of her East Indian house. I said go home, tell them what you want, and then come back. She came back. All I could do was give her some money, gave her a place to stay for a night or two. I said you have to go find your own place, go get a job, and get the hell out of wherever you are. I say that to a lot of women. I could be an advocate.

Almond tried to inform the women of their rights and different resources within the community so they could leave their controlling homes.

**Rochelle: teaching others the laws.** While fighting for her child support, Rochelle learned a lot about the federal and provincial divorce and child support laws. Not only did she advocate for herself, but Rochelle also helped men and women with their divorces. “I’ve written up depositions for [guys] who are in the middle of fights over assets and fights over whether they’re going to lose their pension. It’s not just women it’s affecting. It’s affecting guys too.” In addition to helping herself, Rochelle felt part of her civic duty was to know the law and to help others interpret those laws.

**Lilith: protesting social injustices.** Lilith displayed her concept of citizenship and social justice in a different way. She chose to protest on behalf of mothers with small children, old people, and other individuals made to line up outside the welfare office in the hot summer sun for several hours waiting for their welfare checks. Lilith wondered why people on welfare should be treated in this way, so she convinced the Ministry of Social Services in Victoria to investigate this and other abuse of welfare recipients’ rights in Chilliwack. She said, “I have a natural background in social justice,” so much so that advocates had told Lilith: “They’d like to see me go into advocacy and lobbying.”
Collette: creating community resources for social justice. As an immigrant to Canada, Collette pushed the concept of citizenship even further. She believed in educating the immigrant community and individuals on welfare about their rights and entitlements. This had begun when she saw immigrants were not receiving what they needed. Collette decided to gather information from the community and agencies to share with others by creating a community resource. “I did it alone. I really thought [about it by] looking [at] the needs [because] I had a good idea what the needs were. So I kept information to help people, so everybody had something there.” Collette drew on her own experiences and background to create the center because she knew “everything about immigration, social assistance, [and] the community, so I had a clear idea, so I took what I thought of for the multicultural centre and put it for a centre.”

Collette explained that one of her most important conceptions of citizenship was to educate the community. “I said [the center] was going to be an open door. You have to care for people; otherwise it’s not going to work.”

In addition to collecting information for immigrants and people on welfare, the centre was open to others from the community. Collette also used it to train other women on welfare so they might acquire office skills and learn how to retain a job. Based on her experience from having participated in local job entry programs, Collette was determined other women would have a different experience at the center. “If I’m going to take women, I want to know when they leave they got something from here.”

Collette’s perception of citizenship encompassed many dimensions. As a political agent, this meant informing people about their rights, government policies, and resources while educating the community and helping women on welfare make changes in their own lives. She worked with others in the community and shared her own experiences navigating social relationships while explaining how she had gained different forms of capital. For Collette,

I have lived as an education and as a tool to help others. I am opening a road to other people. I am giving them some power by giving them information for them to fight, not to do things for them. They learn how to do their own things. So I have to be careful. I don’t want to live in the past,
but the person I am now cannot forget what I went through. I do not want to forget now that I belong, so I am another class of citizen.

Summary Thoughts
In this section, I have presented how the women in my study became political agents as they strategized to navigate their everyday as problematic. Furthermore, I have illustrated how the women acted as creative political agents when they encountered structures that constrained or bound their choices through the rules of the game or controlled them through symbolic violence as they sought entry into the fields or access to cultural, social, and symbolic capital. As the women navigated structures to make their transitions and to meet their needs, they also acted as creative political agents, as oppositional agents, challenging control of their choices, life opportunities, and resources to make the choices they deemed necessary to get a job, enrol in a college, or move to Disability. They did this by strategizing how to navigate structures with the help of support networks and their self-direct learning projects. Thus, as illustrated by this group of women, citizenship for women on welfare took on the added dimension of political policymakers within the communities of their everyday spaces. Consequently, the women themselves exemplified active social citizens attempting to make changes on the private level through “lessons around the kitchen table” (Dobson, 2001, p. 186) that would also affect the public policy they encountered. Instead of dependents, these 23 women push the definition of citizen to include them as “kitchen table activists” resulting in social act-or activists within their private and public everyday communities.

Concluding Thoughts
Throughout this chapter, my goal has been to illustrate through their everyday lives as problematic how women navigated social spaces as structures and constructions of citizenship. Through self-directed learning projects and by using support networks, the women acquired social, cultural, and symbolic capital to learn the rules of the games for navigating structures to meet their needs. In their transitions, they encountered symbolic violence and structures that constrained or bound their choices. Although their choices might be bounded, the women made strategic choices they weighed carefully. Furthermore, through their strategic choices, the women became oppositional agents to the macro structures they
encountered in their everyday lives. By opposing structures and making their own choices, the women became the embodiment of creative, active, and strategic political agents. Through their actions, these women challenged the notion of women on welfare as dependents, for they embodied the actions, types of capital, and political knowledge illustrative of citizens, not dependents.

In the following chapter, I present the research conclusions, and I provide suggestions for future research and recommendations. The women’s recommendations have been included with their introductions in Appendix A to retain the power of their voices as political agents.
CHAPTER EIGHT
THE CLOSE OF THE JOURNEY FOR NOW: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I am opening a road to other people, so I am giving them some power by giving them the information for them to fight, not to do things for them.

Collette

Although the 23 women continue to make transitions in their lives, a point of closure for this academic endeavor must be reached. Furthermore, since 2001 when the BC Liberals took power, they have altered welfare policies and benefits. My hope is that this research might provide some insights to truly help individuals leave welfare instead of cause more hardship. Thus, the purpose of this final chapter is to present a short summary of my study, highlights or discoveries from the research, recommendations, and ideas for future research directions.

Summary of Research

Everyday as Problematic
From 1998 to 2001, in Chilliwack and Abbotsford, British Columbia, I followed 23 women's transitions from welfare. By starting with their everyday lives as problematic (Smith, 1987), the women and I have discussed their transitional processes from welfare to paid work and education and moving to.... By examining their daily activities to meet their needs, I discovered government, policymakers, and interpreters of policy, identify, shape, define, and construct women's identities, needs, and opportunities (Fraser, 1989). As women attempted to meet their survival and caring needs in the private domain, their daily experiences took them into the public sphere, thus, intertwining and linking the micro and macro worlds they experienced (Alheit, 1992; Bertaux, 1981; Bourdieu, 1977; Smith, 1987). Therefore, by starting with the everyday as problematic (Smith, 1987), I sought to locate within the private and public fields and social spaces (Bourdieu, 1977) single mothers and single women.

Navigating with Support Networks and Self-Directed Learning Projects
As the women attempted to meet their needs and make transitions, they navigated everyday social spaces and fields they encountered by using support networks (Bourdieu, 1977) and
self-directed learning (Brookfield, 1993) or informal learning projects. These support networks and learning projects were linked to both the public and private through social relationships as women used family, friends, government officials, doctors, and other resources such as libraries, the Internet, and community resources to navigate the structures they encountered.

Making Choices albeit Bounded
In navigating structures, women made choices, albeit bounded (Riemer, 2001) by policy, interpreters of policy, family, friends, fellow employees, employers, trainers, doctors, and even well meaning individuals. Through their choices and actions that affected the women in both the private everyday world of caring and public sphere, they attempted to integrate the two worlds to leave welfare. By making strategic choices, learning the rules of the game, and acquiring different forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1977), the women contested or acted in opposition to the structures (Fraser, 1989), symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1977), and relations of ruling (Smith, 1987) they encountered as they attempted to meet their needs and those of their children in their transitional trajectories. By making choices (Bourdieu, 1977; Kelly, 2000; Riemer, 2001; Solinger, 1999), women learned through critical reflection and problem-posing how to open up their unlived potentialities and take the opportunity to explore them (Alheit, 1992; 1994; 1995).

Citizens: Social Act-ors and Strategic Agents, and “Kitchen Table Activists”
By taking action as social act-ors and strategic agents, the women pushed the definition of citizenship in an attempt to overcome labeling that relegated them to the status of dependent. They challenged the notion they needed to be targeted and fixed up to become taxpaying citizen workers (Brodie, 1996a; Evans, 1996) by choosing to value and perform caring work for their children. Finally, as “kitchen table” activists (Dobson, 2001), women chose to share the knowledge they learned as they navigated and challenged structures. They illustrated they were strategic act-ors as well as social activists as they took part in their communities (Dietz, 1987; Dobson, 2001; Horowitz, 1995; Naples, 1992) by attempting to change policy and alert other women about their rights and their abilities to navigate similar structures. The 23 women were not “sitting on the couch eating bonbons.”
Some Discoveries: Transitions and Moving to...

From my research, a number of interrelated findings emerged. These included: transitions, policies and women’s needs, and the concept of citizenship.

Getting a Job Is not Retaining a Job

One finding with consequences for policymakers, educators, and trainers is getting a job does not mean women leaving welfare will be able to retain it. Women have been targeted as problems, for the government deems them as dependent and needy (Brodie, 1996a). Therefore, women need to be fixed up through training and counseling so they might then become worthy taxpaying citizens as workers (Brodie, 1996a). Government’s solution has been for women to get a job — any job will do. However, in keeping with other researchers, Cancian and Meyer (2000), Edin and Lein (1997), Harris (1997), and Riemer (1997, 2001), I discovered just getting a job was not the complete answer.

Pushed Out or Fired for No Reason

Based on her research, Snyder (2000) believed women attending voluntary pre-employment programs were able to make a successful transition from welfare if the program contained career exploration and work experience. However, my study indicated that even if women attended a pre-employment program, no guarantee existed they would be able to keep their jobs when and if they found work. This was illustrated by the experiences of 7 of the 10 women either losing their jobs or experiencing extreme difficulties even after 6 had come directly from pre-employment programs, career exploration, or had attended a program in the past. As depicted through the experiences of Vivianne after 3 months and Cactus after 2 years, they were fired from their jobs for no apparent reason. Despite attending a training program, Advancing/Advocacy too found herself pushed out of a job. Even after having participated in numerous work-related seminars and workshops at a local women’s employment center to build skills and confidence, Mary found herself pushed out of a job as well. Even Collette’s training, experience, and skills did not protect her from being pushed out of her workplace. All 5 women did not seem to fit. Their experiences support Bourdieu’s (1977) theory that individuals must possess the social, cultural, and symbolic capitals specific to a particular social field of individuals. Furthermore, they must be able to learn the rules of
the game not only to gain entry but to remain within these social relationships. If individuals cannot do this, then they are pushed out of the group and from the field in some way. Before this happens, though, the individuals experience symbolic violence in the form of gossip, social pressures, ostracization, and other means of making people feel unwelcome until either they leave, or they are pushed out or ejected from the group. This happened to the women as has been shown throughout their conversations.

Doing a Man's Job
Tusk and Ann illustrated another dimension of not fitting into a job: gendered work (Cockburn, 1983). Despite their attempts and possessing some social, cultural, and symbolic capital to work in traditionally men's jobs, they were not able to counter gender relationships. They both experienced extreme examples of symbolic violence from men, women, fellow employees, employers, or unions. Although Ann was eventually promoted to another plant, her victory was bittersweet. Tusk was rewarded for her efforts in cleaning up the plant where she worked with having a man come in to receive the pay and benefits she had requested. Despite the attempts of many and the call of government to train women in non-traditional jobs, some work, worksites, and the welfare state are still influenced by embedded gender relationships (Abramovitz, 1996; Baker & Tippin, 1999; Brodie, 1996a; Butler & Seguino, 1998; Cockburn, 1983; Edin & Lein, 1997; Evans, 1996; Hernes, 1987; Kittay, 1998a; 1998b; 1999; 2001; Lister, 1990; Mink, 1999; 1998; Neysmith, 2000; O'Connor, Orloff, & Shaver, 1999; Orloff, 1993; 2001; Tronto, 2001; Waldfogel & Mayer, 2000).

The Exceptions - Mentored
Some women's transitions to work appeared different, making them exceptions more than the norm. If individuals possess social, cultural, and symbolic capitals and are seen as desirable, they may be taught the rules of the game. Therefore, finding a job was one thing, but keeping a good job as pointed out by Cancian and Mayer (2000) is another part of the job process often overlooked. However, it can be accomplished as illustrated by the experiences of Brown Bear, Maya, and Taylor as they seemed able to remain in their new jobs or social fields. Mentors supported these 3 women in learning the rules of the game and attaining social status associated with mentoring that appeared to assist the women to stay employed.
In addition to substantiating Bourdieu's theory of social practice, these findings corroborate researchers exploring programs that have support and mentorship for keeping jobs in place for welfare recipients attempting to transition to work (Blank, Card, & Robins, 2000; Greenwood, 2000; Lei & Michalopoulous, 2001; Michalopoulous, Card, Gennetian, Harnett, & Robins, 2000; Pearlmutter & Bartle, 2000). Perhaps, as Advancing/Advocacy had commented to me, if she would have had a career counselor's help or some other support, she might have been able to retain her job as might have Cactus, Vivianne, Mary, and Collette.

**Employer Flexibility for Mothers' Work**

For Maya, particularly, but also for Taylor, in addition to the mentorship they received, their remaining at their first jobs might have been due to the flexibility of their employers and work schedules. Their employers took into account these two mothers' child care needs and how a fit between family and work needs to occur so that women might stay employed. Their experiences confirmed the findings of Brown, Ganzglass, Golonka, Hyland, and Simon (1998); Debord and Kerpelman (2000); and Heymann and Earle (1998) in their studies of women staying employed after leaving welfare. Although financial incentives are important for women to remain off welfare, the researchers above contend more importantly the other factors of social support for retaining a job, flexibility, and work family fit are crucial and that individuals receiving these supports, indeed, do fare much better than individuals without these types of assistance.

**The Benefits of Education**

**Education Helps Job Retention**

Another finding I made was education had a beneficial effect on the women transitioning directly to college and later to work. Of the 9 women moving to education from welfare, 5 graduated with diplomas or degrees. Despite what Snyder (2000) says about "stopping out" of college having negative effects on women after welfare, I discovered the contrary. All 3 of the women stopping out of college found full time work and had left welfare by the end of the study. One was still pursuing her education. Additionally, 4 other women from my research were enrolled in college, or they were working and pursuing a college education.
Furthermore, the women graduating seemed to move into the workforce more easily, and they appeared to be able to retain their jobs. As pointed out earlier, they apparently had acquired the necessary cultural, symbolic, and social capital to enter and remain in their social fields because of the socialization through education, mentoring, and networking they had been able to receive as students. In essence, they had learned the rules of the game and possessed the capitals necessary for their new fields and social spaces (Bourdieu, 1977). This also corroborates Pandey, Zhan, Neely-Barnes, and Menon’s (2000) findings that when poor women access higher education, they tend to do better by earning higher wages, retaining jobs, and possessing more self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-reliance. Other women, not yet enrolled in training or college believed it was very important for a good career, so many were also thinking about taking a college program.

**Appearing to Stay on Welfare but Moving to....**

**Having the Health: Status of Disability**

Sometimes policymakers, policy interpreters, and the general public believe women seek to remain on welfare. Initially, it appeared some of the women in my study strategized to stay on welfare. However, after examining more closely the trajectories of Lilith, Kate Franschild, and Almond, I discovered appearing to remain on welfare was only one of the steps in moving on to other steps off welfare. At the beginning of my study, these 3 women discussed at length their precarious health conditions and unseen illnesses. These made it difficult for Lilith, Kate Franschild, and Almond to keep jobs that were not flexible enough to accommodate their health needs. It appeared that they would just stay on welfare.

However, as part of their transitions, they chose to move to Disability 1 and then, hopefully, to Disability 2. Aside from taking into account their health needs, moving to Disability 1 provided added benefits for health, food, and other needs. In addition to the supplementary benefits acquired from Disability, the women seemed to realize Disability 1 had greater social capital than just welfare. In fact, the label of Disability did not carry the same stigma or symbolic violence as attached to just welfare. This supports Bourdieu’s (1977) theory that individuals strategize to acquire symbolic capital in order to improve their status and social position within groups. With Disability, the women had a reason that was more socially acceptable for not having a job rather than just being seen as unwilling to work.
Planning to Return to Education

Once Lilith, Kate Franschild, and Almond had their health needs under control, they found time to plan for the future. As they confided to me, none expected to find themselves on welfare or have unseen disabilities that would prevent them from accomplishing their goals. They all divulged they would like to return to college to upgrade their skills or take courses that would lead to good jobs they could live on and that were interesting. In fact, after my research concluded, Lilith had enrolled in a training program at the local college while Kate Franschild was still attempting to control her health. Unfortunately, Almond’s plans were cut short by her untimely passing in a tragic car accident.

Women’s Needs: Contested Policies and Work

Whose Needs: Government’s or Women’s?

As discussed in Chapter 3, welfare policy in British Columbia deals with government’s needs and, particularly, women’s needs (Evans 1995; 1997; Fraser, 1989; Neysmith, 2000). A tension exists between how government identifies women, constructs their needs, and shapes and defines opportunities to meet their needs and how women experience, live, define, and attempt to fulfill their own needs. Often clashes exist and develop between government’s and single mothers’ perceptions and resources. Government seeks to protect provincial coffers to ensure a healthy economy while women try to meet their needs and those of their children to survive and to make transitions. Consequently, many women resist or act in opposition (Fraser, 1989) to government by making their own choices while government constrains women’s choices further through forms of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1977), control, oppression, and the relations of ruling embedded within the system (Smith, 1987).

Transitional Benefits: Road to Working Poor?

Even when the BC provincial government revised welfare policy and allocated transitional benefits for single parents for a year, it did so with a particular goal: move parents, particularly single mothers, quickly to the workforce with minimal cost. Although the women in my study pointed out that a monthly $150 transitional allowance plus dental and medical for a year were helpful, they found they were usually worse off after the year had passed. This echoes the worries of women in Bancroft and Vernon’s (1995) research where women
felt they would be worse off once transitional supplements ended. No consideration had been made for the location the women lived — Chilliwck or Abbotsford — and the availability of “good” jobs with union benefits. Many mothers either found themselves working two jobs as Vivianne explained, or they were part of the working poor as Cactus attested. In the haste to move women from welfare, they were often encouraged to take any job eventually leading them to “low road” occupations and poverty (Wong & McBride, in press). Some, like Mary and Brown Bear, discovered government clawbacks of 75% of their minimal wages made it extremely difficult to make the transition without the full meager income they had earned.

Furthermore, because women had now been relabeled and targeted to go to work to become productive taxpayers, they found their need to perform caring work for their children had been discounted (Brodie, 1996a; Evans, 1996; Evans & Swift, 2000). Paid labour as gendered work in contrast to unpaid caring labour had become the valued gendered model for women by the 1990s (Abramovitz, 1996; Baines, Evans, & Neysmith, 1991; Butler & Sequino, 1998; Evans & Swift, 2000; Fraser & Gordon, 1994; Hirshmann & Liebert, 2001; Kittay, 1998a; 1998b; 1999; 2001; Mink, 1998b; Orloff, 1993; 2001; Tronto, 2001; Waldfogel & Mayer, 2000). Consequently, single mothers were often torn between their caring work and government’s call to have them move to the paid labour force.

Validating and Degendering Caring Work

Frequently, women chose their caring work — as did Maya, Taylor, and Mabel and to some extent Heather, Rochelle, and Gloria at some intervals during my research — over paid work in the public domain. Baines, Evans, and Neysmith (1991) point out caring work should be recognized, made visible, and integrated into social policy. To initiate this process, Bartle (1998), Brubaker (1999), Fraser and Gordon (1994), Kittay (1998a; 1998b; 1999; 2001), and Tronto (2001) call for the recognition of the interdependence of men and women and both perform caring labour throughout the life course. Kittay (1998a, 1998b; 1999; 2001) proposes a model to validate unpaid caring work and redefine it as paid caring labour performed by dependency workers, either male or female, with benefits, vacation, and training in order to degender it. By acknowledging paid caring labour, women, particularly, could be recognized as contributing citizens through this type of work.
Citizenship, Choice, Social Policy, and Action

Creating Everyday Social Policy through “Lessons around the Kitchen Table”

As illustrated throughout Chapters 6 and 7, my 23 women chose to oppose policies (Fraser, 1989) and began enacting their own policy interpretations through their experiences and sharing of “lessons around the kitchen table” (Dobson, 2001, p. 186). Like the women in Dobson’s study, my participants knew through their lived experiences policy could not be black and white like the writing on a page but blurred to gray as individuals lived government social policy. Thus, women, similar to Lilith and Mabel, sought to change their lives by contesting the black and white or by obtaining food like Ali or additional benefits like Almond. Some women, like Ann as she demanded an IUD to avoid pregnancy and Tumbleweed as she strategized to enroll in a program, challenged their status as dependents by taking social action on their own behalf. Through their actions, they sought to share this information with the community of women so they would be apprised of their entitlements and rights. Other women like Lilith and Collette challenged social policy further by demanding respect and educating the larger community through their social actions. Lilith protested the treatment of other welfare recipients waiting in line ups on a hot summer day to her MLA and the Ministry resulting in an investigation about these and other injustices occurring in a Chilliwack welfare office. Collette took social action further by taking responsibility to educate the community of women and welfare recipients by collecting and sharing social policy, resources, and knowledge so they could take action for themselves and others. Thus, through various forms of “kitchen table policy” these women sought to teach others how to become informed, take stands, become active in the community, and create changes (Dobson, 2001; Horowitz, 1995). By becoming activists, individuals could take back control of their lives as women throughout my research did. By participating in their communities and becoming creators of culture and “kitchen table policy,” women participated as citizens in their community, not as dependents, thus, redefining themselves as political agent act-ors (Dietz, 1987; Horowitz, 1995; Dobson, 2001).

Creators of Unlived Potentialities

By examining the women’s actions and their biographical constructions of their transitions from welfare as they navigated structures, we can see “a different way of learning” emerging
The challenge of change and action women experienced provided learning and developmental opportunities (Bateson, 1989). Furthermore, as our own biographers, we tend to see ourselves as agents, creators, and organizers of our intended "action scheme[s]" even when they go awry. Ultimately, this opens up our unlimited potential, choices, and opportunities for learning to change our social worlds (Alheit, 1995, pp. 63-64). Consequently, women became political actors in private resulting in public action to live their unlived potentialities.

**Recommendations**

Based on the lives of the 23 women I followed from 1998 to 2001 and my work with women on welfare, I have a number of recommendations that may assist others seeking to leave welfare: jobs, respect and mentoring, social policy, programs, daycare and caring duties, and incentives. Although many of the women’s recommendations corroborate mine, I have left theirs with the introductions in Appendix A to retain the power of their voices.

**Job Creation**

First of all, the provincial government needs to create “good” jobs with full medical and dental benefits. These must be more than pathways to low road occupations relegating women to poverty (Wong & McBride, in press) and even revolving back to welfare. Government must become creative and must review labour policies to ensure employers are not discouraged from creating jobs and hiring women through increasing payroll taxes and other disincentives.

**Respect and Mentoring**

**Respect.** First and foremost, women need to be respected. Aside from respecting themselves, women must feel this when they even walk into a welfare office and are “helped” by front line staff and social workers. From my observations, what the women told me, and even government reports, such as *The First Step* (1994), *The Second Report* (1995), and *New Opportunities for Working and Living* (1995), women on welfare need to be treated with respect, not based on the person’s perceptions or mood of the moment. Respect might be cultivated for those on welfare by sending staff for professional development and
encouraging them to improve their education. Often, the workers may withhold information or are rude because they feel the women on welfare are being given more privileges to better themselves than the workers. Thus, they may feel jealous and resentful. Courses may encourage workers to continue their own education or to teach them how to treat individuals on welfare.

Mentors. In addition to respect, women on welfare need to be treated as individuals with past experiences and skills to be built upon, not as "a one size fits all," relegating them to "sameness." One way to treat women respectfully would be to team them up with mentors. Thus, a mentoring system for women on welfare could be created and implemented. Mentors could be women having made transitions from welfare, professional women, academics, housewives, or other women from the community. This might help women stay at their jobs. As I observed, as the women told me, and as researchers like Blank, Card, and Robins (2000), Pearlmutter and Bartle (2000), Greenwood (2000), Lei and Michalopoulos (2001) have found, women need support to actually remain in the workforce, for the solution is not simply just getting a job. It is also retaining the job.

Social Policy

Experts need to experience welfare. Although time consuming and probably distasteful to some, social policy might be changed if, perhaps, politicians and those developing welfare policies actually experienced what it is like to be on welfare. This might encourage them to have a fresh look when they are part of the team creating and implementing policies.

Women as part of the policy process. Based on the lived experiences of policy and social actions to change it, women on welfare need to join educators, business, union, labour, and advocacy groups in developing, planning, and implementing policy. This would give women on welfare the role of direct involvement in their transitional process with government so they have choices and are in control of their opportunities, instead of being treated as children with no right to choose or begging for permission to make a decision. Furthermore, they may have new and cost saving ideas for change.
Flexibility for care work. As pointed out by women in my study, Downtown Eastside women in Sorell, Eror, Butler, Louscher, and Alkenbrack's (2003) research, and substantiated by other academics like DeBord, Canu, and Kerpelman (2000), Heymann and Earle (1998), and Pearlmutter and Bartle (2000), government and employers need to create flexibility by implementing policies and benefits to ensure women or single mothers may perform their caring work duties during work hours when needed, for example to care for a sick child or an ageing parent.

Family Maintenance Program. Furthermore, based on the experiences of women in my research, I believe The Family Maintenance Program should be revised. Women need to actually receive all the child support monies from even abusive husbands. The Program needs to obtain support monies from abusive and violent husbands, not just those easy to find. A spouse should not be able to quit a job just to get out of paying child support. The Program should recognize working agreements between mature, divorced adults, and only resort to other measures when all else fails. Tax benefits need to be reinstated for child support to encourage some men to continue providing monies for children.

Revision of child custody and support. Additionally, provincial laws for child custody and child support need to be revised so that women are not dragged back to court, continuously inhibiting them from working if they choose to. These laws also need to be reviewed for today's economic and social climate. Perhaps, we even need to start thinking about a guaranteed income so women might stay home to raise their children.

Programs

Women on welfare as part of program process. All welfare programs should have women either on welfare or having been on welfare help create, design, implement, and run them. This should include a range of women from the most needy to those never believing a program has anything to offer them. When women first enter a program, their skills should be assessed. Prior learning assessment could be used to translate attributes and seemingly unimportant caring skills into work related competencies. Furthermore, programs should be streamlined so they are not redundant. Perhaps, they could be graduated where individuals
learn different skills through different programs to build on women's lived experiences and skills. Some programs for women needing or seeking more support should last longer than 6 months. Sweden, for example, has programs of 2-year duration.

**Accountability and transparency.** More transparency and accountability need to be implemented for individuals and organizations providing programs or services to women on welfare. This should include greater accessibility for academics so they might study and evaluate programs to see if the programs are meeting women's needs (Fraser, 1989). This should also ensure monies are going to the welfare recipients and not just for more beautiful buildings or jobs for other people. Thus, more secure money needs to be available so program facilitators may teach instead of worry from month to month if program funding will be cut. This would also ensure government that one business, person, or organization does not corner the market on delivering services to women on welfare. No matter how successful the program may be, women need choices to ensure their needs are met. Also, those providing services can lower their standards and work commitment over time if not evaluated. However, constant funding threats do nothing but exacerbate this problem.

**Daycare and Caring Duties**

**Daycare as priority – not as election issue.** One of the most important things the provincial government needs to do is make daycare a priority, not just an election or publicity issue only to be forgotten when either the Liberals or NDP take power. To do this, the Ministry needs to allocate more funding to create more daycare spaces for ALL women, especially those on welfare. The daycare should be flexible so it takes into account women working part-time shifts from as early as 6 a.m. to all night. Government and workers need to rethink their stereotyping that women just use this type of care to go out and party. Furthermore, children need after school care that is affordable and flexible to meet single parents' needs. It should start as soon as the school day ends and even be available before school since some parents work odd shifts.

**Reducing bureaucracy.** Additionally, reduction in red tape and bureaucracy for women attempting to apply or reapply for daycare needs to be implemented. Hours of operation for
government daycare workers need to be revised so single mothers starting work as early as 7 a.m. may access a worker at welfare offices. The hours of operation should also be extended to include access to those women working later than 6 p.m. Furthermore, inquiries and applications should be taken over the Internet and phone by a live daycare worker so women do not have to wait for three days or more before phone calls are returned.

**Daycare at work.** Finally, more places of employment, not just large corporations appealing to particular types of employees, need to have on-site daycare. Employers need to become more empathetic and understanding of childcare needs for workers.

**Incentives**

**Longer time for transitional benefits.** As final recommendations, women attempting to leave welfare should be allowed to work and keep all their earnings as an incentive to leave welfare. Also, by allowing a woman to keep the money, she will likely be able to save to meet her needs and leave welfare. Additionally, women leaving welfare for education or work need to have medical, dental, and prescription benefits until such time their places of employment provide them whether this is after 3 months, 1 year, or more. Finally, other systems and organizations such as those supplying food to women on welfare need to be examined. Food should be available for single women, not just mothers.

These are initial recommendations emerging from my research. I would suggest recommendations from women on welfare and other researchers be studied by government in an attempt to truly help women and other individuals leave welfare, not just create more havoc or lip service to an easy target: single mothers and women on welfare.

**Future Research**

This study opens up pathways for new research. Using these findings, three projects could be explored: male single parents transitioning from welfare; women making transitions under the new Liberal policies; and a follow up of the 23 women from the original research.
Male Single Parents

First of all, based on the doubling of male lone parents in Chilliwack, I would recommend a comparable study based on similar assumptions. This would provide a way to compare gender differences within Chilliwack of men’s transitions from welfare – do they make the same types of transitions with similar experiences as women? According to Statistics Canada (2003), numbers of men in the 2001 census performing unpaid caring work has increased. Using Brodie (1996a) and Kittay (1998a; 1998b; 1999; 2001) as a starting point, gender differences based on whether male single parents are more deserving of benefits, or if caring work is perceived differently when undertaken by men could be explored. This would provide a way to examine gender differences between male and female single parents and their needs as defined by welfare policy. Building on Bourdieu (1977), Kelly (2000), Riemer (2000), and Solinger (1999), differences in and perceptions of choice between men and women could be compared as could the strategies women use such as support networks (Bourdieu, 1977) and self-directed learning projects (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Brookfield, 1993). This would help us understand if men on welfare are considered as dependent citizens like women and if they undertake similar actions in contesting social policy (Dietz, 1987; Dobson, 2001; Horowitz, 1995).

Similar Research to Examine New Welfare Policies

As the NDP was government when I conducted my research, I would suggest a similar study to examine the effects on women’s transitions under the new policies implemented by the current provincial Liberal government. Have the changes to welfare policy in 2002 to dental, medical, prescription allowances, and daycare funding had the same effects on women today as those during my study? The new policies also raise questions about how women perform their caring work when being mandated to enter the labour market without daycare subsidies or daycare spaces. Furthermore, the same concepts of choice, strategies, and citizenship could be examined.

Follow up study. Finally, a follow up study of the 23 women should be done 2 years after the original research to explore if the women have remained off welfare and whether the trajectories they have taken substantiate or disprove my previous findings. Their new
transitions need to be documented to understand the transitional process of leaving welfare for the long term for Canadian women.

Concluding Thoughts

These journeys of transition have not only been the women’s, but they have also been mine as well. In addition to my personal transitions, I have experienced and witnessed the women navigate policy, class, age, and gender structures to fulfill their choices. I have marveled at the women’s strategic choices using their support networks and self-directed learning projects. I have cheered as they have opposed structures, and I have been privy to the intimate details of their lives. I feel honored and proud of all the women who graduated from the university college, got jobs, continued performing their caring work, are still in transition, and those seeking to change policy within their communities through their social actions.

In addition to these subjective feelings, I have also been aware of my duty as an academic researcher to ensure my personal feelings do not take over and blind my objectivity and academic rigor (Harding, 1991; Long, 1999). It has been my goal and intention to engage in this research as an equal with the women. I have shared my personal life as well as the academic research with the women as they have entrusted me to act as the conduit for their everyday lived stories so they may reach other academics, educators, trainers, policymakers, and other women on welfare with our hopes of making a difference in policy, awareness, and the lives of other women on welfare. As Tusk stated,

The important thing to remember is things aren't going to change until people start to talk. Until people start to change their perceptions. And the more women talk -- the more open to new information other people will become. Including government.

I truly hope this research will be used to create better policy with the women’s help. I hope it is not used just to plug what appear to some to be ways around the system. I feel that aside from talking, it is necessary for us all to be bold enough to take action.

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
T.S. Eliot – Four Quartets, Little Gidding (1943)
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APPENDIX A

THE WOMEN: OUR INTRODUCTIONS
THE WOMEN:
OUR INTRODUCTIONS

Listening to women,
I heard a difference and discovered that
Bringing in women's lives changes both psychology and history.
It literally changes the voices:
How the human story is told, and
Also who tells it.
(Gilligan, C. 1993, p. xi)

This chapter is dedicated to the women's self-representations. I asked the women to write their introductions so that readers might get to know them without being entirely shaped by an academic document and by my perceptions. Other facets of the women's experiences and personalities will emerge throughout the academic text through selected quotations.

Catherine Bateson (1989) assists us in seeing that life is a journey with many different paths, forks, side roads, and side excursions in these roads. Life choices are by no means necessarily easy or simple. They are much more complex. If we study the individual's life, in this case the women's lives, we discover that life's journeys with its quests are not easy. According to Bateson (1989), "Many of society's casualties are men and women who assumed they had chosen a path in life and found that it disappeared in the underbrush" (p. 7). Frequently, they had been wooed by "The model of an ordinary successful life that is held up for young people is one of early decision and commitment, often to an educational preparation that launches a single rising trajectory" (p. 6). However, if we look at truly creative people, we see that "these assumptions have not been realized for many," (p. 6) for "The landscape through which we move is in constant flux" (p. 6). However, some do appear to escape constant change, for they have embedded and entrenched themselves within the security of unions or protected jobs to ward off the challenges of change. In reality, though,

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6 All introductions are typed verbatim as the women wrote them. As requested by the women, only spelling was changed. After I told the women that the introductions would be published, the women wanted the identifiers used and gave permission for personal and place identifiers to be left as they were written.
the only constant is change although most people try to hold on to continuity and security even if it is less than desirable. Security is gleaned from the known. It is comfortable, and it requires less effort than constant change. One reason for this may be that change is frightening.

If change were less frightening, if the risks did not seem so great, far more could be lived. One of the striking facts of most lives is the recurrence of threads of continuity, the re-echoing of earlier themes, even across deep rifts of change, but when you watch people damaged by their dependence on continuity, you wonder about the nature of commitment, about the need for a new and more fluid way to imagine the future. (p. 6)

Change not only occurs in the personal and social worlds, but it also transpires in the "discontinuities' created by the shifting business and industrial environment” (p. 7). Thus, through our creative actions, we must alter our once secure daily life worlds and "explore the creative potential of interrupted and conflicted lives, where energies are not narrowly focused or permanently pointed toward a single ambition” (p. 9). Even though we might want to remain in a state of continuing security and balance, life has a way often of forcing our energies into new experiences and ways of thinking. “The circumstances of women’s lives now and in the past provide examples for new ways of thinking about the lives of both men and women” (p. 9).

The women in my study attempting to make transitions from welfare to paid work and education have chosen to use some very creative strategies, means, and paths to navigate structural changes away from welfare. Their life histories will help illustrate to others women’s creativity through time and willingness to take a leap of faith. Even more importantly, their life histories help us see individuals holistically through time, not just in a “single aspect or stage of life” (p. 10) and how they deal with change, discontinuity, and insecurity as they make their ways into the unknown and unchartered waters of their transitions. As Bateson points out when she compares life to an improvised meal for unexpected guests, “Improvisation can be either a last resort or an established way of evoking creativity. Sometimes a pattern chosen by default can become a path of preference [and of great change and individual fulfillments]” (p. 4).
This has been the experience I have observed with the 23 women in my research. Many women in my study have also experienced many bumps in their roads that often may have led them into different avenues of their lives. In order to get a sense of the women, their experiences, and their transitions, I present the women through a textual snapshot of themselves at the moment they wrote these introductions to you, the reader. Please keep in mind this is only a moment in time, not the entire story.

**Introductions: Our Words to You**

Now, I would like to introduce you to the women in my study I have come to know since 1998 in their own words. The women’s introductions are presented in the order that I received them. Some introductions were e-mailed; others were mailed; some were tape recorded; and others were given to me during our last interviews. Their words have not been edited. Based on the women’s requests, spelling has been corrected where necessary, but the structure, content, and passion have been left intact so that the reader may hear the women’s experiences from them and not me as the researcher.

9/27/0
Thrown-out of Eden like a wanton witch because I disliked the missionary position and disobeyed Adam and God, I am Lilith, the marginalized demoness. Defying 50 or more churches surrounding me in this Bible-Belt city, I create an identity against the dominant culture to keep myself whole and perform acts of resistance and revolution. I pray to the Great Mother to assuage my fears and give me courage to rise above my reality into visions I haven’t lost. I strengthen my body with weights and work-outs, because I am a warrior-chick against global capitalism, the white male supremacist patriarchy, myself and you. Do you have the right to extrapolate my pain and poverty for your detached dissection in the academy, even if you claim the cause is just? Aren’t you paternalistic savours infantilizing me with guilty efforts of Christian charity as you throw me your spare change or implement inadequate policies that keep me weak and hungry so that I can’t organize my sisters into a revolt? As you hypocritically buy into the comforts of this sinful global economy that kills sisters in Mexico, Korea, and O Canada while you fitfully sleep in your unholy or holy nights. Entering my life like missionaries trying to teach me that poverty is my personal responsibility or teach me about politics, sex, and religion, but I already know and I believe a poor woman’s place is on top. Study me, analyze me, medicate me, label me as if the problem of poverty is my fault. Study yourselves and how you contribute to my oppression,

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7 For more demographic information about the women, please see Appendix C.
study the very rich and their tax loopholes, study the university’s corruption by multinationals, study the white male supremacist patriarchy that fucks everyone. Don’t study me, anymore, because I am Lilith and I believer you’re fucking me as much as God and Adam.

Lilith

Nov. 13, 2000
I am a 38 yr old single parent. I have raised my son alone since age 1 1/2 yrs old. He turns 18 in January. My ex-husband has never paid child support. He doesn’t send cards or gifts for birthday’s or Christmas.

I grew up in an abusive home. My father is an alcoholic and abused all three children and my Mom. I was sexually abused by him starting at an early age (toddler) until I was 15.

I became an alcoholic & addict. At age 19 I got pregnant and I married my first husband just days later. Big mistake. It lasted 2 yrs 2 mos. He hit me; it was over. Over the next 8 yrs I was drinking & doing crime & doing drugs, I made bad choices. In 91/Sept 9 I went to A.A. and got sober. I am 9 yrs sober this year. In 96 I went to the Bridging program. I have been going to counseling since. This past year and a half I had a total nervous breakdown and planned my suicide. (May 99) I was hospitalized in the psychiatric ward.

I was put on anti-depressants and went into deep intensive therapy to deal with my sexual abuse. It was the best and hardest thing I have ever done.

I never have nightmares now and my self-esteem and self worth have grown.

I do still hate my father and always will, but I know that he can no longer control or hurt me.

In Oct. 98 my mother was diagnosed with terminal bowel, liver and lymphatic cancer. She was given 3 months to live. Fortunately we still have her. My father still treats her badly. I thank God for her every day.

Due to the way I was brought up I never had friends. I didn’t know how to make good friends, only bad ones. Since my therapy I now know how to do this.

I won’t let people treat me badly, and I don’t treat people badly.

I have not held down a permanent job except for a volunteer one. But that one I have had for almost four years.

\footnote{All women selected their own pseudonyms. I wanted them to have some power over their text, and I hope to remain true to my underlying goal of showcasing their words throughout my dissertation.}
There have been days with a casual temp position. There have also been a few contracts for a few positions. I continue to seek full time employment.

I am living on Social Assistance still. I live on 932 a month. My rent is 625, Hydro 75, + phone. I can’t afford cable.

I had a second husband who went to prison for killing his first wife. He was released from prison this year. I live in fear from him everyday. He was such a sweet man, I thought I could overcome what he had done until he threatened to do the same to me. I no longer have anything to do with him, I hope he never finds me.

Last year I met a man and we started dating. He has seen me through one of the worst years of my life. Today we are boyfriend and girlfriend. We are truly in love.

He is very supportive and knows all of my past. He even attended some counseling with me so that he could support me better. He doesn’t judge me for my past, just prays that my future is better.

I pray too because I deserve this relationship. I deserve a good life.

Ali

Dec. 8, 2000

I was born into a very dysfunctional family of five children and placed with the second-to-youngest position. I felt invisible growing up — or maybe my survival can be attributed to my ability to achieve invisibility. The dysfunction in my family includes alcohol/drug addiction, mental/physical/sexual/violent abuses manifested from my parent’s mental disabilities as well as social strain and to some degree, identity crisis resulting from cultural confusion. Both my parents are of aboriginal ancestry. My father was in and out of our lives and my mother went between the welfare system and unskilled labor force. My younger brother and I ended up separated and in foster care systems at different ends of the country — the age of 13 — after our father committed suicide. We both were further, seriously abused in the foster care system; my advantage, however, was that I was a successful/perpetual run away.

I went directly from foster care to the welfare system, however, very, very briefly. I (barely) completed high school and married at 19, divorced at 26 with one child. I was self employed for about 6 years and then lost everything as a result of a relationship with an immobilizing, abusive relationship with a man who suffered from bi-polar disorder. I utilized the welfare system at this stage of my life. I completed a Psychology degree at a “community-college-turned University” and I now work as a (name omitted at her request) with an aboriginal Agency. The work is incredibly meaningful for me, however, our standard of living has in no way improved and I still live with welfare — state impositions in my life. My husband, (who is aboriginal) and I, along with three of our six children, live in Native subsidized housing in a politically charged (christian/reform/ alliance dominated) neighborhood and our neighbors
are quick to complain (if our dog barks, etc.) to the City and the housing agency. Much to my husband’s disapproval, I refuse to apply for daycare subsidy – even though we easily qualify – I refuse to allow the welfare system underwrite my existence any more than it already has/does. I will do anything to avoid the inherent shame that the application process promises to impose on me – based on a life of experiences. I continue, however, to apply for Interest Relief on my student loans which total about $75,000 for both my husband and I, and as such, we will never be successful by Society’s measures. We will never own a new car or carry a mortgage on a home or take vacations. We will, however, continue to work toward healing and protecting the next generation of children and we vow to remain persistent in our work of breaking the generational cycle of abuse for our own children as we see them through to adulthood.

Today, as a 37 – year-old woman and a proud survivor (so are, two of my siblings committed suicide) I feel relatively hopeless and unsuccessful. Canadian Popular Culture makes me feel like a complete failure as a woman as I am not blond, white, thin, young or rich enough to participate.

Diana

January 24, 2001 (taped introduction)
For one, I don’t appreciate getting married. Ok? Marriage is a two way street, and when one gets sick, the other one should take care of the other one, not get rid of the other one. I feel better being divorced from a guy who doesn’t care about the other one, significant other one. I feel that he let me down. Didn’t take his vows seriously. I did. I took care of him when he was sick, took him to the hospital a couple of times, but that does not make a marriage.

If I ever get married again, it will be a two way street whether I am sick, healthy, or rich. It will be a two way street. No one’s going to be judgmental. No judge is going to tell me what to do, and I love life. Bless you. That’s it.

Almond

(July 2002 – Almond died suddenly in a “freak” car accident.)
February 4, 2001

My Struggle Continues

I am a 34-year-old single parent. I am very determined and somewhat of a risk-taker. I consider myself outgoing and intelligent. I have always been on a quest for survival, and I have succeeded in my mission of life so far.

I am on a new journey at this point in my life. I am finally on my own, and I am beginning a search for the real me. I am traveling to Australia for a few months to reassess my life and my life’s goals.

I have ensured that my child is well taken care of, and it is the process of separation that I face within myself. There is fear of the unknown and of separating from my daughter; this is something that I must overcome.

It has always been a “dream” for me to travel to Australia. I have always had a goal to meet—a goal to finally see the most beautiful country in the world (at least in my opinion).

I have no idea of the challenges that lie ahead, but I know that within myself, I have the ability to survive. I have proven this over and over again to myself.

I hope that within the next few months, I will become inspired and find my “new” direction in life.

I have always lived for my child, but now I need to start living for myself.

Welcome to my journey...

Tusk
Dear Cynthia,

Here is the letter you wanted. I hope this is what you want and, again, I am sorry for taking so long to send this.

My name is Susan and I am 34 years old. I have one child, a daughter, who is almost 16. I am currently on Canada Pension Disability and am a full time student at UCFV.

I come from a family of five children, two boys, three girls, although one of my brothers died when I was just 7 years old. My brothers and sisters are all a lot older than me, so it was almost like growing up an only child because they were all moved out by the time I was old enough to remember. I had a fairly normal childhood until when I was 11 years old my dad became very sick with heart disease and was sick for four years until he died when I was 15. This was very traumatic for me because I was very close to my dad.

When I was 18 I became pregnant with my daughter. This threw a huge curve in my plans because I was the only child of five that graduated from high school and I was determined I was going to do something successful with my life. After my daughter was born I enrolled in a job entry program and eventually went to work for Lumberland where I stayed for seven years.

When I was 24 I got married and that turned out to be the worst mistake of my life. It was an extremely abusive relationship both physically and mentally and thankfully I had the strength to get out after a year and a half. Shortly after my separation as I was attending school for a business management program I was diagnosed with systemic lupus erythematosus. Needless to say, this had a huge impact on my life. That was nine years ago and my life has changed dramatically since. Thankfully I was blessed with a very caring and compassionate daughter and family and they help me the best they can. I tried twice to return to work, but both times I ended up sick again. The second time I fell and fractured my back and that was a huge setback. The lupus has caused me severe arthritis and deformities in my hands and feet. I have had five hand surgeries and am about to have major surgery on both my feet. Right now I am pursuing my B.A. Blessed with a very caring and compassionate daughter and family and they help me the best they can.

Right now I am pursuing my Bachelor of Science degree and am very determined to get it. I consider myself a very strong and willful person and don't plan on letting anything get in my way. I have finally learned to accept my disease and deal with it instead of trying to overcome it. There are many things that I cannot do anymore, but there are many things I can do. I have a beautiful daughter who is also my friend and hopefully an interesting career ahead of me.

Sincerely,

Susan
March 25, 2001 (third attempt to e-mail received it)
Date: Sun, 25 Mar 2001 18:33:01 -0800
From: @lycos.com>
To: Cynthia Andruske <cynthia@interchange.ubc.ca>
Subject: trying again

Hi Cynthia
I'll try to send the paper again and I will send it in the mail tomorrow.
thanks
Tumbleweed

This is my paper:

March 25, 2001

My Perception of "Self"

There are many analogies in which I see myself. One, although not original, is still effective for me and one I often sketch, is that of a tree. A tree resembles strength and grounding but at the same time is approachable and comforting. As a tree, I have some roots that grow deep and some that grow shallow which you could say are my inherent nature or inborn personality. Over time I have grown in the realms of physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual thereby developing a trunk, sprouting some branches and bearing fruit. Through the years of being exposed to conditions and experiences from fertilization to starvation, from being in a crowded space or being in an open space, from being attended to or being ignored and from being injured or being restored, are a few that have affected and shaped who I am today. In other words, I am genetically made but I am also influenced by the world and people around me. These influences have had profound effect on whether I produce leaves, grow branches, if I'm healthy or all withered up and they helped determine if I am fruitful or not. Within myself I strive to find the "real me" and become the best and strongest tree I can. The truth is, I may have changed dramatically on the outside (ie: have adopted and learned extrovert tendencies) but I am still the same person on the inside. I am still the same tree, with the same roots, willing to share some insight connected with a few of my new branches and fruit and expose some of the buds which still have to sprout as I travel my life’s journey.

As I have traveled through life, facing the challenges, and at time ran away from them, and embracing successes, I have learned to nurture myself for whom I am, to excel and acknowledge my natural abilities as well as my inabilities. It has helped me to discover what motivates me and energizes me, which in turn has empowered me to seek these elements in whatever I do. In doing so, I have learned about all human beings. I seek meaning and connection to whatever happens or comes into my life and focus on solutions rather than the problems. I desire to be mindful of the issues involved and maintain positive relationships with others and aim to avoid negative thinking.

I have a high internal locus of control and I value autonomous behavior and respect it in others. Over time I have developed a healthy self-concept believing that through my own behavior I will receive reinforcement or the consequences there of. Through the pain, heartache, struggles and
challenges I now have a good idea of where I am going and how to accomplish it. I have self-awareness – I know who I was before, I know who I am now, and I know who I can become. The fact that we are all unique and the diversity of people makes the world we live in so interesting and our similarities give us a source of connectiveness --- are what make the journey through life so complex and at the same time simply rewarding.

I feel I am who I am today because I have learned to look through ‘my window of the world’ to understand that growth and development gives me hope for the future that I can change. Without alterations and improvements, those challenges, my mind and my inner ‘self’ might become stagnant and caught in a “one-way” thinking pattern. In conclusion, I view myself as successful because through the negative and positive experiences in my life, I have been able to use them to make a more optimistic, creative, and happier “self’. Through my journey of learning I believe everything happed for a reason and that reason just might be that I reach my ultimate potential.

Tumbleweed

Date: Mon, 26 Mar 2001 21:03:55 -0800
From: @telus.net>
To: Cynthia Andruske <cynthia@interchange.ubc.ca>
Subject: summary

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sorry it took so long. been a hectic semester and a lot of unexpected outside distractions.

My name is Heather. Heather B-single mom. I've been a single mom for a while now and plan on being one for a while. I still hate men quite a bit. Thought I'd get over it, but I don't think I have....or ever will.

I feel pretty fed up with everything-being alone to be responsible for it all is overwhelming. Just when I begin to think that things may get better and that I'm improving, I realize that everything I've done doesn't make the past go away. I am a statistic. From the moment I was born right through to everything that has happened to me and everything that I have done to myself-I am a mere stat. Exhaustion. Every day I feel as though I've accomplished so much but I wake up the next day to do it all over again.....without any help. FMEP claims to be doing everything they can to get child support owed to me, but that seems like a fantasy now. My son, school, and work. That's my life. One time love seemed possible, now it is only something that left me a souvenir----a souvenir that eats and grows and eats and wants and needs and eats. I want to give him the world but that is for other people's children. What I really want is a little holiday. Even just one night to myself. Even just one hour of nothingness. Who ever said that having a baby made a sad girl happy?!?!? I am a statistic and I am a single mom.

Heather
March 28, 2001
When I was invited to be a part of Cynthina’s “study group” I was asked to think of a pseudonym. I chose “Gloria,” and when I was asked why Gloria, I elaborated, “Gloria Steinem.” No more needed to be said.

Gloria

Date: Thu, 29 Mar 2001 18:20:18
From: @hotmail.com>
To: cynthia@interchange.ubc.ca
Subject: Re: intro samples

Hi my name is LOVEY. I have 2 girls ages 9 and 14. I have been separated from my ex for over 8 years now. He has been with his common-law wife for 8.5 years and her daughter who he cherishes more than his own children. I have been trying to divorce this guy for over 8 years now. Today, I have the divorce as of March 21, 2001. With the Judge who wiped the slate clean of arrears in child support on the same day the divorce was claimed. Thus not being able to appeal the decision because it is prior to the divorce.

I was born into a family who did not know what to do with me as I was born a girl instead of a boy. In tradition on both sides of the family that the first grandson will bear all the glory and honour of carrying on the precious name. While growing up I was molested, neglected, abused mentally, physically and spiritually. As a teenager I was raped twice, and the rapist got off, but they will have to pay in the end so I feel I claimed victory.

In all the chaos I still wanted to go to school as I found comfort in knowledge and going to church as I felt comfort there too. My center of the universe has been God. God has been my friend when no one else would be. I keep thinking in my mind that this is only a shell and they can do what they like with my body and mind but they cannot touch my soul. Yes with each heinous thing that my family has done to me has made me stronger and more self-aware of my surroundings. I find victory each time I get defeated in life. Yes, my ex won in court today with the child support, but it will come back to haunt him. At least I know I will be in heaven one day and he just paid his dues to stay on this Earth. My ex's heaven. My family's heaven. Each time someone attacks me in some way, this makes me grow closer to God and I find more strength.

Even though I am considered trash to my family, I find I have a wealth of knowledge and insight for others who are in so many trials in their life. This why I would like to go into nursing and find my niche some where that I can be of some assistance to someone else either physically or mentally. I feel need to finish my schooling even though I should be out working.

One analogy I find that kind of fits my world is a sewer that leaks in to ground which fertilizes the ground thus giving the brightest and strongest flowers to bloom. You have to be
in a lot of crap to enjoy the benefits in time. It may not come right away but like fine
wine the more it ages it tastes that much better in years.

If you think about it, the battles you do have are usually for a short period of time, depending
on how long you decide to own the battle. If you give the battle over to God, God will own it
so it will not attack you in any sense of the word. I have gone through many illnesses that
have put me out of work and school during these battles. Now I have one illness and it is
easier to deal with since I have given the battle over to God as in the mist of the battles the
pain would be worst.

Most of all, I do find my self a very unique, complete and independent woman. Having these
qualities in society today is very hard as it is far more appropriate to have a man (boy) on
your arm. It looks as if you are a failure in their eyes and a very big threat to them. I have
found I do not fear a lot of things that a married woman would feel. I am Lovey. I am not
someone's wife. I am the mother of my 2 girls and am strengthening them to be strong
independent women with option to fall in love with a male without changing their lives to
suit the role of a "wife" role and losing their sense of self in the relationship.

Thank you for listening and bless you.

LOVEY

April 19, 2001 – received by e-mail
Breaking Free

There are 2 cultures, in which we live and interact in, The Culture of Life and The Culture of
Death. Knowing which, separates us, we are living or existing.

Living in the Culture of Life, you will find harmony, respect and fulfillsment, basic needs are
not an issue. Shelter is a stable home, free from violence. Food is there when needed.
Clothing is not an issue. From these basic needs we can move forward into loving
relationships, self-fulfillment and success.

Living in the Culture of Death, you will find mechanical answers, Authorative figures and
attitudes. You are suppressed, controlled and consumed by the fight of obtaining basic needs.
Shelter means a place to stay, if you can make the rent payments. Not to mention hydro,
cable, telephone, things others take for granted. Food is simply not there when you need it.
Clothing is non-existent. If these basic needs are not being met, stress, distress, anger,
yelling, screaming, discord in the family circle, verbal and physical assaults occur, violent
behavior exhibited daily. Breaking free from this culture of death takes and will take an
enormous amount of energy and help along the way. For if we do not move forward we will
remain submissive and hope for success is only a faint flicker of a candle burning ever so far
in the distance.
There are certain emotions that one must emit and feel, they are simple, are we safe? Are we secure? Are we loved? Are we loving? How can we obtain these elusive emotions? As we gaze into the mirror and look all around, perhaps we will see an answer.

My answer begins with the feeling of being safe, secure, loved and loving, which gives me the support I need to fulfill my basic needs. Support will enable me to get an education and the training I need to enter into the Culture of Life. Once more I will be able to continue my journey

Come with me.

*Brown Bear*

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**May 15, 2001 received by fax**

To Whom It May Concern:

I am without a doubt a single mother. Until my daughter was six years old, she has had no other parent except me. When she was one and a half years old, she was sick...nights of endless crying and hospital visits. She couldn’t breathe; she had diarrhea...on and on...I had to quit my job and stay at home full time (the first time since she was 5 weeks old.) At that point, I would have loved her father to be there to sit up in the rocking chair all night or sleep sitting up in the hospital while she has the mask on her face...But he never came, and she and I got through it with flying colors. Now, she’s a happy, polite, 8 year old excited that her mom’s getting married and that she has a father. She’s proud to have a mother who has struggled through welfare line-ups, two jobs at a time, and constant ridicule because I’m a single mom. I’ve struggled through abusive relationships from my father all the way to my mid-twenties to become the woman I am today – a proud mother of a happy child, a proud Christian woman, a good wife, a caring friend, a woman who has lost 200 pounds, and a manager of a clothing store. Plus, I am now a consultant with Mary-Kay Cosmetics. I have all of these things because I learnt the tools to overcome my fears, my victim mentality though a program called “The Bridging Program.” I started up the hill of enlightenment through this program, and now I have the skills and ability to look adversity square in the face. I found God, my husband and my self-respect all because I have the skills. The Bridging Program taught me the skills, and I add the rest, integrity, strength, belief in myself, and God.

I look in the mirror every morning and see a proud woman capable of many things. Anything I want I can have and do get. I strive everyday for my goals, and each passing day, I obtain more and more, closer and closer to anything I want.

To whom it may concern,...this is me...Vivianne. I look forward to my next challenge.

*Vivianne*
Received by letter June 13, 2001

Hello, my name is Taylor. I am 29 years old. I have a grade 7 education and am a single mother of two boys, 7½ and 4½. I have been raising them alone since my youngest was 3 months. I have two sisters, one older, one younger; both have been single parents. My older sister recently married. My mom was also a single parent. She separated from our dad when I was 10. I have never seen my dad much growing up. He worked out of town lots and was and still is an alcoholic. Neither my mom or dad remarried. I left home one month after I turned 16, moved in with my first boyfriend who I lived with on and off till I was eighteen. That was my first abusive relationship, but not my last. I got my first job at 16, worked till I was 18, then, got UIC for one year, then straight to welfare at age 19. I met the father of my children. I spent 5 years in hell with him. I thought if a man hit me again, I would walk. I thought wrong. He was worse than the last one. I’m not sure what real love feels like and haven’t been able to love any man. Don’t know if I ever will. I have been in another on again off again relationship for 2½ years. He does not hit me. He says he loves me. I hope one day I can love him back. In February ’95, I took a hairdressing course; 2 months after I graduated I found out I was pregnant with my second child, put my career on hold until April 2000. I have been working since. I find every day a struggle. I love my job, but I wonder sometimes if it’s worth dragging my kids out the door every morning for $8.00 an hour.

Taylor

Date: Fri, 22 Jun 2001 05:08:49 -0700
From: @hotmail.com>
To: cynthia@interchange.ubc.ca

Hi Cynthia,

You probably have just about given up on this intro. Sorry, It took so Long but I am so busy right now.

Who am I is a difficult question to answer. I am sorta like the laundry basket when you pull the clothes out of the dryer. I cannot be confined to a single type of person. First and foremost I am the child of a loving and kind God. Then I am me, Rochelle. I am a mom. I am a nurse and I have just finished my BSN. For the most part life was a challenge and today I am a happy contented woman who knows who I am and what I am. I have been a sober member of AA since April 15, 1989. I have four children of which three live with me at any given time. All of my children have spent most of their lives living with me. I am currently in the middle of moving to Calgary. I believe that if you take the steps no matter what the fears or challenges you can become anything you desire. I believe that you can pray your way through good and bad and that I am responsible for taking the chances to having a better life no matter what the obstacle. I am at peace with my life and with those around me. Life is good if you are willing to take the risks to make it that way.

Rochelle
June 29, 2001

Mary, that’s what I called myself. I am a single mother of a wonderful son. I always wanted the best for him. I wanted to teach him about the world and show him everything that I could and more. I think that I have done a fairly good job.

Unfortunately, a lot of bad luck came my way, and I have been trying to pick up the pieces ever since. His father was struck down with Multiple Sclerosis, and even though we split up this was very hard on all of us. My X and I got along pretty well; he is unable to care for himself, so he is in a care home. I chose to stay home and look after my son through his younger years seeing as he didn’t have his father around. I moved out to Chilliwack from Vancouver thinking it was a good place for my son to grow up. It was a great place for him, but unfortunately at the time, it wasn’t for me as I knew no one out here. It’s hard moving to a new town when you’re not working as you don’t know anyone. I withdrew and went into a depression. I fixed myself up and started to pick up the pieces. Believe me, it’s not easy.

To make a long story short, I finally found a job doing what I like. Then, I was laid off and am now on Unemployment Insurance. I’m grieving this lay off. I am currently still searching for a job. I’m doing better now believe it or not because I have HOPE, and I believe in myself.

Mary

July 6, 2001 - received by mail

I am 57 years old. I have taken the Bridging program in Chilliwack. Part of my transition has been moving back to White Rock. I am on BC Benefits Disability. Depression has been a plague on my life, and career plans are on hold while I give myself a chance to “feel.” Life “feels” as I am starting over again.

I attend Alanon, and this program has been wonderful in getting my life into perspective.

I am grateful for the Bridging program because it has helped me to hold onto my dreams. “HOLD TIGHT WITH AN OPEN HAND.” Life does not always unfold as we had planned, but if we refuse to give up, we will reach our goal.

Life’s challenges continue for me although my health has improved a lot.

In closing, I will leave this writing from my Alanon program by Henry David Thoreau.

If one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours.

--Advancing through advocacy.

Sorry to take so long with this, Cynthia. I have trouble putting my thoughts on paper.

--Advancing/Advocacy
July 1, 2001 – tape recorded introduction and written from Maya’s faint pencil marks

Alas, I write, but it is not in me to do so. I try to find the appropriate words to introduce myself, but ?sorry? search fails me. I am without and filled with so much. I live a constant contradiction. Therefore, what I think to write cancels itself out, and I am left with nothing and still more. I am done but still beginning. I’d rather write, but I find myself at the end before I begin. So instead of hoping that I will one day finish my intro, I hope that I may accept me and all my contradictions that I may continue to see good and bad in all things and that I make new choices in my life with eyes wide open but closed enough that I may take that leap of faith of finally making a choice. This I write. Finally.

Postscript: Love, love, love, love, love, love, love, love, love, love, love, love

Dear Reader,
Why are you reading this? What are you looking for? What service are these words to you? Do they alter or change your mind? Will you read too much into them?

You are asking a hermit to introduce itself to strangers…for what reason? (to give them fodder for their generalizations and judgements?)

I wouldn’t know what to say? Should I know your purpose to get to know me? Would change my intro to suit, or when should I begin because I am limitless. What is important in this moment or the many moments in our lives. This paper is about….? Should I write to help prove his thesis? Do I dare write what I started to be heard? This is a difficult task to complete and to ask of another. I feel for the all of us. Just know that I exist. Maybe until I have something intelligible to tell you that you are willing to listen.

Maya
July 1, 2001 – tape recorded introduction (taken from an interview where Collette is describing a paper to me that she wrote for a course in adult education.

If I get a better situation I would like to take courses...you know drawing. It’s because I still haven’t had a good job. I haven’t had that ability in a way. I am the one, the breadwinner. So I haven’t had this ability to say, yeah, I can do it now...It’s some things in there, but don’t allow me to...

But I am really, I am a starting over...It’s the beginning of a, so I want to show I want to read you the part...

It’s about how I felt. It’s personal, so what I did I want to read you the, it says, I got the letter, it says:
Dear D, it has taken me much longer than I thought to start writing my paper. I had no idea how I was going to put into writing all my learning experiences during this ADED 320 course. I wrote and wrote numerous pages without feeling I was doing it right. It was then that I decided to tell you a story about how I started, and how I went through the process of learning.

My story’s called The Wise Man at the Lake, and it starts as follow...

I choose to live in the countryside of the city. It was an area with plenty of wildlife and forest surrounding the area near the lake that was my favorite place for reading and spending time, relaxing, and meditating. There was something about this lake that I was curious about. I was afraid just to think of swimming in it. I didn’t know. I didn’t know, why I was so scared because there were so many people getting into it everyday, and they seemed to be very much enjoying the time they were spending in the water. Probably, I was a scared because of lack of confidence in my swimming abilities and that I was not good enough. This was the reason why everyday I stayed out of the water on shore, looking at others having such a good time. It was only water. Then, why was I afraid? I was not the only one on the shore looking at the lake. I noticed that there was a man standing close to the water, and from time to time the swimmers got out of the water to show him something. With a smile on his face, he listened to them and received what they handed him. Soon they were back into the water. He was clearly enjoying what he was given. I assumed that the majority they were exciting things that they found at the bottom of the lake.

One day I started questioning myself why everybody can swim and enjoy the water? Aren’t they scared? They swim so well; probably, they are expert in that sport. I could see people swimming and diving for hours, and I was still on the border of the lake watching them having such a great time. I took a resolution. I decided to approach that man and share with him my fears and concerns about my poor abilities to swim. He patiently listened to me and said, “Every person just sees swimming is a learner. They probably have their own fears, but they don’t, they know they are learners, and they swim with the best of their ability as learners and enjoy every level of it. The Wise Book of Macara says that fear, doubts, and feelings of inadequacies are part of the shape in adult learners when they are in the process of learning. Maybe those people that you see enjoying the water have fears too, and they focus
in other things while they are in the water, and that takes away part of their fear. Maybe you are not the only one having those feelings.” With these magic words, the veil that I had over my eyes was taken away from me, and for the first time, I could see what had happened to me and why I was feeling the way I did. I discovered that my fears were preventing me from learning. I immediately started reading and reflecting about it, and the more I read, the more I realized that I was only a learner, and I had a lot to improve. I was not supposed to know everything because I was only a learner. What happened to me is that discovery took from me the weight that was keeping me down. Suddenly, I felt healthy, motivated, and encouraged to challenge my weaknesses and start the process of learning. This man with his wisdom was able to challenge me in a kind way to find answers, experiencing and looking by myself and discovering new things. At first, I started getting into the water cautiously. Later, I realized that the lake is more than water. I discovered the variety of stones with different shapes and colors, but all of them with their special beauty, pieces of driftwood floating in the lake, plants, and different species down at the bottom. That was a wonderful feeling. Without noticing, soon I was diving and opening my eyes to a new world under the water. The more I learned, the more I wanted to know, so every minute I spent in the water was a live experience for me as learner. My fears were gone, and I was having fun learning. If I hadn’t talked with that wise man, I wouldn’t have been able to experience the magic of nature. Of course, since I was always on the border of the lake, I was always only aware of the surface of the water, and I was scared of the depth of it because I didn’t know it, and I didn’t dare to give it a try. Everyday under the water was a new learning experience for me. I learned to identify different living species by color, by form, by way of life, and as soon as I was back home I was able to read and research about them, widening my horizons and learning more and more about what now was a passion for me. Suddenly, I surprised myself doing independent learning and feeling so well and more a secure of my own abilities. It was the way how I learned to conquer my fears to the unknown and be able to immerse myself in the depths, deeper water of that lake which everyday gives me adventures and new things to discover. I was challenged to find answers, and what a great satisfaction it is when I get some results. I am grateful to this wise man who directed me in a subtly and smooth way to learn by my own experiences and to reflect about them. I know now that if I have a concern in my learning, hopefully, I will be able to go to the lake and find this great wise man at the shore who will listen to me, and with his wisdom will teach me the skills that will help me to find out in my own way what I am looking for.

Collette

I think it’s a story that tells you how, so I give it because I think I have too much merit. I need a concrete example, so I went through to explain where I learn, but I wanted to tell you that it’s because I take seriously what I do. For me, it’s so important, so I think that’s why for me going to school it’s not to spend time. No, it’s because I want to learn, so that was the interaction, so he gave us freedom to write whatever, even if we wanted to record something. But I wanted to, it’s what happened is I was having problems with so many things that I learned, so I didn’t know what to put. I read what he wanted. It’s specific. He doesn’t want us to list everything we did, and he thought no, he wanted to put how we learn, so that is
something that I was having problems, and I am not an organized writer, so took me days
to go through, and it came to me, and this is the second time that I tell in a story the learning
experience because when I was doing my other practicum, I was having problems with my
instructor there was really...a pain.

Collette

July 7, 2001 - Cactus – I am still waiting for her introduction. She said she would write one,
and she has started it.

Cactus

July 10, 2001 telephone conversation
Scout – After reading the introductions written by other women, when I phoned her to see
how she was doing with hers, she said,

“I don’t think I can do that.”

Scout

July 10, 2001 - Ann – I am still waiting for her introduction. She has written it a number of
times, but she has never sent it.

Ann

July 11, 2001
I have never cared to introduce myself save by my actions and positions in discussions, but
here goes...

I am an egalitarian feminist, humanist, experimentalist. I love organizations’ chaos. I have
little tolerance in subjectivity, nor do I believe in complete objectivity. Subjects I am
interested in are anthropology, economics, his-herstory, archeology, psychology, sociology,
science, astronomy...yes, basically everything. I do admire curiosity. My learning is enabled
by understanding a structure with which to attack specifics. Personality type is one shared
with mostly men of a 16th of the population.
I have been sickly for too long...and have endured way too much. I cannot take closed spaces, even large areas. I always have to have a window open and really only feel myself out in growing things or in my space. I'm not really at ease there with company. My child is the only human being I have consistently lived with except my mother and sister. They were hardly there and rarely inclusive. I prefer visiting others. I get embarrassed 'cause I tend to chatter, and people get overwhelmed. That is why I feel more comfortable with the pseudo-social structure and purpose, and etc. of organizations. My housemates of the past have been kinder than most of my friends, and with most of my friends and with most of them who needs enemies.

I have always hated games of all sorts preconceived notions, presumptuousness, pretention, and a thorough revulsion for those who regurgitation posed as education and are buffered from the consequences. I am sick of shallow opinions, lies, and twisted misinformation. They are a waste of time and energy. We are all in this together, and until we see to our collective interests, whatever progress we make as individuals is temporary at best. It is not my job to support nor perpetuate your illusions and or delusions. When it takes 7 generations to rid of patterns of human behaviors, etc., and more than half the world is hardly a second generation out from serfs, peasants, and slavery. We have way too much analysis to make if we are to get anywhere any time soon.

I appreciate critical thinking, the scientific method, reasoning skills, imagination, creativity, and experience. I believe knowledge is a lifetime pursuit and that conversation, dialogue, and discussions are all lost arts. I find most people boring. I think I am ugly and ignorant, but I also think I am a human being, deserving of fundamental respect as do all of us.


I have tried for years to be in a position to fulfill my dream of taking care of me, my own, and fulfill my potential as a whole human being, deserving of respect and an asset to my community, but to no avail. I believe some fundamental changes and attitudes need to be made by someone or thing other than me. It has not been for my trying. I believe I am not asked what I need just because I need. I am tired of being someone else’s excuse for a job. It is amazing I have lived as long as I have even here, and I suppose some thanks is due for just that. But subsistence is to be replaced with life, for this is no life, not really. I have been sent down so many corridors that have no end and doors that open to nothing but gray fog...I have no hope for institutionalized anything these days...I think I shall go foraging off into the sunset... I think my son will fit in just fine though, no worries with him.

Kate Franschold

Mabel’s introduction has been taken from her third pilot interview with me on July 20, 1998, before she disappeared. She is explaining her path or plan that ends in 2000 shown above.

M: I can just show you real quickly because of the detail that's in these different sections and what they mean and the different colours even the colours I used have different meanings.

C: Oh, well, we should discuss that in more detail.

M: I like that palm tree in the middle or though.

C: I noticed that palm tree. I was wondering about that.

M: I'm going to get there. See there I am in my car. I've already been out in the boat. Do you want to take that along with you and look at it and bring it back the next time?

C: I can have a look at it, but don't you want to. You said that you look at it every morning, so I wouldn't want to take your.

M: Well, yeah, check out the palm tree. I can live without it 'til we meet again. (pause) No, I'm going to let you take it, and I'd like you when you do bring it back, I'd like to see what you think it it means or some of it means. See if you can maybe interpret some of the stuff on your own because you're a smart woman.

C: Ok. Yeah, but it's your. It's not mine.

M: Well, no, it's not your path, but it's just the way I've got it, and what each section means or represents. See if you can come up with that. That was on each square was a different instruction paper. Each square was a different part of the path, and I'll give you a hint. We started with the star, which is the ultimate goals. The circle is the steps that you need to take to get to final goals. And there's my date. Two years, I gave myself. And then you come swing back over here.


M: And this here watch - I got that what's my number one step.

C: Keep my faith and dreams alive.

M: And the blue feather is a symbol for faith. And those are supposed to be clouds. They look like footprints.

C: And you have a balance there - keep it level - life balance.
M: Yeah. All these are women that have been in my life that I admired, fictional or non-fictional - it didn't matter. Yeah, Pipi Longstockings, I loved Pipi Longstocking. And this the day here, May 23, is actually how we were feeling that particular day. We had to put it down, and you had to draw. You had to apply your feelings to the paper through drawing. It helped. I'm not a fantastic artist, but I had a good time doing it. And these are all the steps I needed to date. See if you can even interpret some of them.

C: Pay to the order - that looks like a check for you. Spirit, self-esteem

M: Get a pay check, first pay check.

C: Home sweet home. Practice, practice, practice - it's a stairway. Lesson one, sonata, Ra, Do, Mi. Do you sing?

M: No. Play the piano. There's my piano. Used to play grand piano. That's why I put that down., but what that means is I'd have to take lessons again which I'd be willing to do.

C: Well, that's it's in your star. And what's the watch? A chain.

M: Break the chains that bind me, and the watch is give myself time. See the monkeys? Those are monkeys.

M: So you can look it over, and then and then, yeah, the next time we'll discuss it.

Mabel

August 7, 2002 – and now my turn to introduce myself – I ran away to find myself. When I asked the women if I should include my introduction, they all responded that they would like that. Therefore, I have taken the liberty of introducing myself along with them. Partly, I asked them if they wanted me to do this because I firmly believe that I should not ask anyone to do something that I wouldn't do or have not tried. Also, I feel like these journeys of transitions have been mine as well.

The women are right! --It's hard to do! – to introduce oneself What is important at this moment in our journeys? So like them, I'd like you as the reader to keep in mind that this introduction is how I was feeling when it was written.

Where do I begin? Probably the best place is by thanking all 23 women in this project, for they have helped me finish this daunting, yes, daunting responsibility of trying to present their lives I've heard them through their stories. All the women have become important to me as I've watched them struggle to accomplish their goals. I feel that our journeys will resonate with other women's, but maybe men's lives too. I hope so.
Each woman represents a part of me – Collette and Kate Franschild – we’re all immigrants to Canada. I share with Collette the Latin American culture so much a part of me that has experienced a rebirth, and now, I’m going home. It’s a certain death to shut out a part of yourself despite the reasoning.

Mary’s determination to pass that test to get a job at Corrections resonates so much with me, for that’s how we accomplish our goals through that unfailing determination to get back up again when our worlds are coming down around us. Ali, your determination to continually grow strikes a chord with me, for it is hard, but we can do it. When I think of Gloria, I remember the story about rats and the grain elevators. “There’s no shame in having rats, but there is shame in not doing anything about it.” I too have had determination to complete this journey to finish this thesis.

For the quiet, gentle artists, Tumbleweed, Maya, Brown Bear, and Taylor. You have great impact with others as you teach in your gentle ways and help others. We all need to reown and recognize the artist within us as we create a myriad of texts whether they are through paint, writing, working with others, or working with the beauty of hair.

To the seekers of knowledge and their love of learning, I resonate with Cactus, Advancing/Advocacy, Lovey, and Susan. That’s what this human journey is all about – learning, seeking, and exploring. You’ve been a part of my journey too.

When I think of the rebels in their quest for social justice to make this world and our communities better places, I think of Lilith, Collette, Kate Franschild, Ann, Tusk, Vivianne, Almond, Rochelle, Gloria, Almond, and Diana. You all remind me of the importance of justice, fair treatment, respecting culture, advocating for others, being involved and accepting of others, and willing to fight for what you believe in. Yes, we all do it in our own ways – whether it is through protesting in the streets, writing newspaper articles, joining women’s organizations, or telling our stories through research. It can have an effect.

Yes, Lilith, I will get out of your life in this role as researcher. Yes, Mabel and Scout, you slipped away maybe to retain your privacy at a time of great change for you. Yes, Collette, through those tapes that I returned to you, you can “have your life back now” without having to worry about me analyzing more. I, too, will begin anew now that this chapter of my life is closing and continue to believe as I start my next journey,

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

--T.S. Eliot, Four Quartets, Little Gidding (1943)

Thank you for being part of my journey of exploration,

Cynthia
**The Women’s Recommendations**

I pondered and worried about where to include the women’s recommendations to the policymakers. I finally decided that they belong in the introductions. This is their position of most strength – at the beginning. I have tried to include the women’s experiences, stories, and opinions as much as possible throughout the dissertation. Therefore, I wanted very much their opinions and suggestions for policymakers, government officials, social workers, and the helping professions to stand alone. Also, I felt that it was important to ask the women their opinions. Therefore, I asked them to the following question during my research.

- What would you tell a policymaker if you spoke to one? This is your opportunity to make recommendations with me.

These are the recommendations the women made.

1. It's like they've [policymakers] got their little program so set that if they didn't think it needs changing. They don't want [to change]. I think that, you know, if you can give me a suggestion on something, and I could we all look at things in a different way. [Policymakers should ask women on welfare.] (Gloria)

2. Well, I guess, one of the things would be that people need to be, policies and stuff are too general. They need to be based on [the] individual, individually. They usually have a policy and put everybody in a group. You're in that group; you're in this group, it's not done on an individual. Everybody's different. I mean, everybody has different situations and different. I just think a lot of them are just too broad. (Susan)

3. And I find a lot of dealing with [workers], you just get so many different answers. You'll talk to someone, and they'll tell you this is what you have to do for this, and then you go and do it, and you take it back, and someone else says, 'No, you weren't supposed to do that. You were supposed to do this.' A lot of times you do what they tell you and then when you get there, it's someone else and they say, 'Oh, that isn't what you were supposed to do. You were supposed to fill out this paper,' or that paper. [There's no consistency, and everyone tells you something different.] (Susan)

4. I have been recommending things like the medical and the dental. (Maya)

5. I've always thought there should be like a self-esteem program and stuff because women get once when you're on it for so long, you sort of get down on yourself for it. Like some people it's in the back further, but some people it's out there, you know, like being on social assistance, your self-esteem goes down, and I always thought if I had something to say, I would say that sort of thing. I just think they should have, instead of putting them in a lot of these job things, they should just get put them in for
number one thing like they should put like a self-esteem out there and make them realize that it's just not you. There's other people in your situation and stuff sort of thing. (Mary)

6. [If government uses job finders for women on welfare], those finders people would be my concern, so policies would have to be that these would have to be very well educated, maybe they all have the same training. They all do the same procedure, follow the same policy and procedure on how to determine who qualifies for what and who doesn't qualify for what. And that, to me, would be more a fair system, and it would have to be enforced, because the old system where financial workers, or welfare or social workers would sit there at the computer and play God with people and just play with their lives, literally, to me, it was, to me was just really disgusting. But at least if there's a policy and procedure, a protocol, there needs to be a protocol on how to proceed in order to determine, so once they've been scooped off the fair front line, after they've done that selection, and they go to these finders. It's putting the right finders, and once you have the right finders, whoever they may be, it's teaching them, or training them to follow the protocol, and there has to be a protocol, like one way of doing the procedure. And then coming out with at the end, after you've come through the procedure, you're going to end up with 10 different selections. (Tumbleweed)

7. Talking about programs, condensing them and so that they're not redundant, and I agree with that, making them more effective because you're going to learn more, but not to make them in a step-ladder. I would make them more in equal range and giving people more of a choice. (Tumbleweed)

8. Giving that person the choice of you have to take three courses, but we're giving you a choice from ten. I don't have to take job search right now. I can go and take self-esteem building because I think that's what I really need right now. I need to feel more confident in myself so that I can go look for a job. Other people might choose other things, but I personally think that that would be much more effective. And in the sense that you're giving people some of their power back. (Tumbleweed)

9. It's taken me five years, but you know what? I think that's another thing they need to know is, to make a five-year plan and not to give up after two years or after three years when it seems like it's impossible to just stay. Stick with it. It doesn't always happen the way you exactly plan it, but I look back now, and right at this moment, everything I said I was going to do, I've done has worked out. Although at times I didn't think it was ever going to work, it has - everything that I planned for and set my goal for. (Tumbleweed)

10. The poverty, the drug addictions, every issue out there that leads people to needing welfare they need to deal with those issues before they actually plan on saying, "Ok, we're not helping anymore." Well, let's get rid of the issues and then maybe it won't
be used as much. Teenage pregnancy - I couldn't imagine being 15-16 trying to raise a child. I can't believe I did it at 21. (Heather)

11. Just to keep people from being lost in getting despondent and things like that. (Maya)

12. Maybe more financial programs how to manage money. Maybe that would be a, a big one. (Maya)

13. Probably, it would help if I had a mentor. (Lilith)

14. Well, if they're at all insightful and have any kind of vision, and they have the resources, and they really want to do something about welfare instead of cutting back like they've done in Alberta and Ontario and caused a lot of grief and homelessness, which isn't very productive. It's fine to reduce the welfare rolls, but what happens to all those people? I'd say to have some kind of long range vision, and if you're going to have programs, don't just have these little basic computer programs. You've got to have stuff that's going to get people off in the long term. You've probably got to make education more accessible to everyone. (Lilith)

15. Transportation is an issue. If you want us, why not give us all bus passes. (Lilith)

16. There's something in the States has they have like all these food vouchers. That's not a bad idea for up here because if they could help you a little bit more like with your groceries, food stamps, on top of welfare. (Lilith)

17. I think they need to be a little more fair as far as the money goes. Last year, I read in the paper, you know, how the councilmen, you know, got a raise of this and that. The Mayor made a comment about the $53.00 raise, don't spend it all in one place. I'm thinking, 'You ass!' You know, $53.00 that's a week's worth of groceries for me! Doesn't sound like a lot, but that's the way it has to be, and I thought, okay, you want to make such a big joke? Give it to me! Give it back to the system. (Ali)

18. [The incentive to work needs to be changed.] I was allowed to have 25%. They take off everything but 25% of my earnings. So it would come to maybe about $150 extra a month on top of normal welfare. That's my incentive to go to work. Like $150 to me it's not very much money, and it is not an incentive. In Saskatchewan, you were allowed to make $300 plus 25%. On top of the $300, you were allowed to keep plus 25% for a year, then, after that year, 25%. (Cactus)

19. I'd like maybe to have some sort of policy would be nice to change like to have people's eyes opened a little bit. I wouldn't care if this was published, and people read it all the time, even women on welfare, saying, 'Hey, this is what's been done. Read this.' because some things people can at least look at 'cause then you can identify with this. 'Yes, this is me, or this is relatively me, and this is why I'm here, and Oh,
and maybe I do need some help with this area or something.' That would be nice. (Vivianne)

20. They think it's an easy life, and I would really, I mean this would be a big one for me, this would be to change policy is to have like some life skills like me and a couple of other single parents who have been there, been on welfare, [as role models]. (Vivianne)

21. Let them walk into a welfare line. Let them stand there and beg for money. (Vivianne)

22. I work really hard, and I try all the time to have a job. I've gone through the programs, I've gone, and I've bettered myself as a person. And that's the problem, I think, with a lot of these programs, is sometimes, you know, just better yourself, it's who you are inside. You just better the outside self. You're not better in anything inside. And if you don't better anything inside, what is the point in better anything on the outside. I mean, I can get my haircut and look beautiful every day too, but if I don't feel beautiful it is not going to help me any is it? When I moved, they want you to go and get a job, they want you to move, so I moved, and I got myself two jobs in three weeks. I had two jobs and I was working two jobs, but they're not willing to, I mean, they are willing to say, 'We want to work to get you off welfare, but not help [with something like], 'What do you mean you need counseling! What do you mean? I don't care if you have been beaten 400 times!' (Vivianne)

23. [Get out of the program] - I thought I would find a new career and go to school, and actually get a diploma of some type, and have a whole new career ahead of me. (Brown Bear)

24. [The program staff] they're saying, 'Oh, we're great, and we've accomplished all this.' 'No, you've accomplished nothing because us women are still sitting with not knowing where to go or what to do,' and it's some of our fault because we didn't speak up. It's their fault because they didn't follow the program themselves. They didn't give us the opportunity for the education or the training, and damn it, it's got to be out there. First of all, they need the computers that actually did something other than play solitaire on them. Those computers were so old; no one has those types of computers; the programs are completely obsolete. You can learn to type on them and play solitaire. [So no one was encouraged to take some of the basic computer programs at the college.] Oh, no! They were too expensive they told us. (Brown Bear)

25. Everything that the welfare mom has to do keeps her right where she is. There's nothing. Back to work money should be available, incentives, the education, training, and work experience is fine, but let them have some money for doing it, and then they don't feel like they're degraded, and they're being used. If the work experience has some pay off in it, may not be the job. They may not get the job, but they're not going to say, 'I can't do it.' They're going to say, 'Oh, yeah,' and that incentive is there. The
financial workers, the people we have to deal with at welfare should be more supportive to their clients. They don't they don't seem to care. They don't have suggestions. It's 'Oh, you're doing this. You're doing that. There's no goal in it.' You are now penalized for making any money. *(Brown Bear)*

26. I'm getting real worried about the Internet 'cause you can shop on the Internet. Welfare moms and us moms, we don't have credit cards. Chances of us ever getting any credit card are zip, and it's going to go to plastic. What do we do? I can't get Master Card or Visa or anything, and it's needed in today's society. The only, I don't know who would do it. There must be a secured credit card Visa or Master Card where you would put down like a $1,000, and if you didn't pay, they'd take that. I hope banks still do that. I have no idea. That used to be 'cause that was your collateral, and it just stayed there for a year, and then they said it didn't need to be a secured account any longer. It taught the person how to pay, and you need to learn that too. *(Brown Bear)*

27. The other thing that's not budgeting not done enough of at these programs [is] realistic budgeting. I'm talking about saving the pennies. Ok, and over a year, how long does it take to save $5 worth of pennies? Oh, 3 or 4 months, Ok, but if you're more conscious and can throw a few nickels in and all that, I think, every woman on welfare should be able to buy a $100 savings bond and get help with that with welfare. And after, if you'd leave that bond, Ok, let's say all women over 40 have to buy [a bond] a year, and even if they can only put up $50 towards the bond, welfare can certainly give you the other $50, and the bond doesn't mature for X number of years. And you can't touch it. Ok, but what's that going to do over 10 years, the compound interest on that's going to be not bad, and if every year, there's a bond bought, Ok, when that person gets to retirement age, they're going to have a little bit of money, and the stress on society isn't going to be as much. *(Brown Bear)*

28. [Programs] - If it gets cracked open there's going to be all kinds of worms that come out of the can, per se. And the government's putting in a lot of money into programs that are absolutely useless! They are absolutely useless. It's a quick fix kinda thing. Like you said, give you the skills, get you off of welfare, and put you into the work force. Well, it doesn't happen that way. It doesn't. It might motivate you to get motivated to build your self-esteem and to get some skills, but when you go out there, and you've got the skills, but you've never had the work experience, people do not want to touch you. You might have all kinds of skills, but if you don't have any work experience, it doesn't happen. It's a revolving door. *(Tusk)*

29. I think the most important aspect in my own in my own opinion, is having women's voices heard Whether or not the government listens, it gives the opportunity to women to actually to be heard others. And it's really up to the government to be able to listen to their stories and to come up with some creative measures to help women, whether it's different programs or new programs or reinvented programs, to be able to give women more of an opportunity to get ahead for themselves. If you ask the
government, I'm sure they'll say, 'Oh, there's lots of programs out there. Do you really need any more? Isn't this enough?' But that's the idea that I had to base my own conclusion on is that there needs to be more programs for women. There needs to be more help for women in a financial sense to be able to get them ahead so they can become more independent, and they're not self-reliant on the government because that's really not self-reliance. I think that's the aspect of the government: 'We're gonna help you. You can go on welfare, and we'll help you,' but it's up to the individual woman to say, I don't want to do this. I've had enough. I think that's where my own opinion comes in. Maybe I'm different. I see myself as being different from these women. (Tusk)

30. I think sometimes the government, you put people through programs, and just because you put them through a program some of the instructors—they know they're setting these people up for failure. Why put them through the program if you're gonna have them fail? If you're gonna have them succeed, great. If it's mandatory, well that's an iffy iffy, but if you're gonna really help them succeed then spend the time. But I've seen people get pushed through programs that are just set up for failure, and it's sad because they're the ones that really don't want to come back. [What's the notion of success?] How is it measured? (Tusk)

31. I would tell them that the program should be directed to the people not to the employment services and not to the government. I would tell them to really see the needs. For example, now, there is here in Chilliwack, how many employment services. There is an employment services for women. This place is so small when places like Abbotsford, they don't have them. I don't understand that, so instead of giving the money back to the people, you know creating jobs, they are giving that to private institutions. One is for women. There's the Ebcon Centre, and the Korean Management, Career Tracks, so one is for youth, which makes sense because [there are ones] for women and men everywhere. (Collette)

32. [For policymakers], I have a social formula. It's money equal health equals school equals job equals money. (Kate Franschild)

Concluding Thoughts

The recommendations the women have made would facilitate women's transitions from welfare. They would help women meet their needs and assist them to enter the workforce if they choose. These recommendations draw on the women at the grassroots social policy or the "kitchen table" (Dobson, 2001) level instead of having policy and programs be top down models. The 23 women here have lived the transitions, so they know what would help others.
APPENDIX B

TYPE OF CONTACT AND NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>PEP</th>
<th>CO</th>
<th>CRC</th>
<th>Referred</th>
<th>Asked to join</th>
<th>Total interviews</th>
<th>Interviews used</th>
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<td>1999-2001</td>
<td>X</td>
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</table>

**TOTALS** | 13  | 3  | 3  | 2  | 3  | 97  | 75  | 8  | 21  | 20  | 16  | 2  |

PEP: Pre-employment program. I have background knowledge of group from my work in 6-month program.
CO: Community organization
CRC: Community resource center
(date): This means I received an e-mail, fax, or letter from the woman for introductions or updates.
[date]: I interviewed the woman over the telephone.
APPENDIX C

TABLE 2C: Women Strategizing to Work

TABLE 3C: Women Strategizing to Transition to Education

TABLE 4C: Appearing to Remain on Welfare but Moving to
## TABLE 2C: Women Strategizing to Work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>First and Closure Interviews</th>
<th>Time on Welfare</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Goals/Transitions</th>
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<td>1½ yrs. plus since 1999</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Boy - 26, Boy - 18, Girl - 12</td>
<td>X-Ray technician</td>
<td>Working to EI denied to welfare 1999 to Disability 1 &amp; some volunteer &amp; part-time work</td>
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<tr>
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<td>June 2000</td>
<td>2 times</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cactus</td>
<td>Nov. 1998</td>
<td>12 ½ -13 yrs.</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Boy - 20, Boy ?19, Boy ?16, Boy ?17, Boy -12</td>
<td>1989 Secretarial Diploma Compu College - was enrolled in Fitness Instructor Diploma Program</td>
<td>Full time work to full time work &amp; welfare subsidy to EI to pt-time work &amp; welfare subsidy to EI &amp; govt. programs to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dec. 2000</td>
<td>4-5 times</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vivianne</td>
<td>Dec. 1998</td>
<td>5 yrs.</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Girl - 5</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>2 part-time jobs &amp; welfare - moved to Manitoba full time work to moved to Chwk. full time work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feb. 2000</td>
<td>3 times</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>May 1999</td>
<td>8 yrs. &amp; 2000 to 2 times (EI - 2 yrs.)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Boy - 8</td>
<td>GED</td>
<td>Working to EI to back welfare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feb 2002</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collette (married)</td>
<td>Aug. 1999</td>
<td>11 yrs.</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Boy ?28, Boy ?26, Girl ?20</td>
<td>Accounting, Office Careers, Enrolled in BA in ADED</td>
<td>Volunteer positions &amp; welfare to school &amp; work EI to welfare full time work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>July 2001</td>
<td>(EI - 4 yrs.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tusk</td>
<td>Aug. 1999</td>
<td>7 yrs.</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Girl -16</td>
<td>BSW from Ontario</td>
<td>BSW to full time work to EI to full time work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jan. 2001</td>
<td>(EI - 1 ½ yrs.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown Bear</td>
<td>Oct. 1999</td>
<td>20 yrs.</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Girl -18, Girl -(20 passed away)</td>
<td>Gentle teaching certificate, sign language &amp; working on GED</td>
<td>Welfare &amp; founded society for her daughter &amp; work for society to full time work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aug. 2000</td>
<td>left welfare 1999</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Notes
- The information in this table was collected during the first interview. Therefore, a woman's age is represented as when we first spoke.
- The woman's goals/ transitions were collected at the close of the research.
- The length of time a woman has been on welfare at the beginning of the study is approximate since this was a very sensitive topic for some.
- Only the dates for the first and last interviews are given. I was in contact with most women even after the closure interview.
### TABLE 3C: Women Strategizing to Transition to Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>First and Closure Interviews</th>
<th>Time on Welfare</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Goals/Transitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heather</td>
<td>Jan. 1999, Dec. 2000</td>
<td>7 - 7 ½ yrs.</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Boy - 4</td>
<td>Enrolled in college w/ Student loan &amp; grants &amp; working part-time - special needs people</td>
<td>Graduated Social Services Diploma 2002 &amp; looking for work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diana (Native Indian)</td>
<td>March 1999, Dec. 2000 (EI-1 yr)</td>
<td>1 yr.</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Boy - 14, Boy - 7 Boy - infant</td>
<td>BA Psychology 2000 - student loan</td>
<td>Graduated 2000 &amp; working full time in aboriginal agency-guardian worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>March 1999, Dec. 2000 (EI-1 yr)</td>
<td>8 yrs.</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Boy - 5, Boy - 2½</td>
<td>Hairdressing license &amp; basic upgrading courses college</td>
<td>Upgrading to working as hairdresser full time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scout</td>
<td>April 1999, July 2001</td>
<td>5 yrs.</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Boy - 7</td>
<td>Early Childhood Education Diploma</td>
<td>Daycare worker – full time – ECE Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>April 1999, Nov. 2000</td>
<td>5 yrs. then to Disability Pension</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Girl - 13</td>
<td>Upgrading &amp; now first year college courses - goal BSc.</td>
<td>Canada Pension Disability &amp; full time student –</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya (Bill C-31 Native Indian)</td>
<td>Nov. 1999, July 2001 (EI-1 yr)</td>
<td>.5 yrs.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Boy - 4</td>
<td>Fine Arts Diploma &amp; some college</td>
<td>Working full-time &amp; CGA via distance education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes.**
- The information in this table was collected during the first interview. Therefore, a woman’s age is represented as her age when we first spoke.
- The woman’s goals/transition were collected at the close of the research.
- The length of time a woman has been on welfare at the beginning of the study is approximate since this was a very sensitive topic for some participants.
- Only the dates for the first and last interviews are given. I was in contact with most women even after the closure interview.
TABLE 4C: Appearing to Remain on Welfare but Moving to....

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>First and Closure Interviews</th>
<th>Time on Welfare</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Goals/Transitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(EI – 2 yrs.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Girl – 18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Girl – 16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Girl – 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Girl – 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American &amp; Canadian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Boy – 15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Girl – 12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Girl – 11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lilith</td>
<td>Sept. 1999–Sept. 2000</td>
<td>13 yrs. 2 times</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Some university</td>
<td>Welfare &amp; Disability 1 – unemployable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lovey</td>
<td>Dec. 1999–March 2001</td>
<td>6 yrs.</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Girl – 13</td>
<td>Residential Care Aide Diploma, secretarial, &amp; college</td>
<td>Upgrading &amp; enrolled in nursing program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Girl – 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
- The information in this table was collected during the first interview. Therefore, a woman’s age is represented as her age when we first spoke.
- The woman’s goals/transition were collected at the close of the research.
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APPENDIX D

MAP 1: Chilliwack, British Columbia

MAP 2: Fraser Valley Regional District

MAP 3: District of Chilliwack Location Map

MAP 4: Mainland/Southwest Development Region

MAP 5: Abbotsford, British Columbia Map
Chilliwack, British Columbia

Legend

- Water
- British Columbia
- Alberta
- United States
- Highways
- Trans Canada Hwy
- Chilliwack
- Major Cities
Fraser Valley Regional District Profiles
Fraser Valley Regional District

Municipality Profiles

Abbotsford  Harrison Hot Springs  Kent
Chilliwack  Hope  Mission

Fraser Valley Regional District
Mainland/Southwest Development Region Profiles

Mainland/Southwest Development Region

Regional Districts

#09 Fraser Valley
#15 Greater Vancouver

Sunshine Coast #29
Squamish-Lillooet #31

Mainland/Southwest Development Region

Map of the Mainland/Southwest Development Region showing regional districts with numbers.

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YOU ARE HERE: Home > Visitors Guide > Abbotsford Map

Visitors Guide:
- Abbotsford Map
- Attractions
- Community Facts
- Community Profile
- Day Trips
- Farm Tours
- Hike & Bike
- Lodging
- Recreation
- Shopping
- Ski & Fish
- Transportation

Click on Abbotsford for a detailed map.

Distance to:
- Vancouver (West) 72 km 43 miles
- Horseshoe Bay Ferry (West) 100 km 60 miles
- White Rock (West) 48 km 29 miles
- Harrison Hot Springs (East) 68 km 40 miles
- Chilliwack (East) 28 km 17 miles
- U.S. Border Customs (South) 3 km 2 miles
- Mt. Baker (South) 70 km 42 miles
- Bellingham (South) 50 km 30 miles
- Tsawwassen Ferry (West) 75 km 45 miles
- Mission (North) 14 km 8 miles

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APPENDIX E

UNIVERSITY PROTOCOLS

Research Certificate of Approval
Letter of Invitation to Participant
Participant Consent Form