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Good Welfare Moms

Stories of Caring Labour

For all women, the status of caring labour is problematic. However while unremunerated and lacking any formal acknowledgement in policy, the social reproduction work of most women is given tacit support and appreciation. The circumstance of lone mothers appears to differ. Rather than approving of their sole parenting—most often in the absence of their children's fathers—the caring labour of lone mothers is subjected to moral surveillance, by the state and the majority of its citizens. This paper explores this issue, suggesting that this social response may be rooted in the discursive constructions that shape our views of lone mothers. Thus, prevalent and common discursive constructions of lone mothers are explored and analysed with a view to better understanding these differences. Using data from "Lone Mothers: Building Social Inclusion," a federally funded community/university research alliance (CURA) that is exploring the impact of welfare and labour market changes on the lives of lone mothers, both descriptions of the caring labour lone mothers provide and their reflections on the social responses to their caring roles are examined in light of these contemporary and shaping discursive constructions of lone mothers.

This paper explores the caring labour of lone mothers. Caring labour is systematically and routinely unacknowledged and unvalued, and represents a disproportionate share of the work of women (Bezanson, 2006; Orloff, 2006, 2001; Lewis, 2001). Thus for all women, the status of caring labour is problematic. However while unremunerated and lacking any formal acknowledgement in policy, the social reproduction work of most women is given tacit support and appreciation. The circumstance of lone mothers appears to differ. Rather than approving of their sole parenting—most often in the absence of their children's fathers—the caring labour of lone mothers is subjected to moral surveillance, by the state and the majority of its citizens. The stories are legion of lone moth-

ers facing the moral scrutiny of welfare workers and child welfare authorities, teachers, landlords and almost everyone else with whom they relate (CMHC, 2006; Little, 2001; Baker and Tippin, 1999). Programs such as Learn $ave, a national pilot project on asset development strategies, routinely require that its participants attend parenting classes on the presumption that poverty and bad parenting are inextricably linked (Elliot, 2007). These experiences contrast sharply with the dedication and commitment most lone mothers' evidence in caring for their families (Caragata, in press).

This paper explores this issue, suggesting that this social response is rooted in the discursive constructions that shape our views of lone mothers. I suggest that while mothering more generally may be undervalued, and that there is both systemic and systematic devaluing of carework, lone mothers are subject to a different and damaging discourse. Using data from "Lone Mothers: Building Social Inclusion," a federally funded community/university research alliance (CURA) that is exploring the impact of welfare and labour market changes on the lives of lone mothers, both descriptions of the caring labour lone mothers provide and their reflections on the social responses to their caring roles are examined in the context of some common discursive constructions.

The shaping power of discourse

Discourses are interconnected sets of beliefs, attitudes, and values that individuals share with others and use to contextualize and interpret events and experiences; the organization of common storylines (Dryzek and Braithwaite, 2000). Claiming neither empirical wisdom nor an exhaustive discourse analysis, I discuss some elements of the public discourse related to lone mothers with a view to that this may help explain the moral scrutiny directed to their caring labour.

That lone mothers are often poor is part of the problem. In fact just being a single parent—and 90 percent of single parents are women—means that you are more likely to be poor (Caragata, in press). The discourse related to those on welfare is straightforward. The following three quotations are noteworthy, illustrating the power of our dominant constructions. Although they are American, much of the Canadian discourse about lone mothers has been shaped by images prevalent during U.S. welfare "reform."

> The Chicago welfare queen has eighty names, thirty addresses, twelve social security cards and is collecting veteran's benefits on four nonexisting deceased husbands…. Her tax-free cash income alone is over $150,000. (Ronald Reagan cited in McCormack, 2004: 356)

> Miss Young, you're so full of shit. Why don't you get off your fat, lazy ass and get a job. Why don't you get a life, get a job, and quit taking from people who do have lives and jobs." (Excerpt of a message left on the answering machine of Mara Anna Young, of California, by

> the county's Department of Social Services). (cited in McCormack, 2004: 356)

> I know a girl that used to have (children) so that she wouldn't have to work, because they had started this thing where once your child starts school, you got to go get a job. She would have a baby … she wind up with about seven or eight babies because she didn't want to go out and work. She had gotten so lazy and so stuck on social service that that's all she wanted to do. (Alice Brown, 40-year-old black welfare recipient cited in McCormack, 2004: 356).

A former President of the United States, a Social Service caseworker, and a woman who is receiving welfare all share the same—negative—understanding of welfare. And, lone mothers are a vulnerable population subgroups more likely to need social assistance. Many lone mothers have fled abusive partners or found themselves without the support of a partner or spouse whom they may have relied on financially. Others, although a small number in Canada, are young moms who chose to raise a child from an unplanned pregnancy. Even lone mothers with solid employment histories and job skills may find themselves relying on social assistance due to the lack of adequate, subsidized child care combined with precarious employment. While paid employment is mandated and desired by some lone mothers, the presence of children often dictates a reliance on social assistance in spite of these negative images and the poverty and lack of status that accompany receiving welfare.

One's economic status is increasingly powerful in contemporary western society. Our roles as workers shape not only our material relations but also define our social relations. I suggest this shaping power of economic relations to be a change—not an abrupt one, but rather a slow, continuing aspect of advanced capitalism (Caragata, 2003)—wherein, as Hannah Arendt (1958) prophetically claimed, one's excellence and ability is no longer made visible in the public realm but expressed more solely through wage labour. Our attention has been drawn by Amartya Sen (2000), Nancy Fraser (1997), and others to the relationship between our economic status and our status as "citizens" with needs we believe the state has a responsibility to meet. This "right" of citizens of privilege then contrasts with the less-visible-if-made-at-all citizenship claims of those who are needy.

"Wealth as worth" is a discourse so pervasive it underpins many aspects of contemporary public policy. Andrew Herman (1999), in his study of philanthropy and the meanings of wealth, examines the ways in which the wealthy have come to be seen as the "better angels of capitalism." One sees this manifested as governments around the world rationalize tax breaks to upper income groups because of their presumed job generation capability, their roles as "wealth makers." Money, in the hands of those who are better off, is presumed to have a higher use value than it has in the hands of the poor.

Herman (1999) suggests that this derives from a moral overvaluing of wealth and those who possess it.

Herman describes the morally worthy as male, perceived to be a wealth generator, which of course, shapes through the power of the contrast, the "other." "The abject 'other' has taken on many forms: … the spendthrift, those who do not use their 'talents', the slothful, the economically dependent…" (Herman, 1999: 256) and it is herein that we see some of the discursive constructions that have framed how we see lone mothers.

Morally suspect lone mothers

Morality as a basis for economic entitlement and as derivative of economic success has shaped how we rationalize state benefits. The concepts of the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor are well understood as relevant to "who gets what." Beyond general conceptions of the poor as morally unworthy, there is a sliding scale of moral worthiness, especially relevant in the discourse on lone mothers. In the early periods of industrialization, lone mothers began to pose a policy problem, often consigned to workhouses even if they were not seen to have caused their impoverished circumstances. Evolving moral and legal discourses left bastard children without the legal protection of any parent while mothers were threatened with criminality for neglect or abandonment. Victorian moral purity movements cast the lone mother as a fallen woman and her motherhood was interpreted as immorality (Gillis cited in Smart, 1996: 49). Carol Smart (1996) further suggests that the shame of illegitimacy continued through the Second World War years, as a moral disincentive to lone motherhood. Following the war, important distinctions began to be made *among* different groups of lone mothers. Widows and educated lone mothers were distinguished from young, never-married lone mothers.

Changing divorce laws, mother's allowances, abortion availability, contraception, growing awareness of abuse and a host of related social factors all led by the 1970s to a lone mother discourse wherein it was harder to singularly and negatively characterize the lone mother. This moment of promise was surprisingly short. The men's and father's rights movements, an anti-feminist backlash, rising neoconservative politics, high levels of public debt and a corresponding critical view of welfare state spending combined, by the 1980s, to bring into question state support for lone mothers, highlighted by the punitive, lone mother focus of US welfare "reform" which confirmed her as a "welfare scammer,"disinclined to work. This also marked an important shift in valuing stay-at-home parenting, dovetailing with increases in women's labour market participation. Overall, while women continued to be primary carers, they were to combine this with paid work. In Canada, women's labour market participation almost equals that of men in spite of these enduring reproduction roles (Statistics Canada, 2006).

These historic and contemporary discourses shape our views of poor and/or low-skilled lone mothers as changes in women's education and employment

have enabled middle-class lone mothers to claim good jobs and high incomes. In a sense, economics trumps all in contemporary discourse. The lone mothers for whom there is a discourse of moral regulation or dependence are those who are poor and more likely to also be racialized, disabled, "othered." As Herman (1999) suggests, in spite of all other factors, wealth equates to moral worth. The problem is, that being a lone mother is itself a likely contributor to a woman's poverty, making wealthy lone mothers a less-than-common entity.

Sen (2000) notes that one's relative sense of worth or entitlement is shaped by material well-being and this shapes one's sense of public worthiness. Hence, I will briefly examine discourses relevant to shaping lone mother's notions of citizenship, as well as those that shape how we understand the public realm and hence how we see those who make claims of the "public," such as receiving welfare.

Women have a long history of trying to achieve status in the socio-political realm. Seen as the keepers of the private realm of the family (Arendt, 1958; Pateman, 1988; Fraser, 1990, 1997), ignored in the construction of the social contract, women achieved legal and political status in part through their roles as mothers, negotiating on behalf of their children for social goods, such as school entry, social and recreational activity and with the bureaucracy to obtain social benefits (Fraser, 1990; Sassen, 1998). In spite of these small points of entry, women as political citizens remain an underrepresented construction (Paxton, 2003; Trimble, 2001).

Stergios Skaperdas (2003) describes a contemporary discourse of "citizen as consumer" that puts the citizenship claims of some women at risk. Arguing that economic growth has become a more singular societal goal detracting from time spent engaging "publicly" as citizen, Skaperdas suggests: "Material growth increases the time spent working in the market while it reduces the time spent in gatherings, in symposia, with others. Public discourse requires time…" (5).

Herman (1999) echoes this view, citing Juliet Schor who suggests that those without wealth must work more and acquire more debt to establish themselves as sovereign citizens and subjects—of consumption. The poor lone mother is unlikely to see herself as a successful consumer. Rather, she is a failure in a society that creates ever-new consumer needs that she cannot satisfy. Thus, as she fails as consumer, at least according to Skaperdas's view, she also fails as a citizen of the contemporary "public" realm.

"Citizen as taxpayer" is a dominant discursive construction often reflected in the views of the National Citizen's Coalition and others who demand a reduced role for the state, thus minimizing taxes and leaving individuals free to care for themselves and their families. This view is particularly problematic in extending the notion of citizen to those who are poor. Is one's degree of citizenship equated with a higher tax levy? If so, then poor single mothers are by implication, less than citizens. They are reminded, in contemporary discourse, that they are takers, relying on the system, even "taking advantage" of the system rather than contributing. Harry Boyte (1995) suggests that "America begins

and ends in liberal democratic individualism" and the dominant assumption of American political thought has always been individual social freedom. Given these constructions of citizen, it is no wonder that Sen (2000) highlights the relational deprivation that derives from poverty: one's feelings of public worthiness are diminished. Discursive constructions of "citizen" mark out lone mothers (and others) as unworthy, failing as both consumers and taxpayers and having a set of interests quite at odds with those that ask of the state *only* the protection of their private interests.

These are but some of the contemporary discursive constructions that shape how we view the caring labour of lone mothers. Rather than appreciating and applauding their single-handed caring, we view it (and them) with scepticism, suspicion and at times alarm. When compared to the lack of public attention given generally to women's social reproduction work, the level of social surveillance of lone mothers' caring labour warrants inquiry. Lone mothers might well wish that their social reproduction roles were as ignored as is the case for most other mothers. The data that follows describes the enormous caring contributions of lone mothers and their reflections and reportage on its moral scrutiny.

Methodology

"Lone Mothers: Building Social Inclusion" is a community/university research alliance involving academic researchers from five universities across Canada with non-profit community organizations sharing an interest and concern for the circumstances of poor lone mothers. A major aspect of the initiative was a combined focus on research and advocacy and the grounding of the work in a feminist, participatory methodology, reflected in the recruitment of lone mothers on social assistance who joined the project as research assistants (RAs). Eight women have now been active as RAs, advocates, and overall peer advisors to the project. These women are also interviewed by academic partners as part of the longitudinal panel described below.

A longitudinal panel of about 110 lone mothers in Toronto, St John's, and Vancouver, Canada was established, with interviews occurring every six months over a three-year period. All of the women were on social assistance at the point of selection and each had at least one child living with her. Lone mothers on social assistance, who were selected and trained as RAs, as described above, conducted a majority of the interviews. Women researchers, including academic partners, project staff or doctoral student research assistants, conducted remaining interviews.

In Toronto, 42 lone mothers on social assistance were interviewed in the first round of panel interviews. These were transcribed, stripped of identifying information and coded according to an initial, descriptive coding tree developed collaboratively by several research partners. NVivo software has been used to assist with data analysis. Data from this first set of interviews were summarized and shared with our Toronto group of lone mother research assistants as a

check on our categories and resulting analysis.

Emerging from this initial round of interviews conducted in Toronto between May and September, 2006, were data that described the enormous caring contributions these lone mothers were making. Also described, were the interview participants' reflections on their social status, the ways in which they were perceived and judged by those with whom they related. A very significant disconnect was revealed—between women's passionate commitments to caring for their children and their overcoming enormous obstacles in ensuring their families' basic subsistence—and, high levels of negative social judgement and a seeming lack of any public appreciation for what these women were accomplishing.

The Toronto panel was purposively selected to represent the spectrum of poor lone mothers living in the city: Canadian born and immigrants, diversity by age, education, neighbourhood, number of children, and including aboriginal and racialized women. Of the 42 panel participants, nine were recruited through welfare offices, 22 from grassroots community organizations, five through snowball sampling where a participant referred someone and for six participants, the source of the referral is unknown.

The ages of the participants are quite varied with five between 16 and 20, eleven from 21-30, fifteen from 31-40 and eleven over 40 years old. Of the 42 lone mothers, 17 have one child, 12 have two children, five have three children and eight women have four or more children. Overall, these mothers are sole parenting 85 children, 27 of them pre-schoolers. It is interesting to note that the number of children in each household parallels the data for Canadian women overall (Statistics Canada, 2006), contesting the idea that women on social assistance have more children.

Twenty-five panel participants were Canadian born, six are from the Caribbean, three are from Africa, and two were from each of Latin America, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. Among the seventeen women who are immigrants, ten had been in Canada for more than ten years.

The women's levels of education reflect a wide range: four have completed college or university, five have some college or university, nine completed high school and fifteen have completed some high school. The level of education was unknown for eight participants.

Workfare was introduced in Ontario in 1995 by a conservative government promising a "Commonsense Revolution" and eager to demonstrate its ability to stem the welfare roll increases arising from the economic downturn of the previous several years. Accompanied by a 21.6 percent cut in benefits, welfare programs were transformed including the transfer of lone parents to having status as employables and the end of special programs with their higher benefit levels. With this government's defeat in 2003, the new liberal government reduced the pressure on recipients to find work, adding provisions for volunteering while retaining welfare benefits. Some program administrators have been reluctant to actually discontinue benefits for a recipient who fails

to comply with these regulations even though this is permissible under the legislation. These political and consequent policy changes help to explain the diverse durations of time on assistance reported by participants.

Six women had been receiving assistance for less than one year, eleven from one to two years, eleven from two to five years and eight women have been receiving welfare benefits for more than five years.

The lone mothers interviewed were all actively negotiating "work for welfare" and labour market expectations, contending with their double demand roles as labour market workers or aspiring workers while doing the carework of raising their children. In only a few instances was a father helping share the required carework. Further complicating already complicated lives, many women had left abusive relationships with their children's fathers, some had child welfare authorities involved and others had to negotiate the complexities of supervised visits by fathers or respond to children disappointed by fathers who failed to live up to scheduled arrangements. Most of these 42 women were not simply sole support parents, they were also negotiating and managing their children's relationships with their fathers, yet one more example of their unacknowledged carework.

In considering the data related to the caring work of lone mothers and the contrast between such caring and the social judgements these lone mothers felt, it is important to reflect on how these experiences shape the subjectivities —the agency—of the lone mothers involved. I will return to this issue in the paper's conclusion.

Stories of caring

The primary occupation of a lone mother, especially one who is also poor, is caring for her children. This carework is of two primary types, instrumental work largely related to provisioning, and what is more familiarly understood as carework, the affective caring for one's children. It is the former aspect of caring labour that requires particular attention in the lives of the lone mothers under discussion here. In the traditional hetero-normative model of the nuclear family, on which we base most of our public policy (whether or not such a family actually exists), the male "breadwinner" (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Lewis, 2001) ensures an adequacy of income such that the female homemaker can buy what is necessary for the maintenance of the domestic realm and care for the house and children. A critical difference emerges in how this "story" plays out in the absence of the male breadwinner—and these distinctions are also likely to be true for other poor women—even with a male breadwinner. The welfare income a lone mother receives is inadequate. She simply cannot buy what she needs for herself and her children. And it is here that a huge realm of uncharted carework comes to light. Lisa articulates the desperation she felt:

> *Before, it was so, so hard 'cause my rent was, like, the first time I went out on my own, my rent was $795 for a one bedroom and I used to get $900*

something plus $200 for school. So, it's like $1100. And, even when the rent was $800, I had to pay my cable, I had to pay my phone bill, I had to buy Pampers for my son and I couldn't afford to buy him clothes or anything. It was really, really hard. I don't know how I got through it but I did. Even now, I go, how did I go through it?'Cause it's so hard without money. You have to go asking people….

Sophie expresses the complex struggles and the feelings that accompany them:

There's been plenty of times, just like now. I have to think, how am I going to get through all of next week, until I get my baby bonus? Bread, milk, juice, fruit, just daily things that I need, I don't know what I'm going to do. I just have to go day by day and figure out what am I going to do. It's not easy, it's hard. It's so hard and sometimes I cry. I worry; I have to figure it out. I have to say no to my kids because my kids can't have a glass of juice today but maybe they can have that glass of juice tomorrow. How do you tell a two-year-old, "No, you can't have more juice," or, "No, you can't have another cookie?" You know? You can't say that; that's bad.

Pauline succinctly summarizes the difficult choices she has to make and comments on how she utilizes food banks to augment her meager income:

I could afford to eat but I couldn't afford to pay my rent…. It takes me an hour to walk there [to the foodbank]. Yeah, and an hour to walk back and I usually have to carry whatever I get. So, I usually take a back pack with me. It takes me an hour and one hour to walk back….

Tanya normalizes her experience, struggling as she is with juggling the multiple demands she faces:

Basically [I experience] what everybody else experiences, trying to pay the bills on time and make sure that the kids are well taken care of. Making sure they go to the dentist, make sure they follow up on appointments and stuff like that. So basically… what everybody else goes through, nothing different….

Madison concretises the challenge of provisioning and also acknowledges just how far she—and other lone mothers—are prepared to go to provide for their children.

Yeah, so, you know … I don't want J to not go on a field trip—you know what I mean? Like, for me, I'd rather sacrifice my own personal fun and entertainment, because, you know, hey, I've … I've had my twenties; I've

had my fun. You know what I mean? But, um…for J? No. I … I will do anything…. I'll give blood to make 20 bucks. You know, [laughs] … just so J goes on the school trip. I gave him 12 dollars, but I couldn't go out that weekend, kind of thing. So you know what I mean: it's always sacrificing one thing or the other.

Other mothers talked of "selling ass," buying stolen goods and other illegal activity as well within what they would do, or have done, to care for their children. Many women were leery of reporting such activity, fearful that such information would be used to support the very discourse that in a sense legitimates the depth of poverty ensured by their welfare experience. If we believe that they are of questionable moral worth, then reluctant and precarious welfare benefits fairly reflect the public's doubt about their being deserving.

The more traditional affective carework is described by lone mothers as both a pleasure and the motivational basis for their continuing struggle, as well as unrelenting hard work, accompanied by the considerable stress induced by doing this work alone. Pauline's comments about her care for her daughter reveal her consciousness of the challenges she faces and her goals for herself and her daughter: "It's difficult because my daughter has asthma and allergies, and I'm sick, too, so for both of us trying to maintain our health is very trying."

Her job is education and my job is to take care and provide for her. So, I try to do the best I can. I've been through a lot last few years which is why I'm on social assistance now but I want to get back to … I've been a professional in my community for last twenty five years till … you know, life happens….

Lena reflects on the competing demands between having time to just care for her son and her need to do all of the more instrumental carework, all alone. She also notes how her challenges are magnified because of other social systems not working as they should.

It's hard, especially with my son. He's taking lots of my time and my energy and I don't know really what to do with him. I love him and want him [to have] the best. I could give him all my time but I need some time for the house, for the bills, for the car, sometimes, I have to attend to other things. I'm sad because.… the schools [have failed him].

Lena's comment about schools failing her son was noted more generally by many women and is an important dimension of being impoverished. Whether it is schools, the courts or the health care system, life challenges are compounded when systems fail to deliver as we have been led to expect. While many families encounter systems that fail to meet children's needs, many more

affluent families have the resources to buy private care or the social capital to ensure the necessary support for their kids.

Women's roles in social reproduction have historically extended beyond their families to their communities. As Saskia Sassen (1998) notes, it has often been through women's struggles to secure resources for their own children, that they translate their private individual needs into public needs, organizing in communities to provide services or making claims against the state for the public provision of services. The list is long of those public and social services where the first provision began through the actions of mothers. And, in addition to work in community oriented directly to their own interests, women, including the lone mothers described here, have a long history of helping others, making our communities better, safer, and/or more integrated. Although the 42 lone mothers we discuss here have extraordinary carework burdens just in maintaining their own families, we also see their carework extend to their communities. It is interesting to note, that women often describe this work as "giving back," a recognition that in receiving social assistance, and being unable for the present, to work in the paid labour market, carework in the community is a contribution that they can and do make.

Tanya describes herself as "liking to help." In spite of the difficulties and demands of her own life situation she describes her social caring: "I'm here to help. Sometimes I say to somebody that's carrying groceries that I can hold the baby or something. I'll carry the groceries or something."

Janet describes involvement in her community and how this caring makes her feel good about herself:

> *I have one of my neighbours who is always calling me, "Come, please, my child needs help." So I feel very good helping, especially with math. That's my strength. And because of having a child with special needs, I'm able to have compassion.... I feel good that the children in the neighbourhood come running to me, "Janet, Janet! Can you help me with this?"*

The women interviewed as part of "Lone Mothers: Building Social Inclusion," evidenced serious struggle in trying to overcome the obstacles of being a single parent in poverty in order to provide for, and raise their children well. What is at odds, given the transparency of these efforts, is the social stigma and negative social status these mothers experienced. They reported feeling that the quality of their parenting was questioned, their morality doubted, their judgment not to be relied upon, their honesty, abilities, and overall worth clouded by suspicion.

Sophie describes her experience, suggesting the fact that she is black adds another layer in the negative social judgement she feels applied to her:

> *...discrimination, racial profiling. It's the same thing. I get looked at every day because I'm on social assistance.... It bothers me. It's embarrassing*

> *sometimes. You meet somebody and you can have an intelligent conversation with this person and have a lot of things in common, but once they find out that you're on Social Services, they're like, "Ew, I pay for you to live."*

Kayla acknowledges the same feelings of being judged and under surveillance:

> *[It's] very difficult. Everybody thinks you're happy to sit on it [welfare] and get a free ride. What could be a free ride about something like that? They're digging up in your past; they're digging up everything. You have no privacy whatsoever.*

Helen's comment reflects a view we heard from a number of women: they feel the negative judgements associated with being lone moms on social assistance so acutely that they wish to protect their children: "I really mind. I don't want to tell anybody. Even I don't tell my son. I just tell him, 'Don't worry about the money, I'll take care of it.'"

These are but the smallest sampling of the women's expressions of negative social judgements which extended to feeling that their physical space could be invaded by nosy landlords and that "workers" had extraordinary authority and could ask and demand answers to all manner of questions that did not relate to receiving social benefits.

Lena reflects the ways in which these dominant discourses become internalized. Even while she partly acknowledges that she is doing a good job, it is not quite what she thinks it should be:

> *I could do much better, much, much better. But, my health or my age is not helping me and when my husband passed [away], this is also not helping me…. We lost the house that my kids grew up in. I could be more proud if I [was] stronger.*

Given the adversity with which Lena has coped while maintaining her family and ensuring that her children are well cared for, her comment is particularly poignant and typifies an ambivalence that many women described about their work as mothers. On one hand, women described their pride in their children, that they were doing well and were well brought up, and on the other hand, described the ways in which their children had been deprived or faced unnecessary barriers for which their status as lone mothers on assistance was to blame. "If only I had…" was an expression that typified many mothers' feelings that they were to blame for their difficult circumstance. Deriving from these internalized—or partially internalized—judgements were feelings of hopelessness and despair. And, adding to the complexity of these women's lives, they felt that they needed to keep these feelings from their children, a difficult task as a single parent in a small apartment without any respite care.

Women described going into the bathroom to cry, trying in every way possible to stifle their feelings.

Conclusion

Lone mothers on social assistance do all of the carework of most mothers—and more. Like other lone moms, they are often responsible for negotiating their children's relationships with their fathers. This work is often fraught because of the lack of social support oriented to helping men understand and assume their carework obligations. Women seemed, often, to put themselves out to support their children being able to see their fathers, sometimes where there was little evidence of the father demonstrating equal commitment. Additionally, abuse, custody issues and the involvement of child welfare authorities all add dimensions of complexity to their carework. The roles of men and fathers are at the heart of the problem with how social reproduction is undertaken in contemporary western society. As carework remains the unacknowledged work of women, there are few if any demands that such work be socialized or that men assume their share of these responsibilities (Bezanson, 2006).

Lone mothers' work associated with provisioning is monumental in scope. The juggling of bills and the scraping together and planning for small amounts of income from a variety of sources puts these women in a league of their own when it comes to financial planning. Because of such limited incomes, getting food for the family may involve trips—by foot—to food banks, to numerous grocery stores hunting sales and sometimes scrounging and borrowing from family and friends. Ingenuity and creativity are augmented by sheer tenacity as lone mothers go about trying to meet their families' needs.

And, traditional affective carework, described by many lone moms as a joy, is also a demand when one is stressed, exhausted and without respite. It is clear too, from the interview data that an important determinant of which mothers remain on social assistance likely has to do with the needs of these women's children. Children with chronic medical conditions and special needs are just some of the additional demands many of the women we interviewed were coping with.

Like many women, lone mothers on social assistance have assumed the normative expectation of paid employment. Many women talked about desiring paid work and wanted to acknowledge their particular reasons for being on social assistance—for the time being. Many women also talked of "making up for," or "paying back" their receiving welfare through contributing to their communities.

On the basis of the data reported here, lone mothers on social assistance are good mothers. Working in difficult circumstances they evidence both awareness of what being a good mother means, and a strong commitments to its execution. The path to being a good parent, especially a lone mother, is not always clear, well-marked or without hurdles, many of which are beyond the mother's control. One of the hurdles faced—unnecessarily—by the lone

mothers discussed here is the social stigma attached to being a lone mother. The discourses of "wealth as worth," "citizen as consumer," and the mortal doubt cast on women who are without men shape the social experience of lone mothers as economic and social failures, bad parents and welfare scammers. These discourses are but a small part of the moral regulation of all women and the regulation of the poor. As they are assimilated by women and those "others" who are poor, racialized and/or minoritized, the prevailing discourses become ever more effective at privileging and supporting a small strait of acceptable and socially approved behaviours.

We see evidence of such assimilation in the women we interviewed *and* a struggle against it. Those women who resist, and construct themselves in ways that counter these discourses of oppression, face a new struggle as they are re-constructed, often in processes of criminalization. For most women, there is an awareness of the dominant discourse and a desire to resist, but its pervasiveness and power shape, at least in some ways, their self-perceptions, their subjectivity. Sometimes this takes the form of distancing themselves from the "bad mothers on social assistance," but more often and more insidiously, it creeps in, causing them to doubt their own value. As objects of suspicion, weakened subjective selves make the coping required of poor lone mothers even harder.

The carework of women begs a revisiting of the male breadwinner model which continues to inform our social structures in spite of women's almost equal labour force participation. The model has shifted—not to a gender neutral or gender positive one where both marketplace and carework are acknowledged—but to extending traditionally male patterns of paid work to women alongside their ongoing, unacknowledged and unpaid carework (Bezanson, 2006; Korteweg, 2006). While significant for all women, for marginalized women, such as the lone mothers under discussion here, a demand that they balance more fully privatized carework with a breadwinner role in a precarious labour market is unduly onerous and threatens their inclusion as citizens. The poverty deriving from social assistance incomes and the presence of only one caregiver, alongside welfare requirements for paid work, affects lone mothers' ability to care for themselves and their children. Women must be able to choose whether to join the paid labour market or continue their carework without being consigned to poverty. One of the mothers, Madison, suggests:

> *Recognize mothers; pay them to stay at home, instead of paying construction workers to make buildings to pay childcare workers to work there. Half of those childcare workers are probably mothers themselves who'd rather stay home too. But again, you have to be thrown into a workforce because you're not recognized as a mom; you're not paid as a mom.… That's why I wish the government would say: why don't we pay the mothers to stay home, instead of paying childcare workers to raise their kids. 'Cause I'd rather stay home.*

The author wishes to acknowledge the support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada in enabling the research reported herein.

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