

**Autonomous Mothers and Social Policy: How the CCTB, UCCB, and Alberta Child
Care Subsidies Govern Women's Autonomy in Motherhood**

by

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Abstract

Liberalism's conceit is the separation of the private from the public sphere, a conceit that, in turn, supports a common sense in which families are understood to be private entities that exist outside the purview of the state. And yet, Canadian income support programs clearly demonstrate the state's interest in the organization of Canadian families. This thesis examines the policy processes and rationales through which *autonomous mothering*, or choosing to mother without a co-parent, is understood and addressed in Canadian social policy and provincial social policy in Alberta. Using a feminist critical policy analysis of the Canada Child Tax Benefit, the Universal Child Care Benefit, and child care subsidies in Alberta and a feminist critical discourse analysis of legislative debates, I examine political engagement surrounding childcare policies in Canada and Alberta from 1996-2015. I conclude that Canada's federal government and the province of Alberta idealize and favour, in political speech and policy design, the traditional nuclear family form, creating material, social, and political hardship for women who choose to parent without a co-parent.

Dedication

I dedicate my thesis to my mother, Ione Karin Challborn. Our story inspires my research; her wisdom and curiosity guide me daily; and she is the most revolutionary woman I know. Thank you for giving me a story to tell and for changing the world while you did it.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Lone-parent households are almost always headed by women (Statistics Canada 2011) but women who *choose* to parent without a co-parent are a smaller, less common demographic. When my mother decided to have a baby, her decision was met with confusion, shock, and questions – questions about how she would get pregnant, how she would financially support a child, and how she would explain (to me, family, friends, strangers) why my father was not an everyday part of my life. My mother chose to parent autonomously, or without a co-parent.¹ Her choice was radical then and it appears that 25 years later our family form still sparks questions and intrigue, perhaps with less judgment, but the same amount of curiosity and sometimes shock. Despite extraordinary challenges to my mother’s decision, the ability to order her intimate life as she chose was paramount. In light of her own experiences navigating the social, political, economic, and legal waters of autonomous motherhood I recently asked if she thought current child tax benefits discouraged parents from having the types of families they desire. Harper’s flagship childcare policy, the Universal Child Care Benefit, favours two-parent family forms with one high-earner and one low- or unpaid-earner (Battle et. al., 2006; McInturff and MacDonald 2014), and while this may be the traditional family form – or normative prescription – it certainly does not represent the diversity of family forms in Canada. She said, with a laugh, that indeed policy has a profound impact on the creation of families because, had she received more financial support, she would have had more than one

¹ When I first told my mother that my graduate work would examine autonomous motherhood, she said that instead of writing a thesis, I would likely write a “victim impact statement”. We both laughed because people often assume we were victims of a tragedy. Apparently, that is the only explanation for a woman raising a child on her own.

child. As surprised as I was to learn that I was not *the* dream, I was equally inured to hear that Canada's approach to family policy intimately shapes the life choices of women and men.

An important outcome of feminist struggle is women's enhanced ability to shape their lives as they see fit, including whether to have children and whether to do so autonomously or with a partner. Yet a wide range of social and economic policies, laws, practices and regulations render sole parenting a challenging option. Moreover, negative moral judgments and economic challenges continue to characterize autonomous mothers' experiences, with potentially detrimental effects for women's well-being and their children's life chances. My project will explore 3 iterations of child care support policy that affect the capacity of women to mother autonomously as well as examining the pervasiveness of the traditional, two-parent, sole earner family as the normative family form in child care policy design. My aim is to understand the ways in which tensions among women's autonomy, women's workforce participation, and the ideal of the "stay-at-home" mother shape women's choices to parent autonomously. In order to understand this contemporary dilemma and consider possible policy solutions, I undertake an analysis of select federal and provincial childcare benefits to investigate whether or not, and how, they affect the capacity of women to mother autonomously. Law, in addition to having material consequences for Canadians, serves a "symbolic function" (Berinstein 2001, 420); by privileging certain family forms, law "helps construct some identities, persons, and families as 'normal' while others are deemed 'deviant'" (ibid.). I argue that family policy works in similar ways, to demarcate normal from abnormal, and inclusion from exclusion.

This thesis aims to identify and unpack the legislative discourses that have framed the development of childcare policies in Canada and Alberta and to understand how these policies are indicative of governing norms surrounding family, gender, sexuality, and motherhood. Families, like those led by autonomous mothers, that fall outside the “traditional” (nuclear) family form, challenge patriarchal assumptions about the proper roles of women and men and the assumption that families are, or should be, self-sufficient and self-contained economic and care units (Bernstein and Reimann 2001, 5). Queer theorists have long articulated that the heteronormative underpinnings of law and policy constrain queer people and their families in both implicit and explicit ways (ibid., 14). This description also resonates for autonomous mothers, for whom heteronormative policy fails to account. Of course, all families are impacted by the expectations of a traditional, conservative family form. Yet the autonomous mother is distinctive because she is risky. Since her intimate life is not built around a marriage contract with a man, she threatens a foundational assumption that women’s sexuality is strictly procreative and she challenges norms surrounding gender, family, and “privatized systems of responsibility” (Boyd et. al. 2015, 1).

Inspired by my mother’s story and ongoing political attempts to address “the family”, I began my research with the question: *does the Canadian state favour or disfavour a particular family form?* As I read, it became quite clear to me that indeed the Canadian state does favour a particular – nuclear – family form, and thus my thesis asks: *How, and why, does the Canadian state disfavour autonomous motherhood?* I explore this question in the context of federal income supports for children with families, including the Canada Child Tax Benefit and the Universal Child Care Benefit, as well as

Alberta's contributions to the CCTB and its child care subsidy regime.² I chose these policies because they reflect flagship family policies for Canadians and Albertans and I anticipated that debates surrounding these policies would reveal interesting discourses about desirable and undesirable family forms and the expectations that governments have for how citizens are to order their intimate lives.

Why motherhood? Why autonomous motherhood?

The maxim “stand up like a *woman!*” has no serious meaning. It conjures up imagery that is, at best, merely humorous. There is no doubt which model of behavior as exhibited by which gender receives the highest honors in Western public culture (Friedman 2003, 99).

Popular television shows like *Jon and Kate Plus Eight*, the media's preoccupation with the life of Nadya Sulema, the “Octo-Mom”, and television shows like “Teen Mom” on *The Learning Channel* demonstrate a cultural obsession with motherhood – “with what it should, or should not, look like” (Arosteguy 2010, 410). “Mommy lit”, magazines about mothering, and “mommy blogs” also speak to the myriad of ways in which people engage in discussions about how to be a mother and what motherhood means. At the level of public provision, we are also aware that in Canada, mothers do not have access to affordable childcare, women are still doing more caregiving than their male spouses (Statistics Canada 2010), and women predominantly lead one-parent households (ibid.). Further, Canada's history of eugenicist movements (targeting women with dis/abilities, Indigenous women, women who were sex workers, women living with addictions, and

² This work could examine a range of topics concerning families, including, but not limited to the responsibilities of adult children to care for their sick, aging, or impoverished parents; the role and efficiency of spousal and child support; parental determinations in the context of reproductive technologies; and whether, and how, to recognize polygamous or polyamorous families.

women living in poverty) reveals that the state explicitly sought to ensure that “suspect” women did not reproduce (Dyck 2013; Harris 2010; McLaren 1990). These examples demonstrate that our cultural obsession with motherhood also involves the cultural *regulation* and *governing* of motherhood. Implicit in these efforts to shape motherhood are messages about race, class, sexuality, and ability – and what combinations of identities are favourable to nation-building, citizenship, sexuality, and lineage. These narratives also describe the intensity with which women are governed by their ability, or inability, for motherhood what Kline calls the “dominant ideology of motherhood” (1993):

[...] the constellation of ideas and images in western capitalist societies that constitute the dominant ideals of motherhood against which women's lives are judged. The expectations established by these ideals limit and shape the choices women make in their lives, and construct the dominant criteria of 'good' and 'bad' mothering. They exist within a framework of dominant ideologies of womanhood, which, in turn, intersect with dominant ideologies of family. (310).

Examining motherhood through the lens of dominant ideologies reveals the complexities and paradoxes of motherhood. Kline elaborates on “core expectations” of motherhood, including: motherhood is the “natural, desired and ultimate goal of all ‘normal women’” and that a woman must become a mother in order to be socially considered a “mature, balanced, fulfilled adult” (ibid.). Perhaps most important for my analysis is that mothers are expected to operate within, and support, the heterosexual nuclear family form (ibid., 311). But, the dominant ideology of mother shapes women’s lives differently. For Kinser, “motherhood is better conceptualized as a privilege than as a right” because dis/abled women, women of colour, Indigenous women, unmarried women, single heterosexual women, lesbian women, young women, older women,

women living with addictions, women who engage in sex work, and poor women are all discouraged from having children (ibid., 312, 315). The dominant ideology of motherhood highlights highly prescriptive and normative gender roles and highlights the construction of identities for mothers based on race, class, sexuality, and ability (ibid., 313). Given that so many women are discouraged from reproducing, Kline argues that “motherhood as privilege” is a clearer analytical concept because it allows us to unpack how motherhood can be withheld in material and ideological ways from women who are deemed “unfit” (ibid.).

My research reveals an interesting duality about women’s lives: while it appears that many women have the flexibility to order their intimate lives as they choose because of the “unprecedented” diversity of their roles (Greenlee 2014), traditional “ideologies of motherhood” (Kline 1993) continue to govern women’s choices in parenting. For Kline, ideologies and institutions “construct the dominant criteria of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ mothering” (310) and shape the choices women make about parenting and their own intimate lives. My mother faced both implicit and explicit challenges to her choice to parent autonomously. Perhaps the most telling examples are from my childhood: because my mother chose not to name my father as a parent or spouse, the hospital refused to discharge me as an infant, would not provide my mother with my birth certificate, and denied her social assistance. The limits of family policy and assumptions about family form shape our lives in very concrete ways and it would be easy to suggest that my mother could have avoided these challenges by simply listing my father on official documents. But the root of these events is a much more interesting topic: what is the state’s interest in legally recording the connections between child, mother, and father? I

continue to be fascinated by this question, and more generally, by the treatment of diverse family forms in political and social life.

While certain types of family diversity are becoming more commonplace (for example, guardianship by grandparents or close family, gay or lesbian parents, and parents who are divorced) there are curiously few representations of autonomous parenting in media, news, movies, and academic and non-academic literature. The autonomous mother fascinates me for her invisibility *and* her ability to, seemingly, disrupt the very foundations of family life and gendered expectations for women. By choosing to parent without a co-parent, my mother was often asked “If you don’t need a man, then what purpose do men have?” That question, asked more than once, is layered. I suspect that what inquirers really wanted to know was how could a woman financially (and socially) have a child without a man? What role were men to play in society, if not that of the family breadwinner? Who would be her sexual and emotional companion? There was a time when lone mothers were thought to be “insane” (Spensky 1992, 108) and while that would be a taboo assumption now, the fact that male parental absence is an issue reveals that the family, and mothers in particular, are perplexing subjects for liberal theories of freedom, individuality, and autonomy. I hypothesize that women’s interconnection with children and with men in the procreative scene reveals a persistent assumption about the “natural” connection between mothers, fathers, and children – an assumption that is reproduced in policies, and social conventions, through a kind of inevitability (or at least desirability) of the nuclear family form (Chodorow 1978). Relatedly, the social norms associated with autonomy differ for women and men (Friedman 2003).

Academic accounts of motherhood have created, intentionally or not, typologies in which autonomous motherhood does not easily fit. The literature presents the following categories: lone/single motherhood, lesbian motherhood, and (heterosexual) nuclear motherhood. These categories fail to account for, and theorize, a family form that offers a rich site for exploring the relationship between the family and the state and the family as metaphor for the state (Ferguson 1980; Ferguson 2012*b*; Lakoff 1996; Shanley 1997), the co-existence of the social and sexual contract in both political theory and political life (Bakker 2007; Pateman 1970); the assertion that the family is pre-political, or private and properly outside the sphere of state regulation (Brodie 2010; Harder 2009; Lasch 1997; Luxton 1997); and the assumption that women enjoy the same level of political autonomy as men (Friedman 2003; Gazso 2012; Greenlee 2014; Kelly 2009; Little 1998). The autonomous mother allows us to deconstruct the ambivalence in social and political life around independence, interdependence, and dependence and how that ambivalence is played out on the terrain of gender and the family (Fraser and Gordon 1994).

The autonomous mother is a fascinating site of inquiry because she reveals both political and social dependencies *and* independencies of the individual and she exposes tensions in the construction of motherhood, families, and the state. At first glance, one might read the autonomous mother as a hyper-liberal subject because she behaves in (seemingly) individualized and self-realizing ways, but in the very definition of the autonomous mother she is two people: independent (autonomous) and dependent (mother). She demonstrates the individualized, freethinking, and self-realizing capacities of women and the relational nature of families, which is a complete role reversal for how

women and families are traditionally (through a masculinist lens) interpreted. However, a hyper-liberal reading of the autonomous mother reveals the contradictions in liberal conceptions of individualism, namely that liberal subjects should be free to order their lives as they see fit. Clearly, in the case of the autonomous mother, not all liberal subjects have the freedom to do so.

The limitations of nomenclature proved to be more daunting in my research than I anticipated. I refer to the “autonomous mother” instead of more common academic references to “single mother by choice” (“SMC”) or more simply, single or lone motherhood, choosing “autonomous” to indicate the elements of choice, independence, planning, and most importantly, the radical act of women who behave in traditionally unacceptable ways. That said, I do not want to suggest, even by implication, that women who choose to parent *with* a co-parent lack choice, independence, planning, or even radical acts of defying gendered patriarchal norms. Yet the social reading and lived reality of a choice to parent alone as distinct from a choice to parent with a partner are clearly distinctive. Further, the term “autonomy” is, to say the least, a very complex concept for feminists. I explore theories of autonomy in greater depth in Chapter 2, but to ground the reader in my choice of the term and definition I offer a brief introduction here.

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy notes that many early feminists theorizing autonomy were wary of the “‘masculinist’ ideals of personhood’ that construct people as ‘atomistic’, as ideally self-sufficient, as operating in a vacuum unaffected by social relationships, or as an abstract reasoner stripped of distorting influences such as emotions” (Stoljar 2014). I rely on Marilyn Friedman’s analysis of autonomy, with some adjustments, to understand the autonomous mother and the subject of autonomy more

broadly. For Friedman, behaving autonomously occurs when a woman “chooses or acts in accord with wants or desires that she has self-reflectively endorsed” (2003, 5). That autonomous behaviour is “based on the deeper wants and commitments of the behaving person, is partly caused by her reflections on and reaffirmations of them, and mirrors those wants and commitments...” (ibid., 8). Of course, based on this account of autonomy, choosing to parent in *any* way, as long as it is self-reflective and mirroring deeper values and commitments, is autonomous. So, on this reading autonomous motherhood becomes a broad term indeed, encompassing any form of motherhood that aligns with a woman’s core values. But, because I am focusing on autonomous motherhood as a solo project, my definition constrains Friedman’s autonomy through its empirical focus. I do, however, retain Friedman’s affirmation that emotions, desires, and passions are integral to autonomous personhood – contrary to traditional Kantian-style accounts of autonomy (Kant, 1785). In my work, autonomous motherhood is a radical departure from traditional conceptions of, and expectations for, motherhood (which occurs in the nuclear heterosexual family). Like Friedman, I argue that while autonomy is now more widely encouraged for (some) women, “it is still not regarded as a particularly *feminine* value or virtue” (2003, 56).

The extent to which any of us are truly autonomous or independent is debated in feminist scholarship. In Chapter 2 I will delve more deeply into relational accounts of autonomy, critiques of the dichotomy of independence/dependence that traditional theories of autonomy carry, debates about valorizing qualities of autonomy and why, despite controversy, I still find the concept useful for analyzing this particular brand of motherhood.

Why family policy?

The second-wave of feminism brought a “new, and potentially radical vision for Canadian social policy” (McKeen 2004, 3). Prior to major second wave gains (access to birth control and abortion, the abolishment of marital rape, pay equity legislation) Canadian social policy treated women as “mere appendages to their husbands” because women’s entitlement to benefits was based on their status as a wife or mother (ibid.; Eichler 1983, 1997; Haddad, 1986; Kitchen 1980, 1986). Formal and informal exclusions from welfare state benefits continue to privilege men over women, but also some groups of women over others (for example, women in two-parent homes versus one-parent women-led homes) (Cohen and Pulkingham 2011, 12). Further, a major task of feminist analysis, and of my own research, is to highlight how these exclusions support or negate social and sexual citizenship (ibid., Smith 2007, 92).

Feminist struggles to have the family recognized in policy, alongside the “state” and the “market” dramatically changed the landscape of the Canadian welfare state (Porter 2003). Since the mid-1980s, Canada’s governments have aggressively pursued neoliberal economic policies that orient political decisions towards what is best for business and the economy (Cohen and Pulkingham 2011, 17). In addition to the economic changes that neoliberalism brings, Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell argue that neoliberalism began as a “starkly utopian intellectual” project that was promoted by ideologues Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan and then cemented in the Washington Consensus (2002, 380). Neoliberalism’s “new religion” shifted dramatically away from the Keynesian welfare state to an “aggressive forms of state downsizing, austerity financing, and public service “reform”” (ibid., 381). For the purpose of this paper, I

define neoliberalism as a profound depoliticization of the public sphere that results in large resource cutbacks to the social service sector. Neoliberal governance structures are characterized by an “unequal representation and decreasing availability of public goods required for the maintenance of capabilities and basic human security” (Bakker 2004, 68). The insidiousness of neoliberalism comes from its operation as a multifaceted and multilevel program involving social, political, and cultural spheres of human activity (Larner 2000, 6). The subject-transformations desired by neoliberalism are a “strategy for governance” (Munk 2005, 68) that has profound implications for family life. Economic and political reorientations towards neoliberalism have dramatically altered the capacity of families to rely on public provision of goods and services to meet their needs. Neoliberal public policy “extends...market logics and calculations and market-mimicking practices to a vast array of social and political institutions...” and it radically alters “gender orders and the organization of households” (Brodie 2010, 1568).

What does this mean for public policy, and more specifically, family policy? Both theoretically and politically it is important to understand the “full ideological force” of neoliberalism (Cohen and Pulkingham 2011, 23). Who is the ideal citizen? Does the ideal citizen have a family? If so, what does that family look like? What does that family teach “us” about proper and improper citizenship? Neoliberalism was created to make the free-market more efficient so that it can accumulate capital more easily, free from state intervention, but as Karl Polanyi notes, “a market economy can only function in a market society” (2001, 60), meaning the market “continuously seeks to make a society in its own image” (ibid.). Through interactions in the market, our individual subjectivities are shaped to reflect marketized logics, which then support overarching neoliberal goals of

market formation. The effects of this shaping determine how we interact with each other and how we self- and collectively govern our behaviours, interactions, and activities. All public policy – military, environmental, fiscal – impacts families in implicit and explicit ways (Cohen and Pulkingham 2011, 23) but the neoliberalization of the state has downloaded very particular duties of care and financial responsibility to families in ways that dramatically alter the political terrain for families and those who constitute them. Family policy is also structured to adhere to market and subject-shaping principles, which studies have shown do very little to support families and advance women’s equality (Bashevkin 2002; Jenson 2009; McInturff and MacDonald 2014). What then, accounts for the current interest in incentivizing a structure that seems to offer families less economic stability? And how do the tensions between conservative morality and economic liberalism play out on the terrain of family policy?

The use of tax expenditures to deliver social policy is a particular useful approach for neoliberal policy delivery and has become an increasingly popular method of social program delivery in recent years (Harder 2004, 89). Since its birth in 1917, the Canadian income tax has evolved from a “revenue-raising instrument” to a “powerful social and economic tool” that is increasingly involved in the delivery of social programs (Young 2000, 1). Harder notes that its popularity derives from the ability of the tax system to incorporate both the federal and provincial/territorial governments in social policy with very little friction over jurisdiction, its delivery of means-tested programs without stigma, and its efficiency (Harder 2004, 89). However, few people feel comfortable and confident understanding tax law (Johnson 2002, 10), the use of the tax system for policy delivery obscures very contentious politics and gendered dynamics from political and public

interrogation (Harder 2004, 89).

In 1973 Stanley Surrey developed the concept of tax expenditures. He argued that any fiscal policy that deviated from the normative tax system – including income exclusions, deductions, or tax credits – are tax expenditures. So, instead of funding a service directly (by a grant, for example) that service is delivered through the tax system (Young 2000, 9). The tax expenditure concept is based on an understanding of the tax system comprising of two components: first, the “technical” tax rules that are designed to raise revenue (the “normative” tax system) and second, those rules that deviate from the normative system, which are expenditures (Young 2000, 10 and Johnson 2002, 11). According to the Department of Finance, the tax system is also used to achieve policy objectives through the delivery of expenditures via “exemptions, deductions, and credits” (2015), like the Universal Child Care Benefit. Tax expenditures are often hidden and complex. However, they are not well targeted to the group which they purport to benefit, they often favour higher-income earners (even when designed to benefit lower-income earners), and tax expenditures are of no use to people who do not pay taxes, do not file tax returns, or do not have a permanent address at which to receive benefits (Young 2000, 10). However, being “cloaked in dry technocratic legalese” tax is “deeply implicated in social and economic policy” and the public/private divisions in the Income Tax Act have often left women and children “beyond the realm of economic assistance” (Johnson 2002, 10, 22).

While no country has achieved “genuine and full” equality between women and men, the tenuous gains that women have made are easily reversed “when the impact of law and policy on women is not kept at the forefront of the agenda”, as has been the case

in Canada (Lahey 2011, 11). Federal spending cuts made in the early 1990s delivered enormous blows to women, who are already vulnerable to economic changes (Yalniziyan 2005, 6), and thus, in recent years there has been a “dramatic erosion” of women’s equality through tax and fiscal policies that “reinforce women’s traditional lack of social, economic and political power” (ibid.). In 1995 Canada adopted the UN Platform for Action at the 1995 Beijing world conference and began implementing gender mainstreaming and gender based analysis into its policy making practices (ibid.); however, the commitment to gender equality was short lived. Lahey suggests that by 2000, Canada had implemented budgetary, tax, and spending changes that undermined women’s equality but Yalniziyan (2011) demonstrates that these cuts began in 1995 with changes to the Canada Assistance Plan (“CAP”) and the Canada Health and Social Transfer (“CHST”) - the very year the Platform for Action was signed. Women’s equality is further eroded by “numerous tax and spending decisions” that disproportionately impact women and the federal government’s “continuing reluctance to design fiscal policies to redress women’s inequalities” (2011, 13) and both Liberal and Conservative federal governments have failed to use their “governance and regulatory powers” to erase sources of gender inequalities present in fiscal policies. By the mid 1990s spending cuts and tax cuts became a common strategy at the federal and provincial levels and as a result of this “retrenchment” women and men across the country experienced massive cuts to public services (Lahey 2011, 23-24).

There are several problems with neoliberalization of fiscal policies, and the embedding of social program deliver into the tax system, especially for women: policies do not consider women’s low incomes, high levels of care responsibilities and unpaid

labour, and their constrained mobility; and, policies that employ gender-neutral categories like “poor”, “single parent”, or “children living in poverty” makes fiscal policy appear that “women, whether contained in the couple, in the social assistance system or in parenting, do not matter unless they and their containers...serve worthy purposes” (ibid., 29-30). As Lahey argues, the challenge in gendered analyses of tax expenditures and fiscal policy generally is not merely to bring women into these debates, but to “change the forms and contexts in which women are seen and see themselves” (2011, 29). As it stands, the state only cares about women to the extent that they are “contained within the structures of masculine capture – the couple, the family, the household, the retired couple” (ibid.) and so analyses of fiscal policy help to “expose the degendered liberal subject” as a fiction and challenge the masculinist presuppositions in fiscal policy (Harder 2004, 91), even in policies that should be designed to elevate women’s equality.

The CCTB, UCCB and childcare subsidies in Alberta

Canada uses a variety of child and family tax benefits including direct income transfers, tax credits, and joint taxable benefits³ (McInturff and Macdonald 2015). My project undertakes a contemporary analysis of two key federal policies, the Universal Child Care Benefit and the Canada Child Tax Benefit, and childcare subsidy policies in Alberta from 1996-2015. This timeline traces one of the biggest social changes in Canada: the rise of women with children in the paid workforce. In 1990, roughly 53% of women with children worked for pay and by 2003 roughly 70% of women worked for pay (Yalniziyan 2011, 15). And yet, Canadian social policy had not yet responded to the

³ While Canada maintains the individual as the unit of taxation, for the purposes of some benefits, including the UCCB and CCTB, eligibility is determined on the basis of family (spousal) income.

increasing needs for affordable and accessible childcare (ibid.). In turn, public supports for childcare are increasingly delivered as subsidies and are more likely to be provided through tax-expenditure and fiscal policy than through the provision of actual daycare spaces or grants (ibid.). In light of these changes, I chose the CCTB, UCCB, and subsidy policies in Alberta as case studies of policy governance that affect the capacity of women to mother autonomously and because they allow me to trace competing conceptions of gender relations to understand the ways in which these dynamics shape women's choices to parent. I am particularly interested in Alberta because its approach to childcare is a "pure" example of conservatism and despite the fact that changes to federal spending and taxation profoundly affect the types of social service supports that provinces and territories can provide (Yalniziyan 2011, 12) little academic attention has been paid to Alberta, compared with studies of other provinces like Quebec (Bushnik 2006, Kohen et. al. 2008, Michel and Mahon 2002). Further, women in Alberta actually have very particular childcare demands as a result of women's high levels of unpaid work in their households compared with men, the very low levels of public investment in childcare as compared to other provinces and territories (in 2012, Alberta spent the third smallest amount on regulated child care spaces as compared with other provinces and territories), and the profound disparity between women and men's incomes (Lahey 2015, 20).

While I examine these policies from 1996-2015, conversations surrounding child care in Canada certainly pre-date that timeline. Some organized child care programs existed provincially and municipally in the early 1900s, but there was very little government involvement until 1942, as a result of the recruitment of women to fill labour shortages resulting from men's military service (Doherty et. al. 2003, 20). In 1942 the

government established the “Dominion-Provincial War-Time Agreement” which made 50 percent federal cost sharing available to provinces that established and operated child care programs. However, these programs were only to be used by mothers working in “essential war time industries” (ibid.). Ontario and Quebec participated in this program, limited as it was to an emergency, war-time effort, it was disbanded once servicemen returned from the war. In this policy design, women’s labour force participation was clearly regarded as extraordinary, and women were expected to return to their roles as full-time caregivers once the war ended (ibid.).⁴

Women began to lobby the federal government for universal child care during the second wave of the feminist movement, arguing that universal child care was an essential component for women’s full political, social, and legal emancipation. The 1970 Royal Commission on the Status of Women listed universal childcare as central to women’s rights. The Task Force on Child Care articulated this goal in 1984 and again in 1986 in the report of the Royal Commission on Employment and Equity.

The second federal effort at addressing Canadians’ child care needs was in 1966 with the creation of the “Canada Assistance Plan” (“CAP”). Under CAP, the federal government reimbursed provinces and territories for up to 50% of their expenses on programs like childcare and low-income assistance. However, in 1995 the federal government both reduced the amount transferred to the provinces and collapsed CAP into a single financial transfer called the Canada Health and Social Transfer (“CHST”). The

⁴ Intriguingly, the government’s approach did not take the situation of soldiers’ widows into account – presumably expecting them to remarry as quickly as possible and thus not be in need of childcare. The Veterans Insurance Act, passed in 1944, provided for the purchase of up to \$10,000 in life insurance for returning WWII soldiers or their widows (Veterans Affairs Canada 2014). However, it is very likely that even women who were able to access this money needed to supplement their income. Overall the lack of attention to these women in postwar policy design – regarding child care – is noteworthy.

provinces could use the CHST at their discretion, without federal standards (save a prohibition on residency requirements) and thus not necessitating the provision of quality, or any, childcare provisions. The move to the CHST, and the subsequent abandonment of national standards of social service delivery, reintroduced the prospect of “spouse in the house” provisions in provincial social assistance schemes. (Little and Morrison 1999). In Little and Morrison’s examination of the Ontario Mothers’ Allowance (“OMA”) provisions, they note that mothers’ living arrangements and relationships with men (sexual, familial, or friendly) were so tightly regulated that women worried that any contact with men could jeopardize their monthly allowance. Mothers experienced surveillance by OMA administrators, neighbours, and community members and those who engaged in surveillance of mothers’ intimate lives were nicknamed the “Pecker Detectors” (112). Throughout the history of the OMA there has been a concerted effort to provide some financial support to single mothers while also not providing so much support as to “promote this deviant family form” (112) and mothers have lost OMA cheques because of their real or presumed intimate relationships. The logic underlying this scheme is that a relationship or co-habitant will provide financial support for the mother and her children, thus relieving governments from providing financial support (111). Further, the collapse of CAP into the CHST increased the possibilities of moralizing and regulating social policies implemented by the provinces because of reduced federal funding. The CHST reduced national standards for social policies, gave more leeway to provinces (which also increases the possibility of subjecting policies to provincial political ideology), and reduced funding to the provinces, all of which has resulted in patchwork of provincial social policy approaches (Yalniziyan 2011).

Between 1980 and 2005, Brian Mulroney, Jean Chrétien, and Paul Martin each promised to develop a national childcare plan. Amoroso suggests that it was businesses and economists, rather than organized women, who were able to rally the Liberal government in the mid 2000s to create a national child care plan (2003, 39). Citing the importance of investing in children in his Throne Speech in 2004, Martin attempted to establish a national child care program by negotiating individual deals with the provinces and territories. With Harper's election in 2006 these plans were cancelled in favour of the UCCB in an effort to avoid what Harper called, a "one size fits all" model of child care (Conservative Party of Canada 2006). Jenson suggests that the ease with which Harper was able to dismantle Paul Martin's design and implement the UCCB was a consequence of the previous government's focus on child poverty and child investment discourses instead of a focus on women's rights and equality (2009). During the Chrétien and Martin era, women and gender were "written out" of the child care conversation and child care was framed "in terms of its potential for human capital and not as a citizenship right of women" (Amoroso 2003, 41). While I do not think that Harper's actions were completely enabled by Martin's policies, framing policies in terms of what is good for children allows governments to discuss the family while not actually addressing the roots of familial inequalities: access to quality and affordable child care, poverty, gendered divisions of care, the gendered pay gap, and women's labour force participation. More specifically, politicians can pay lip service to a "women's issue" while not actually talking about women or making policy changes that enhance women's lives. This is particularly concerning for autonomous motherhood because the conception of the family championed by these policies continues to be the nuclear family. Other types of intimate

arrangements are not reflected, and autonomous motherhood is actively written out by family policies that do not change the economic, social, legal, and political status quo for mothers.

Developed by the Liberal government of Jean Chretien and heralded as “the most important social policy” since medicare (Battle et. al. 1997, 1) the CCTB has been retained by the Harper Conservatives. The CCTB has two non-taxable components: the base benefit targeted at low- and middle-income families, and the National Childcare Benefit Supplement (NCBS), which provides additional assistance to low-income families (2009). The CCTB base benefit provides \$122.58/month for each child under 18 years of age and an additional \$8.58 per month for the third and additional child (Canada Revenue Agency 2015). All provinces vary CCTB amounts based on the age of the child. Yet while most provinces provide a more generous benefit to younger children, Alberta reverses this practice, providing \$113.08 for children under 7, \$120.75 for children ages 7-11, \$135.08 for children ages 12-15, and \$143 for children 16-17 (ibid.). There is a phased reduction to this benefit as family income increases (ibid.). For families with one child, the benefit is reduced by 2% of the amount of “adjusted family net income that is more than \$44, 701” and for families with two or more children the reduction is 4% (ibid.).

The National Child Benefit is a federal, provincial, and territorial initiative designed to prevent and reduce the “depth” of child poverty; ensure that families will “always be better off” from working; and reduce duplication of government programs and services (ibid.). The National Child Benefit Supplement (NCBS) is the federal government’s contribution to the NCB, paid to low-income families with children under

the age of 18. The NCBS was originally conceived as a means of replacing the provincial social assistance payments that went to children to free up that provincially allocated money to be used to develop other services to support children (Battle 2008, 8-9). However, several provinces instead chose not to allocate those funds for alternative programming and instead used the “savings” to reduce their deficits. The NCBS amounts are: \$189.91/month for the first child, \$168.00/month for the second child, and \$159.83/month for the third and additional children and the NCBS provides the largest benefit to single parents (Canada Revenue Agency 2015). The NCBS is reduced by 12.2% for families with one child whose net income is more than \$26,021, by 23% for families with two children whose net income is more than \$26,021, by 33.3% for families with three or more children whose net income is more than \$26,021 (ibid.). Further, the receipt of NCBS may reduce a recipient’s social assistance payments as some provinces and territories consider the NCBS as income and will adjust social assistance payments to reflect the NCBS received (ibid.). Thus, the very policy that is directed at assisting low-income families expresses anti-natalist and classist ideologies towards low income families; families are deterred from having more than one child (or risk financial harm) and they are deterred from having children if they receive social assistance, or deterred from applying for social assistance if they have children.

Stephen Harper’s 2006 federal budget wielded a devastating blow to Canada’s fledgling national childcare system (Battle et al. 2006, 1). The replacement policy, the UCCB, does little, if anything, to provide Canadians with choices in childcare that alleviate archaic and gendered burdens of care. Childcare costs vary widely depending on the type of care a family chooses (live-in caregiver, day home, licensed daycare) and the

age group of the child(ren) needing care (infant, toddler/pre-school, or school-age) but the costs incurred are often astronomical. On average, women in Alberta who need full-time childcare spend 25% of their income on that service alone (Lahey 2014, 92) and as the number of children increases, the less likely it is that women will remain in the paid labour force because childcare costs then double or triple (ibid.). The median cost of unsubsidized infant care (>1.5 years old) in Edmonton is \$900/month and \$1,050/month in Calgary, while Toronto is the most expensive, at approximately \$1,676/month (MacDonald and Friendly 2014, 5). Compared to other OECD countries, Canada spends 1/3 of the recommended minimum 1% of GDP for children under 5 (ibid., 5) and so the roughly \$3/day that the maximum UCCB contribution delivers to parents fails to cover, or even offset, the costs of childcare. Childcare costs also vary from province-to-province and city-to-city. When first announced, the program provided \$100/month to children under the age of six. Yet most families do not receive the full \$1,200 per year benefit. This is because families of different forms (for example, single parents, one-earner and two-earner couples with children) but with similar incomes receive different after-tax benefits; and, even if the UCCB is used towards childcare (which it need not be), the small amount of money that families receive does not off-set the costs of childcare (ibid.). Further, the biggest monetary benefit goes to high sole-earning, two parent families, which explicitly undermines autonomous mothers. The UCCB might, on the surface, seem beneficial to families, but it only provides families with an illusion of “choice” in childcare policy (Jenson, 2004). And despite the fact that the UCCB is widely assessed as ineffective and inefficient, on October 30, 2014, Stephen Harper announced that his government would increase contributions to the UCCB from \$100/month to \$160/month

to children under the age of six. That the cheques arrived as a lump-sum payment this summer, just in advance of the federal election call has been widely interpreted as a shrewd political maneuver and vote-buying exercise (CBC 2014, Globe and Mail 2015, iPolitics 2015).

The UCCB was Harper's plan to undo the previous government's "one size fits all" "childcare bureaucracy" and allow parents to choose the model of childcare that best suits their family's needs (Jenson 2004, quoted in Amoroso 2010). As a result of the federal government's failure to create a national daycare program, provinces and territories have "13 disjointed 'childcare regimes'" that are organized differently according to the relative significance of governments, commercial childcare providers, and familial provision of care (Dobrowolsky and Jenson 2004). The benefits and subsidies available to families differ drastically depending on where they reside, producing deep horizontal inequalities between families. Julie Amoroso (2010) argues that Harper's cancellation of national daycare discussions in favour of the UCCB has been the most "devastating policy action" surrounding childcare benefits in Canada's recent history. This choice reflects the increasing neoliberalization of public policy which de-emphasizes direct state intervention and favours cash-transfers to families over the direct provision of services (Cohen and Pulkingham 2009).

On a provincial landscape, the most "intense" resistance to nationally coordinated childcare efforts are from Alberta which has advocated for an "ABC" – anything but childcare – approach involving tax credits to give families "choice" in child care (Jane Jenson 2004). In Alberta, childcare subsidies are available to eligible lower-income families who are using licensed care centres, licensed pre-schools, approved early

childhood development programs, “kin childcare”, “extended hour childcare”, and for “stay-at-home parents” (Government of Alberta 2014). Families who have a combined income of less than \$50,000/year are eligible to receive maximum subsidy amounts; for example, a family could receive up to \$628/month in subsidy for full-time licensed daycare services for infant care or up to \$310/month for after-school care for children in grades 1-6 (Alberta Human Services 2014). In 2008, these subsidies accounted for almost 60% of provincial spending on regulated childcare (Tough et al. 2013) and while subsidies are reported to decline as income increases, there is no publically available information on the Alberta Human Services website for the income cut-off at which families are no longer eligible to receive subsidies.

Alberta’s subsidy model, reflective of Harper’s approach, gives families the *illusion* of choice, while actually providing insufficient monetary benefits to families and undermining options for different forms of parenting/family structure. Alberta’s reticence to develop an affordable childcare program was compounded by the province’s regressive approach to personal income tax, which, among other consequences, produced the largest income disparity between women and men in the country (Lahey 2015). At least until the spring 2015 election of the NDP, the provincial climate in Alberta has been, at best, woefully ignorant regarding the needs of women and families, and at worst, intentionally sexist. Alberta’s child care service landscape is dominated by private or for-profit child care in Alberta and by the availability of subsidy for kin-care and stay-at-home parents. The reliance on women’s low-wage or unpaid labour in this subsidy model underscores the assumption that women will be the child minders – even if they are doing it for pay.

These policy approaches clearly demonstrate the state's interest in private, intimate relationships – in particular, the organization of Canadian families. Child care subsidy policy in Alberta does not explicitly favour two-parent over one-parent families, as does the UCCB, but the “choices in childcare” model is regressive in its assumption that there is, in fact, a sustainable, affordable, and accessible care option that does not require supplemental financial or familial supports – namely, a two parent household where one parent is able to provide full-time care. Cohen and Pulkingham assert that “both acting and not acting constitute public policy” and that inaction is typically the public policy response that governments use for meeting (or not meeting, as the case may be) women's needs. By not instituting particular policies, like universal childcare, governments are making a conscious policy – and ideological – statement (2011, 4) about the nature of the family, responsibilities for care, gender roles, and who is properly responsible for child care (families, and in particular, mothers). Despite decades of feminist mobilization around tax fairness, gender equity, and state benefit programs, fiscal policies continue to do very little to enhance women's equality (Lahey 2010, 27). In Chapter 2 I present a brief chronology of particular family policy developments as they relate to my study of the CCTB, UCCB, and childcare subsidies in Alberta⁵, before undertaking a feminist policy analysis of these policies and discourse analysis of surrounding debates in Chapters 4 and 5, respectively.

⁵ For thorough accounts of the evolution of feminist contributions to social policy in Canada see Baker and Tippin 1999; Bakker 1996; Banting 1987; Bashevkin 1996, 1998; Brodie 1994, 1995, 1996, 1998; Cohen 1992; Eichler 1980, 1983, 1997; Mckeen 2004; and Porter 2003.

Outline of Thesis

In this chapter I contextualized a study of family child care support policy in contemporary Canadian politics; I demonstrated why a study of motherhood, and more specifically, autonomous motherhood, is a rich site for political inquiry; provided a brief overview of the CCTB, UCCB, and Alberta childcare support policies; and, explained my rationale for using these case studies. Moreover, I articulated my project's aim: to explore a fundamental tension in the expression of women's autonomy.

In Chapter 2, my literature review will examine the lacuna in theorizing about autonomous mothers. Despite the long-standing presence of "the family" in political conversation and in feminist theorizing, there is much work to be done to understand the challenge to social and political order that is posed by autonomous mothers and, more broadly, why certain forms of intimate association are favored or disfavored by constellations of power and politics. I think through the conditions of possibility that make autonomous motherhood desirable - to see it, in Foucauldian terms, as a product of certain power relations, and productive of a way of being in the world. Is it the best way of being? Is it a defensive posture in the face of the forces of patriarchy and capitalism? How, in historical terms, does it become possible to think about a figure called "the autonomous mother"? In my writing and research I will employ a feminist political economy framework to help me understand the ways that neoliberalism shapes policy development and the construction of political subjects through governing rationalities. I posit that this powerful economic force is shaping our interpretations and regulations of intimate lives, with respect to how autonomy, individuality, and personal choice is imagined for women and for men.

The second part of this chapter presents the theoretical framework that I use in my research. First, I explore, in depth, the concept of autonomy, as it relates to women and motherhood. I draw on Pateman and Friedman's work to explain why autonomy is such a complicated and contested concept and why the autonomous mother figure is so contentious, socially and politically. Second, I draw on feminist analyses of Canada's history on public policy relating to childcare, noting the shifts in government thinking about women and public policy in the last 3 decades (Bashevkin 1998; Bezanson 2006; Brodie 1996). Third, I examine critiques of neoliberalism, incorporating Larner's analysis that neoliberalism can be viewed as a set of policies, as an ideology or as a "practice of governance" (2000, quoted in McKeen 2009, 75) and Brodie's focus on "restructuring discourses" (1995, 1996) of neoliberalism that shape individuals in support of particular "modes of existence" (Dean 1995).

In Chapter 3, I outline the methodological approach used to conduct both the literature review and discourse analysis of the case studies. In this work I define *discourse* as the "social and cognitive process that reflects, creates, shapes, re-creates, and reifies meaning in the lifeworld" (Strauss and Feiz, 2013, 1). Further, discourse is "all forms of meaningful semiotic human activity, seen in connection with social, cultural and historical patterns and development of use (Blommaert 2005, 3). I focus on discourse to "[locate] and [understand] meaning through various analytical lenses" (Strauss and Feiz 2013, 3) like scripts, rhetorical devices, and ideological assertions/claims (Trimble and Sampert 2010, 329). I explain how the literature and theory guided my research and hypothesis, justify the discourse analysis approach, and discuss the strengths (and limitations) of this method. Mirroring Caragata's discourse

analysis approach in her study (2009) of lone-mothers accessing welfare, I suggest that this method will reveal discourses that have cultural and political “salience” in our views of autonomous mothers (Caragata 2009, 168). In particular, I will test Caragata’s hypothesis that autonomous mothers face economic, sociopolitical, spatial, and subjective exclusions from society (ibid.)

The fourth and fifth chapters present my analyses of the CCTB, UCCB, and Alberta’s child care subsidies. I demonstrate that regressive conservative ideologies underpin these debates and effectively disable, or seriously dissuade, women from parenting without a co-parent. These policies favour the nuclear family form and rely on women’s unpaid reproductive labour to sustain child care provision. Largely these policies demonstrate that while liberal societies have celebrated autonomy because autonomy is “not simply an ideal for a satisfying life but also a value that properly grounds the nature and purposes of political power” (Friedman 2003, 75) extending the principles and values of autonomy to women “would signal that women’s beliefs, choices, actions and lives were important... women’s individuality would come to take on an importance of its own” (ibid., 72).

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

Introduction

This chapter presents the theoretical framework that guides my analysis of my story – and the unexamined story of women’s autonomy as mothers. Despite the prominence of theories and concepts of individual autonomy in political theory, there is little or no consensus about what “autonomy” really means and when it can be “legitimately” employed to describe a decision, behaviour, or experience (Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000, 4-5). The concept is fraught for feminists and political theorists alike and becomes even more confounding when combined with a discussion of motherhood – an experience that is conventionally understood to be one of dependence and self-sacrifice. I delight in the opportunity to explore the possibilities that theories of autonomy have for understanding the autonomous mother and am inspired by Nedelsky’s observation that the experiences of motherhood bring forth moral, psychological, and political problems that are “intensely personal” and intensely political (1999, 304).

I begin this chapter by examining Friedman’s theory of autonomy (2003) to underpin and amplify the insights of feminist theories of autonomy. Friedman’s account of autonomy is central to my work because she engages with criticisms of autonomy from both feminist and communitarian camps and presents a defence of autonomy and its utility for feminists and feminist theory. Second, I explore feminist theories of the family and unpack why the family is so culturally freighted, despite little theoretical agreement on what combinations of people and relationships actually constitute a family (Bernstein and Reimann 2001, 2). As an “ideal type”, the family consists of “a legally married

(biologically male) husband and a (biologically female) wife, approximately two children, and the obligatory dog or cat” (ibid., 3). While the choice of pet may be a negotiable component in dominant social scripts surrounding the family, the heterosexual, or at least heteronormative, marriage relationship is not. Families that fall outside the boundaries of the traditional nuclear form contest patriarchal assumptions about sexuality, gender and, where children are involved, procreation (ibid., 5). The notion that each family should be a privatized unit, responsible for its own economic wellbeing (led by husbands) and emotional health (led by wives) is challenged by the family forms of immigrants, poor families, and racialized families (ibid.) and, I argue, autonomous mothers. Given that marriage is supposed to determine who can and cannot have sexual relations (Berinstein and Reimann 2001, 438), autonomous mothers have unrestricted sexual relationships that challenge the sexual/social contract *and* they counter the dominant national imaginary about citizenship and nation by producing *filius nullius* (a historical Latin term to describe “a child of no one”, or, a child born to an unwed mother).

Third, I discuss the Canadian political economy landscape and invite the reader to consider why and how the adoption of neoliberalism has dramatically impacted family policy, Canadian families, and created fertile ground for a resurgence of conservative expectations of gender roles in the family. I pay particular attention to the work of feminist political economists like Janine Brodie (2013, 2010, 2008) and Meg Luxton (2010, 2006, 2001) whose research is attentive to the gendered tensions in neoliberal state restructuring. Brodie argues that shifts in governing practices are an “historic alteration in state form which [enact] simultaneous changes in cultural assumptions, political

identities, and the various terrains for political struggle” (Brodie 1996, 386). Further, “neoliberalism as governmentality” literature reminds us that while neoliberalism means less *government*, it does not mean less *governance* (Larner 2000, 12). My research explores neoliberal government *and* governance and its implications for diverse family forms.

Feminist theories of autonomy

My mother is frequently asked, “So, how *did* you end up having a child? You adopted, right?” To which she candidly replies, “I had sex, just like you.” The collective curiosity about her choice to become an autonomous mother in the late 1980s (and today, when I recount my childhood) is met with curiosity, disbelief, shock, and often very pointed questions such as “Did your husband leave you? Is he in jail? Were you *raped*?” While contemporary perceptions of autonomous mothers may have shifted slightly, the underlying assumptions present in these questions form the basis of social and political norms governing women’s choices to become autonomous mothers.

The concept of autonomy is often criticized for its limited applicability – perhaps only to the lives of a few “successful, white men” (Friedman 2003, 23) and for the denigration of values associated with dependence, interdependence, and individuals’ relationships to the social. However, against almost all (feminist) odds, I find theories of autonomy useful for understanding the experiences of women who choose to parent without a co-parent. There is a small collection of research on this style of lone motherhood and the popular term is “autonomous motherhood” (Boyd et. al. 2015) but, “autonomy” is a loaded term in both feminist and political theory and so I begin this

chapter with a discussion of why I am inspired by a feminist theory of autonomy and why the term “autonomous” is such a significant descriptor of this style of motherhood. To frame my research and interpret my findings I rely on Friedman’s reformulation of autonomy. I am inspired by her analysis because it includes an examination of common feminist and communitarian critiques of theories of autonomy *and* a defense and reconceptualization of the theory, grounded in the experiences of typically marginalized groups.⁶

For Friedman, autonomy is acting on:

...the deeper wants and commitments of the behaving person[. It] is partly caused by her reflections on and reaffirmations of them, and mirrors those wants and commitments in the sense of helping her to achieve, promote, or protect them (2003, 8).

A person behaves autonomously when she “chooses or acts in accord with wants or desires that she has self-reflectively endorsed” (ibid., 5). Autonomy is frequent, self-determination and requires “the choosing and acting self” to play a role in determining those choices and actions (ibid., 4). The intentional, self-reflective, and endorsing components of thought and action are Friedman’s key parameters of living autonomously. Self-reflection and affirmation of deeper wants and values bring into alignment an agent’s principles and actions to produce autonomous behaviour and, ultimately, an autonomous life (ibid., 5). Conversely, when choices or actions are not “self-reflexively endorsed”, they are not autonomous, because the actor has not deliberated fully on how that choice reflects her deeper wants, desires, and values (ibid.).

⁶ For more work on theories of autonomy, see Anderson 1996; Antony and Witt 1993; Baier 1985; Benn 1976, 1982, 1990, 1991; Bhaba 1999; Buss 1994; Butler 1990; Chodorow 1985; Christman 1985, 1991, 1995; Code 2000; Dworkin 1988; Feinberg 1989; Grimshaw 1988; Haworth 1986; Hill 1987; Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000; Nedelsky 2012, 1989; Schmitt 1995; Schneewind 1998; Soble 1997; and Stoljar 2000.

Autonomous action is self-reflective in two-ways: first, it is caused by the consideration of what is important to the actor and second, it mirrors her deeper wants, values, and desires (ibid., 7).

In Friedman's theory of autonomy, no one is thoroughly "self-determined" but instead, autonomy is a matter of degree (ibid.). Self-reflection occurs along a continuum and the more that one reflects upon her values and acts in accordance with those values, the more autonomous her behaviour, and the more autonomously she leads her life (ibid.). Further, despite traditional disavowals of "the social" as a component for realizing individual autonomy, Friedman asserts that we are all "differentiated selves" with social identities and commitments and that autonomy can only be realized through a social context (ibid., 9). While autonomy may have "individuating effects" on persons, it never loses its "social rootedness" (ibid., 17). Of particular importance to understanding the autonomous mother, Friedman notes that the autonomous agent's actions "tend to intensify their differentiated distinctiveness from the masses" (ibid., 18) and her actions provide a lens for assessing "oppressive social conditions" that prevent the formation of individual autonomy (ibid., 19).

Liberalism and liberal theories have long celebrated autonomy as an ideal for living a satisfying life and as a value that "properly grounds the nature of political power" (Friedman 2003, 75). Feminist theories of autonomy are vast, sometimes contradictory, and always complex. Because "autonomy is a controversial value" (ibid., 3), there are a variety of accounts wherein theories of autonomy are considered nearly useless for feminist analysis and for women more generally. Together, these critiques demonstrate that traditional concepts of autonomy are gendered, classed, raced, and constructed on the

basis of an able-bodied ideal (Barclay 2000; Code 2000; Hoagland 1988; Nedelsky; 1989 MacIntyre 1981). A common feminist critique of autonomy is that its conceptualizations overemphasize individualistic, “atomistic” behaviours (Barclay 2000, 52) that deny the “inescapable connectedness of selves” and underemphasize that individuals’ “immersion in networks of relationships *form* their desires, aspirations, indeed their very identities” (ibid., my emphasis). In other words, traditional theories of autonomy disregard that people are fundamentally social and interdependent beings (ibid.), which is particularly problematic for women, whose lives are often built around, and devoted to, caring for others (Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000, 59). Even though the “capacity and aspiration” for autonomy is not something we are born with but is something we develop in, and through, our social relationships (Barclay 2000, 57), the relationship between social life and autonomy is often ignored. Traditional theories ignore, or perhaps intentionally deny, is that “it is primarily women’s labors, especially in the early years, that contribute most significantly to the development of the skills required for autonomous agency” (ibid., Friedman 2000).

The atomized emphasis on “independence and emotional detachment from others” and the “self-sufficient, independent, and self-reliant [man]” is the “traditional, mainstream, or masculine” way to think through autonomy (ibid., 83). There is, for example, no “stand up like a man” maxim for women, because “[standing] up like a woman!” has no cultural value, and is humorous at best. The dissonance in the phrase “stand up like a woman” results from the unusual imagery of women as self-sufficient and independent *individuals*. It is unusual to find cultural norms that value women embodying the same level of individualism and autonomy as men because traditional

gender roles, and expectations of motherhood, do not conceive of women as independent or self-actualizing people. Hegemonic masculinity, in its North American manifestations at least, holds the ideal man to be “the self-made man” who is a “ruthlessly aggressive entrepreneur who climbs over the backs of his competitors to become a “captain of industry”; the rugged individualist, the loner...” (ibid., 91). Through idealized forms of masculinity, men are encouraged to be “*independent, self-reliant, aggressive... Often they defy established authorities and institutions to accomplish their goals*” (ibid., my emphasis). What then, does it mean when women “defy established authorities and institutions to accomplish their goals” of becoming mothers outside of marriage? By being self-actualizing, independent, and seemingly individualistic, autonomous mothers challenge normative assumptions of what it means to be a woman. The autonomous mother transgresses traditional lines of femininity and masculinity. She is a father and a mother, a man and a woman, and embodies femininity and masculinity. However, her strengths are also her weaknesses: with these dualisms she disobeys the boundaries of “emphasized femininities” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 848) and undercuts dominant ideologies of motherhood (Kline 1993).

Our culture places great value on “independence from the help of other people” and “[distrusts] and de-values dependence on other people and vulnerability in general...” (Wendell 1989, 111 and 105). Characteristics that are socially accepted as independent are ascribed to men and masculinity and traits that are accepted as dependent are ascribed to women and femininity (Davis 1984, 1). Not surprisingly, many feminists are critical of concepts of autonomy because the concept and supporting theories seem so starkly at odds with women’s experiences of care work and relationality (Mackenzie and

Stoljar 2000, 59). What is the utility of autonomy if traditional theories deny the very concept of the social and interdependent self – and in doing so deny the reality of many women’s lives? Hoagland’s response is that “autonomy... is a thoroughly noxious concept” that “encourages us to believe that connecting and engaging with others limits us... and undermines our sense of self” (2000, 52). What would a theory of autonomy look like if women’s experiences were foregrounded? If theories of autonomy included women’s experiences, then women’s lives would become valuable in their own right, instead of being valuable only in relation to others (ibid., 72). Friedman maintains that despite tensions within and between feminist communities, the concept of autonomy has “intuitive plausibility”; it encourages “critical reflection” on social practices that are oppressive to marginalized groups; it entitles people to “live free of domination by others”; involves aspects of the self that can resist forms of oppression; and, it grounds the liberal conception of political legitimacy (ibid., 78).

Friedman calls for a definition of autonomy that is relevant to women by creating “new paradigms of autonomy that involve female protagonists [and] narratives of autonomy that avoid stereotypically masculine traits” (Friedman 2003, 99). To create new “exemplars of autonomy”, women who “[lack] opportunities to be autonomous should become participants in a cultural conversations about autonomy” (ibid., 46). My thesis examines motherhood – which is expected to be a self-sacrificing pursuit of care and dependence – and its possibilities for enabling women’s autonomy and pursuit of “self interest”. By exploring the possibilities for women’s autonomy within traditional relationships like motherhood, my research demonstrates the ways in which autonomous mothers are disregarded in policy and are unthinkable subjects. I invite the reader to

disengage autonomy from the individual and instead think about autonomy in a parent-child relationship (Fineman 1995) while also shifting notions about the proper place of interdependence outside of the nuclear family to a broader network of support and care (biological family, chosen family, and the state). These broader networks are not new – mothers have always relied on supports beyond their husbands to meet the caring needs of their families. This project brings that broader space of connection, interdependence, and relationship into focus through the autonomous mother. By investigating the ways in which women enact autonomy through motherhood, I argue that “culturally idealizing autonomy for women [signals] that women’s beliefs, choices, actions, and lives are important to culture and not just for their value for serving the needs and interests of others” (Friedman 2003, 72). I am particularly interested in the ways in which the autonomous mother resists dominant forms of gender-based oppression by redefining what motherhood and sexuality look like outside of the heterosexual marriage contract. Friedman argues that a feminist approach to autonomy requires accounts of women who “strive in paradigmatically or distinctively female situations against patriarchal constraints to express and refashion their deepest commitments and senses of self” (2003, 100). By choosing motherhood without marriage, the autonomous mother challenges heteropatriarchal expectations of women and their procreative roles and responsibilities.

In 1949, Simone de Beauvoir argued that women are expected to submerge themselves in the identity and life of their free and self-actualizing husbands (447-449). This expectation continues, and extends too, to contemporary expectations around a mother’s investment in the project of her children. A dutiful mother is caring, available, and dedicated fully to her children, an arrangement made possible by her marriage to a

breadwinning husband. What then do we make of a mother who does not have a husband? Can she provide, emotionally and financially, for her children? Who does she rely on for financial support? Does she marry the state instead of a man? Women's reproductive roles are central to a nation's survival (Schachar 2003) and because all political communities (except Vatican City) acquire members through birth, political communities also have a variety of practices that control when, how, and with whom women can (or should) reproduce (quoted in Friedman 2003, 180). The aim of these practices is to determine who becomes a full and legitimate citizen, and who does not (ibid.). The state has a vested interest in mobilizing certain forms of sexuality that are conducive to cultural and national reproduction (Friedman 2003, 180) and autonomous motherhood falls outside the boundaries of appropriate sexual citizenship. Bell and Binnie argue that families are governed by "sexualized constructions of appropriate and inappropriate modes of living together and caring for one another" (2000, 10) and the regulatory regimes that disfavour autonomous mothers do so because autonomous mothers defy models of "appropriate" modes of intimate life.

Feminist theories of "the family" and motherhood

At the core of contemporary debates and concerns about the family are changes in family living and household composition (Jagger and Wright 1999, 1). The growth of non-normative families – step-families, single parent homes, families with two working parents, and rises in divorce rates – have fueled debates around "the family in crisis" (ibid., 1, 10). Unfortunately, there is nothing *new* about this debate; for centuries changes in family structures have sparked controversy about morality and the sanctity of the

family (ibid., 10). Despite cultural nostalgia and reverence for the nuclear family model, that ideal is far from “traditional” (Coontz 2000). The earliest families and societies were actually “associations of families” which absorbed many different strangers. The fiction developed though that families “sprang from the same blood line or descended from the same ancestor (father)” (Pateman 1988, 27). And yet, despite the relative novelty of the nuclear family model, it constitutes both the ideal to which families are held and the prevailing belief system that governs and evaluates families. As Meg Luxton points out, although there has been an “[increase] in diversity in the way people actually organize their intimate, sexual, childrearing and domestic lives, there has not been a related change in familial ideology” (Luxton 1997, 7). Cheal (1991) refers to this intransigence of the nuclear norm as the “disjunction between the idealization of one type of family (nuclear) – and the diversity of actual family forms (quoted in Jagger and Wright 1999, 10). Of the American political climate, Coontz notes, “many commentators blamed the growth of poverty on single parenthood” or attributed declining economic performance to a “deteriorating work ethic and disintegrating families” (2000, xiii). Similar commentary is occurring in Canada: in 2003, Prime Minister Stephen Harper said, “we need to rediscover Burkean or social conservatism because a growing body of evidence points to the damage the welfare state is having on your most important institutions, particularly the family” (*CBC News* 2013). Similarly, *Globe & Mail* columnist Margaret Wentz wrote,

Family disintegration... is an underclass problem. The evidence is plain that *children born to unmarried women* – of whatever race – do much worse than children with two married parents. They’re less likely to succeed in school and more likely to turn to violence (boys) and promiscuity (girls)... (2012, my emphasis)

Wente is famous for her conservative views on women and family life, but she is not alone in her judgment, and fear, of lone motherhood. Part of the backlash involves varying conceptions of the family resulting from different ontological claims about “human nature, the relevance of biology in social life, the significance of masculinity and femininity...and the nature of sexuality” (Luxton 2005, 29). Women who choose to parent autonomously are directly threatening the social romance surrounding the traditional nuclear family and prevailing ideologies that suggest the only way to parent is through the heterosexual nuclear family. The “normal” (nuclear) family is seen as both established *and* threatened – a model to be revered and protected (Jagger and Wright 1999, 122).

Feminist gains in the 1970s gave rise to the possibility of sex without reproduction (via more widely accessible contraception, like the birth control pill), the prospect that a woman could choose to become pregnant and an associated promise of fully autonomous motherhood (Smart 1995, 53-4). The legal and political changes of the time allowed motherhood to become detached from the governance of the father. However, that moment was quickly usurped by a renewed “discursive closure” on the possibilities for autonomous motherhood (ibid., 55). Smart suggests that the reconstitution of fatherhood and masculinity reflected a growing concern about the power of women as mothers and a renewed fear about the consequences of allowing autonomous motherhood to thrive (ibid., 55-56). Lone mother families pose a special kind of social threat because they are “responsible for nothing less than unruly and ill-educated children, rising crime, and a crisis in masculine identity” (Jagger and Wright 1999, 30). This discourse refuses alternate conceptualizations of relationships of support,

societal responsibility for collective well being, and ideas about family responsibility to communities. Instead of thinking about how other structures of care, support, and kinship might be constructed, women are denigrated for refusing the nuclear family model of interdependence.

The dominant ideology of motherhood assumes that motherhood is a natural condition, instead of an institution “that presents itself as a natural outcome of biologically given gender differences” and as a natural expression of maternal instincts. The existence of the institution of motherhood is rarely questioned, even though the “proper qualities” of motherhood are often topics of debate (Smart 1995, 37.). Instead, motherhood is taken as a given and not as the result of social processes that have a historical and cultural location (ibid.). Mapping the history of different forms of motherhood alerts us to the fact that motherhood is a deeply political site imbued with discourses about “proper” motherhood (ibid., 10). Conversations about motherhood are especially difficult because they involve complex and shifting issues beyond the scope of mothers and children, to include debates about ideologies, resources, labour markets, technological changes, masculinity, and law (Silva 1995, 33). How are the boundaries of “proper motherhood” patrolled, so that once motherhood is established, it takes the “appropriate” course? (Smart 1995, 39).

The mid-19th century brought forth the *legal institution* that is now understood as motherhood (Smart 1995, 44). While women have been mothers forever, before the mid-19th century women had no legal status as mothers; only fatherhood, existed in the law (ibid.). Fathers passed on to their children their name, wealth, property, religion, and social standing, and without fathers, children had no meaningful social or political status

(ibid.). While an unwed mother was responsible for her “bastard” child, her child was legally the *child of no one* – the child had no name, no inheritance, and no political claim (ibid.). Establishing motherhood as a social and legal institution with similar rights to fatherhood was an enormous struggle of early feminists (ibid.). Feminists relied on discourses of mothers as nurturing, caring, and morally superior beings to gain more rights to the “nascent family law of the day” (ibid., 45). But as ideals about good mothering spread, so too did an understanding of what constituted bad mothering, and more specifically *who* was unfit to be a mother (ibid.). For example, expectations around breastfeeding, where an infant slept, whether a child should or should not be swaddled, and expectations of a mother’s affection were communicated through doctors, health officials, politicians, and educational materials for parents (women) (ibid.). These rules became *calibrations of motherhood* to which all mothers were expected to adhere (ibid.). That the content of rules for calibrations of motherhood change reveals that motherhood is not natural or instinctual, but it does not lessen the power of these social mores and their ability to govern women (ibid., 47). Smart applies Foucault’s theory of *normalizing discourses* to describe the homogenizing power of ideologies of motherhood and to describe the way in which adherence to, or deviation from, the norm are governed by “the stigmas and impositions placed upon those who disregard them” (ibid.).

My project traces the experiences of the unwed mother, because she is crucial to the “maintenance and rise of hegemonic motherhood” and to delineations between “good” and “bad” motherhood (ibid.). The good and bad mother exist in a symbiotic relationship; one cannot exist without the other (ibid.). The production of good motherhood is one of the chief interests of the state in its intervention into the private

intimate lives of its citizens (Moore 1995, 58). This is very clear in settler colonial states where reproduction was, and is, governed on the basis of managing racial differences and persists also in governing morality, sexuality, class, and ability (Stoler 2002, McClintock 1995). Given mothers' intimate roles in shaping the next generation of labourers, voters, and (re)producers, the state is also involved in the demonization of deviant forms of sexuality and intimacy.

State policies and practices frame the lone mother as the “benefit scrounger” who turns to the state for assistance while the married mother turns “happily and confidently to her husband for support” (McIntosh 1995, 150). McIntosh suggests that part of the fear surrounding autonomous motherhood is that the freedom of the lone mother – personal, sexual, social, and political – highlights the lack of freedom of married mothers and that if images of the “free” mother were to prevail then fewer women would choose married life and dependent motherhood (ibid., 154). The devaluation of lone/autonomous motherhood reveals an interesting truth about (good) married motherhood: the family is as much a “collective fantasy” as it is an actual institution (McIntosh 1995, 149). The autonomous mother exposes the myth that family can only occur in a nuclear form, and yet, her experience of disrupting that myth results in a disciplinary object lesson – her very real marginalization in the face of the power of the family a social and political institution. The privileged place that this fantasy holds has material implications for what forms of intimate relationships are normalized (ibid.). The traditional “family values” approach to changing family forms is a way of expressing the (archaic) belief that the family should be able to provide for all its personal needs and “secure social harmony and national well-being at the same time” (ibid., 150). Social anxieties surrounding lone

motherhood are an expression of this familial fantasy: the “social pathology” of the lone mother is just as fantastical as the social desirability of the married mother and the nuclear family (ibid.). This social pathology has rendered monogamy as the natural expression of human intimacy and “adequately expressive of our psychological needs” (ibid.). Thus, any family form or sexual intimacy that occurs outside the boundaries of (heterosexual) monogamy deviates from human nature.

Liberal democracies are predicated on the divide between public and private life, a myth that is bolstered by classical consent theorists’ assumptions that “women, and the relationship between the sexes, are of no special relevance to political theory” (Pateman 1980, 149). Pateman demonstrates that John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, and Jean Jacques Rousseau’s work on the social contract tell only half the story – the story between rational men and between these men and the state. The other half of the story consists in the *sexual* contract, wherein women are constrained by the patriarchal power of their husbands. By forming families outside of the sexual contract, autonomous mothers defy the very logic of western political life and political theory. By refusing to engage with the social/sexual contract, autonomous mothers redefine political subjecthood and redefine how women, and mothers, engage in public and private life. Pateman’s analysis “[pushes] against the confines of social contract theory” by highlighting the ways in which classic [contract] theorists failed to take into account women’s incorporation into, and obligations within, the social contract (ibid.). The “story” of the sexual contract is about heterosexual relations between women and men and women as “embodied sexual beings” and it helps us to understand “the mechanisms through which men claim the right of command of the use of women’s bodies” (ibid.). It is through submission to the sexual

contract that women are interpolated into the dominant ideology of motherhood and the heterosexual nuclear family matrix. Examining how mothers transgress boundaries of idealized forms of motherhood renders visible the limitations of the social contract and the restrictions of the sexual contract.

Contemporary political economy, family policy, and feminist ethics of care

For Peck and Tickell, neoliberalism began as a “starkly utopian intellectual” project that was then taken up and promoted by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan and then consolidated in the form of the Washington Consensus (2002, 380). While neoliberalism does not manifest uniformly across time and space, social policy influenced by neoliberal values reflects a “cluster of core assumptions that mark a radical departure from the generative orientations of the post-welfare state (Brodie 2010, 1568). Peck and Tickell note,

Neoliberalism was therefore qualitatively different [from Keynesianism] because it inhabited not only institutions and places but also *the spaces in between*.

...Neoliberalism was playing a decisive role in constructing the “rules” of interlocal competition by shaping the very metrics by which regional competitiveness, public policy, corporate performance, or social productivity are measured—value for money... (2002, 397).

Relying on Larner’s analysis of neoliberalism, this thesis defines neoliberalism as an ideology, policy paradigm, and governmentality (Larner 2000). Neoliberalism cannot be confined to a discussion of the economic, but must be understood as a multilevel program that involves the social, political, and cultural spheres of human activity (ibid.).

That is, neoliberalism is intertwined with social, political, economic, and legal institutions and processes (9); it is a policy framework marked by a dramatic shift from the Keynesian welfare state towards “unfettered” free markets (6); and, neoliberalism is as much about government as it is about *governance* – but that less government does not mean less governance (12). The intent of neoliberalism is not just to free up markets, depoliticize the public realm, and create a more efficient flow of capital, but also to “change the soul” of individuals (Harvey 2005, 23). In this way, neoliberalism is a “strategy for governance” (ibid.) and a “missionary faith” (Connell 2010, 23) – a project that is constantly seeking either to transform existing markets or create new markets to generate competitive and individualized spaces (ibid.).

Neoliberal cutbacks to public expenditures result not just in reductions to services but also a cultural shift in which expectations about what the state should be providing are diminished. Theoretical and material evidence is mounting that manifestations of neoliberal governance are characterized by “unequal representation and decreasing availability of public goods required for the maintenance of capabilities and basic human security” (Bakker 2004, 68). The market – and social – reorientation towards neoliberalism has dramatically altered the capacity of individuals and families to rely on state provision of goods and services to meet their needs. Neoliberal public policy “extends and disseminates market logics and calculations and market-mimicking practices to a vast array of social and political institutions...” (Brodie 2010, 1568) and it radically alters “individual subjectivities, *gender orders*, and the *organization of households*” (ibid., my emphasis). That the CCTB, UCCB, and subsidy policies in Alberta are delivered through the tax system and/or are targeted at individuals, instead of

through a truly universal benefit system or bricks and mortar services, reflects neoliberal logics of hyper-individualism, privatization, and competition. The “political costs” for conservative governments of spending money to “address the human impacts of [economic] restructuring” are considered too high if they require tax increases to address these issues (Bakker 2004, 68) and of the many consequences of this approach is that service provision becomes decentralized, spread unevenly across the country, and not necessarily accountable to service-users (ibid.), as is the case with child care. Further, the state’s reliance on the voluntary or private sector to substitute for the provision of public goods, burdens non-profit service-providers with high demand and meager funding to meet service-users’ needs (ibid.), while allowing the private sector to flourish with little concern for affordability or accessibility. As such, the political landscape becomes ripe, and in fact creates incentive for, the birth of the “model neoliberal citizen” – who has “strategized for [herself] among various social, political, and economic options”, not one who seeks political alternatives or collectivity (Brown 2006, 704). Under neoliberalism’s particular form of governmentality, “institutions, structures, issues, and problems that used to constitute the public” become privatized and so individuals must rely on themselves and their families to meet their needs (Read 2009, 35). All families are impacted – I argue, profoundly negatively – by neoliberal state restructuring. Families have never been isolated and self-sustaining units who do not rely on public goods and services. That said, autonomous mothers are particularly impacted by the increasingly individualized and privatized nature of public goods, especially child care. If the state assumes or expects families to rely on their own human resources and financial capital to provide for services like child care, then women are either discouraged from becoming

sole-parents or are likely financially punished for their decision to do so. Current child care systems – if they can be called that at all – require enormous financial flexibility, multiple people who are willing to contribute to child care, or one person who can commit to child care full time.

My theoretical framework is informed by a feminist political economy ontology that takes account of the connections between state, market, and family. Political economy studies “social relations as they relate to the economic system of production” (Drache 1978, 5) and understands society as a “totality which includes the political, economic, social, and cultural where the whole is greater than its parts” (Clement 1997, 3). For Luxton, the interdisciplinary framework of political economy “predisposes” political economy to the study of “women, gender, sexuality, race, and class...age and ability” (2006, 12-13). Despite the flexibility in its framework, Luxton asserts that Canadian political economy was “slow to take up feminist issues and resistant to adopting gender as a key analytical concept” and instead takes gender, if at all, as one concept among many (ibid., 10). As a result, many feminist political economists align their work more strongly with feminist theory, a research strategy that has had the perverse effect of contributing to “an ongoing marginalization of feminism in political economy” (ibid.). But in its ideal form, feminist political economy “[advances] the analyses of progressive social change” (Clement and Vosko 2003, xii) and is a way of “documenting the vast amounts of socially necessary labour as a corrective to other formulations [neo-classical economics], which leave that work invisible and undervalued” (Picchio 1992, 140).

In this context, feminist political economy work on the ethics of care helps in understanding the challenge that autonomous mothers pose to the family and the ways in which the autonomous mother invites us to think deeply about interdependence. Betts notes that the past decade has witnessed an impressive expansion of care ethics literature, highlighting the implications of care work for public life (2014, 49). This literature emphasizes “values, ethics, emotions, and relationality” to address the theoretical and material inadequacies in liberal and behaviouralist theories’ assumptions that people are inherently rational, autonomous actors and that policies should reflect that (ibid.). Feminist ethics of care emphasize human interdependence to challenge the public/private divide and assert the role that care plays in all our lives and the ways in which we rely on others’ care to carry out the “reproduction of society” that makes life – political, social, and economic – possible (ibid). The autonomous mother demonstrates that *all* families rely on care and all families are relational; the nuclear family is also a family of interdependence, despite the myth that it is a self-sustained and independent unit. The autonomous mother alerts us to the “centrality of care to all human life and activities” (ibid., 52) and that “relatedness is more fundamental than separation” (Kershaw 2005, 66). Moreover, theorists like Hankivsky (2004, 2006, 2011) and Kershaw (2006) connect and highlight the interlocking sites between care ethics and social policy and demonstrate the utility of a feminist ethics of care to social policy. Robinson notes, “foregrounding care as a set of practices and a moral disposition reveals the material and discursive power of hegemonic masculinity and neo-liberalism in the global political economy” (2013, 133). An ethics of care helps to reveal neoliberalism’s flawed assumptions

regarding the individual, autonomy and dependence, and the proper role of work and care (ibid., 138) .

Policies like the Universal Child Care Benefit, Canada Child Tax Benefit, and child care subsidies in Alberta are much more than simple financial transfers or tax benefits. Family policies represent both implicit and explicit principles about how the (federal and provincial) state views its relationship and responsibility to families, legislated through law or policy (Baker 1995, 5). Although Canadian laws no longer require a gendered division of labour, the expectation that women will be full-time caregivers and supported by male breadwinners prevails in most contemporary family policy (ibid., 13). A range of normative investments concerning the importance of reproduction, child rearing, and the role of parents (usually mothers) in families and in society undergird family policy (ibid., 40). In Canada (as in Australia, Britain, and the United States), conversations around family values tend to be politically and socially conservative and heavily influenced by the “moral right” (Baker 1995). Even more recent trends towards “gender-“ or “family”-neutral policies are modeled on the nuclear family or biased towards men’s occupational patterns and financial flexibility (Baker 1995, 346).

Although feminists differ in their analyses about family life and gender equality, there is some agreement amongst feminists that the family should never be the sole unit of analysis for a study of policy because families – and family members - are impacted differently by policy and sometimes in unexpected ways (Eichler 1988; Baker 1995, 343). Numerous scholars have critiqued family policy (*see* Abbott and Wallace 1992; Abramovitz 1989; Eichler 1988; Heitlinger 1993; Lewis 1993; McDaniel 1990; Patemen 1988, 1989; Sidel 1992; Spakes 1991) and my work draws on liberal, radical,

and socialist feminist arguments to critique Canadian family policy and suggest alternate policy approaches. Liberal feminists argue that for women to have increased equality and social/political representation, they require equality before the law (Baker 1995, 343). Radical and socialist feminists respond by arguing that women's biology and life experiences are so profoundly different from men's that to achieve equality, policies should emphasize "equality of outcome" rather than equality of opportunity (ibid.). Because legal, political, economic, and social institutions are shaped around men's lives and their experiences/needs/interests, these very institutions need to be restructured to centre women's realities (ibid.). For policies to become more responsive to gender equality, they must be attentive to the gendered power dynamics within families (McDaniel 1990; Baker 1995, 344) and, in relation to childcare policy, must acknowledge that child-bearing and child-rearing is *work* (Baker 1995, 344).

Canada's political system is based on liberal democratic assumptions of the full and active participation of all citizens. However, these assumptions fail to acknowledge that women's labour market participation and citizenship is "truncated by lack of access to good jobs, a lack of access to childcare, and programs which define them as men's dependents" (Pateman 1989; Baker 1995, 344). Naples (1991) argues that policies that are modeled off these presuppositions ignore the ways in which family policies punish women: first, gender-neutral language masks the different life experiences of women and men and their access to power; legislation stigmatizes families that do not conform to societal norms (especially single parent homes); women are encouraged to stay in unpaid caregiving roles that are devalued ideologically and economically; and they undermine

women's autonomy and control over reproduction and intimate life (quoted in Baker 1995, 347).

The shift in the norm regarding women's engagement in the paid labour force has been attributed to structural changes in the economy; the opening up of particular jobs to women (and the pink-washing of job sectors like education and social services); the restructuring of family benefits and the taxation system; and laws relating to reproductive choice, employment, divorce, and child support. In the process public opinion has shifted dramatically, acknowledging, at least to some extent, that women have legitimate social need and significant capacity to contribute to the productive (not just the reproductive) economy and to public life (Baker 1995, 345). While feminists made great strides lobbying the Canadian state to secure women's rights, the failure to establish an "alternative non-sexist vision for social policy" in Canada is one of the reasons that neoliberal reformers have been able to move policy frameworks slowly and steadily away from a "women-friendly" model (McKeen 2004, 120). Canada's social support system has narrowed and is now primarily about incentivizing entrance into the labour market and providing (paltry) financial support for families, using implicit and explicit messages about the desirability of the nuclear family form (ibid.). For example, many social assistance programs have been restructured to reduce access to financial benefits for lone mothers (Macdonald 1998; Evans 1996; Scott 1996; Vosko 2000; McKeen 2004, 120) and this approach to family policy has grave implications for the abilities of women to "exercise political voice or to engage publicly" because lone mothers are financially disadvantaged and silenced by policies that disfavour them or do not recognize their existence (McKeen 2004, 120).

Despite the liberal democratic divide between the public and private spheres – where “the family” is relegated to the latter sphere – the home and family are intimately entwined in political, economic, and legal life. So, despite Trudeau’s famous statement, the state seems to be the nosy neighbour in our bedrooms – overly concerned with the ordering of Canadians’ intimate lives, and in particular, how women’s sexual autonomy and reproduction is governed. The UCCB, CCTB, and childcare subsidy policies in Alberta thus provide useful sites from which to explore how the state, the market and the law shape the intimate lives of citizens, and what the consequences of such constraints are for one’s freedom to order one’s personal life. Family policy should give women genuine alternatives to heterosexual marriage, and opportunities to form autonomous families, and to control their sexuality and reproduction (McKeen 2004, 121).

When considering the full extent of women’s sexual emancipation and freedom, there is a political and social fear that valuing women’s independence and autonomy might “lead to egoists, Nietzschean excesses in which women indulge themselves at the expense of others and neglected all the innocent others who depended on them” (Friedman 2003, 72). However, theories of autonomy need to be reconceptualized so that they are attentive to “the complex nature of the autonomous agent and to the differentiated social and historical contexts in which agents are embedded” (Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000, 12). Women are “characterized as much by our capacity for care and concern for others as by our self-interest” and women “need moral and political theories that are shaped according to this fact” (ibid., 59).

Conclusion:

In this chapter I presented the complex and interlocking theories that underpin my analysis of autonomous motherhood. Part of the challenge of this project is that feminist theories of autonomy and motherhood are diverse and often present more questions than answers. To outline the interconnectivity between theory and practice, the following chapter presents my methodological framework and how I chose to assess political debates with methods informed by my theoretical findings.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

My project asks: how do federal and provincial social policy disfavour autonomous mothers, and why? To answer these research questions, I chose a qualitative mixed-methods approach that relies on critical policy studies/feminist critical policy analysis and discourse analysis techniques. My research project had three phases: first, I selected and narrowed my research question, selected a research design, and chose a sample; second, I collected and summarized data; and third, I analyzed my data in relation to my research question, drew conclusions from the data, assessed the limitations of my study, and considered directions for future research (which I will discuss in the conclusion). I begin this chapter with an examination of the feminist methodology that provides the foundation for my qualitative research; I review how I selected texts for both stages of my qualitative research; I discuss the methods I employed in my qualitative research and describe their application; and I comment on the limitations of this study.

Guiding Feminist Methodology

Jill Vickers proposes a “feminist vision of political science” (1997, 15) to illustrate the need to “reinvent” (ibid., 11) political science from its traditional androcentric orientations and occupy the theoretical space necessary to create a political science lens that incorporates, recognizes, and centres women’s activities as *political* activities. Relying on Vickers’ articulation of a “feminist vision of political science” (ibid., 11), I explore policy debates surrounding child care subsidies, and the role of the

family in providing child care, federally and provincially in Alberta. These debates are perfect examples of Vickers' definition of politics because these debates "...[involve] collective efforts to change power relationships in society, its communities or its institutions..." (ibid.).

I draw on feminist methodologies to illustrate the tenets upon which my qualitative research methodology is built. In *Feminist Methods in Social Research*, Shulamit Reinharz proposes ten characteristics of feminist methodology (1992, 240):

1. Feminism is a perspective, not a research method,
2. Feminists use a multiplicity of research methods,
3. Feminist research involves an ongoing criticism of nonfeminist scholarship,
4. Feminist research is guided by feminist theory,
5. Feminist research may be transdisciplinary,
6. Feminist research aims to create social change,
7. Feminist research strives to represent human diversity,
8. Feminist research frequently includes the researcher as a person,
9. Feminist research frequently attempts to develop special relations with the people studied (in interactive research),
10. Feminist research frequently defines a special relation with the reader.

These characteristics guide the methods employed in my qualitative research. Although contrary to her first point, I think feminism can be both a method *and* a perspective, I follow Reinharz's characteristics of feminist methodology and my qualitative research methods reflect several of these points:

1. I develop a mixed-methods approach (explained in further detail below);
2. I employ Vickers' reinvention of political science as a lens through which to view and write about motherhood, the family, and the state;
3. My research and methods are guided by an amalgam of feminist theoretical contributions;
4. I draw on my own discipline of political science and feminist theory to identify and illustrate my research findings;
5. My research aims to fill the gap in existing literature on theorizing motherhood and family as political and the state as a producer of particular forms of sexual citizenship, and;
6. In analyzing my standpoint as a researcher and the child of an autonomous mother, I include my own perspectives in the analysis of my findings.

As a reflection of the feminist methodology outlined above, this thesis employs a qualitative mixed-methods approach of a critical policy studies/critical feminist analysis and a critical discourse analysis to express a “commitment to thoroughness, the desire to be open-ended, and to take risks” (Reinharz 1992, 197). As Reinharz suggests, feminist researchers often combine multiple methods to “cast their net as widely as possible” to understand the “critical issues” of their research (1992, 201). Employing a mixed-methods approach adds “layers of information” to help clarify and add nuance to the research project and reflects the multifaceted identity of feminist researchers and the issues we study (ibid., 201, 202).

Critical Policy Studies and Feminist Critical Policy Analysis

... I try to distinguish between two meanings of motherhood, one superimposed upon the other: the potential relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the institution, which aims at ensuring that that potential – and all women – shall remain under male control. (Rich 1976, xv)

Critical policy studies asks “how does one incorporate new knowledge into the policy process?” and how do these “new ways of knowing require us to redraw the contours of the public policy field?” (Orsini and Smith 2007, 8). A CPS approach is flexible and adaptable - “critical policy studies” is a toolkit for “approaches and perspectives...that are best suited to changing the policy contexts in which we find ourselves” (ibid., 1). This approach is not a strict set of practices but it is inspired by the tradition of “speaking truth to power” (ibid). Further, critical policy studies scholarship has wider implications for how academics, students, and policy makers understand public policy and policy analysis (ibid., 3-4) because it requires the student, researcher, and policy maker to see what policies say, do not say, and the consequences of both. Additionally, Marshall argues that “the master’s tools must be cast aside” and theories and methodologies must integrate analyses of gender with power and politics to bring to light that which we thought was “common sense” (1997, 2). Feminist critical policy analysis is research conducted *for* women that focuses on policy and politics (ibid.). Feminist critical policy studies is “ideological, centres on gender, states a clear values base, and identifies formal and informal processes of power and policy that affect women’s and men’s full advancement” (ibid.). Critical feminist policy analysis dismantles policies by describing the limits of traditional, mainstream conceptions and

methods and demanding a widened view of policy arenas, politics, and policy agendas (ibid., 3).

According to Nancy Fraser, those who control policy agendas arrange “the hegemonic mode of domination” (1994, 123) and thus, public policy matters because it reveals the legitimating discourses and metanarratives about gender, family, women’s autonomy, and intimate life (Marshall 1997, 6). Patriarchal and liberal democratic distinctions between public and private determine what types of social problems make the (public) policy agenda and what problems remain under private (and familial) purview (ibid.). Critical policy analysis centres an analysis of power, policies and processes that restrict people’s access to services, and demonstrates how privilege is maintained through specific policy programs and how marginalized groups are silenced (ibid., 9). Marshall describes critical policy analysis as the “search for improvement of the human condition, an emancipatory social science” (ibid., 10). As such, feminist critical policy analysts must consider “whether a policy will empower and democratize, whether it will dispense goods to the have-nots as much as they consider traditional questions such as whether a policy is efficient” (ibid., 10-11). By making power dynamics visible, feminist policy analysis “[probes] silences, absences, and distortions in dominant paradigms” (Hawkesworth 2010, 277) and by challenging traditional explanatory accounts of social and political life, feminist inquiry exposes new areas for research (ibid.). My research pays homage to Orsini, Smith, and Marshall’s approaches to critically re-evaluating and redefining public policy while also, through a critical discourse analysis, paying attention to “policy deliberations” and “master narratives” that appear in speech and text (Marshall 1997, 10).

My analysis will rely chiefly on McPhail's (2003) feminist policy analysis framework. She develops a comprehensive set of questions (which I abbreviated for this study) designed to uncover policy biases and ideologies and create theoretical spaces for redesigning policy in ways that support women's equality. From her framework, I chose 7 questions to guide my analysis. These questions are:

1. Are women's unpaid labor and work of caring considered and valued or taken for granted?
2. How does the policy mediate gender relationships between the state, market, and family?
3. Does the policy achieve gender equality? Are there equality of results or disparate impacts?
4. Does presumed gender neutrality hide the reality of the gendered nature of the problem or solution?
5. Are women clearly visible in the policy? Does the policy take into account the historical, legal, social, cultural, and political contexts of women's lives and lived experiences both now and in the past? Is the policy defined as a traditional "women's issue," i.e., "pink policy?"
6. Are women penalized for either their roles as wives, mothers or caregivers or their refusal to adopt these roles?
7. Where are the policy silences? What policy is not being proposed, discussed, and implemented?

Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

Feminist critical discourse analysis seeks to make visible the "complex workings of power and ideology in discourse in sustaining a (hierarchically) gendered social order" (Lazar 200, 1). In Lazar's book *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis: Gender, Power and Ideology in Discourse*, she asserts that advancing understandings of the complexity

of power relations is especially important in “present times where issues of gender, power and ideology have become increasingly complex and subtle” (ibid.). Lazar’s anthology highlights the implicit ways that “taken-for-granted social assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced...” (ibid., 1-2). The impetus for a “*feminist critical discourse analysis*” is the specific critical feminist view of gender relations, “motivated by the need to change” the status quo (ibid., 2-3). Further, the need for a “*feminist critical discourse analysis*” is the view that discourse is a “site of struggle, where forces of social (re)production and contestation are played out” (ibid., 4). Feminist critical discourse analysis focuses on “demystifying the interrelations of gender, power and ideology in discourse”. As such, feminist critical discourse analysis is “committed to the achievement of a just social order through a critique of discourse” (ibid., 5).

Following Trimble and Sampert’s outline, my discourse analysis examined “discourse fragments” of parliamentary and legislative debates surrounding childcare benefits (2010, 329). These include:

- a. Thematic structures—the central themes or arguments of the text
- b. Scripts (standard storylines that create narrative tension) or frames (narrative devices that tap into existing knowledge)
- c. Rhetorical devices—stylistic choices that convey themes and meanings such as forms of argumentation, symbols, images, sources
- d. Ideological assertions or claims (e.g., about human nature, power, political values and goods)

To look for indicators of gender stereotypes, the naturalization of family, and assumptions about who is properly responsible for care, I read texts for metaphors, tropes, frames, archetypes, use of cultural resonances, and discourses employed by the

speakers. I suggest that discussions of / comments on the family as sacred, mothers and fathers as child care experts, and “freedom of choice” are indicators of the construction of families as private spaces, nuclear, and arrangements in which parents (that is, mothers) are primarily responsible for child care. My discourse analysis frame can be found in Appendix 1. Second, I looked at the use of gender neutral language and considered whether phrases that use gender neutral language (“parents”, “guardians”, or “families”) sound bizarre if one replaces the gender neutral term with men/fathers. This replacement technique reveals that “neutral” language is in fact gendered, and that the choice of gender neutral language is a political ploy rather than a representation of a progressive policy approach. My findings support Graef’s assertion that policy making is more than a simple sorting and evaluating of policy options, but is actually an “act of power” (2007, 35) and Smith’s claim that public policy is “organized around profoundly heteronormative assumptions about the nature of Canadian economic, social, and political life” (2007, 92).

My textual discourse analysis examined syntactical structures (format, structure, layout), rhetorical devices (forms of argumentation, symbols, or images), thematic structures (central themes of the text), frames (narrative devices that communicate meanings through cultural resonance), and ideological claims (notions of power and authority). My analysis had three stages of development whereby I coded openly, axially, and selectively. Open coding refers to the primary textual reading to identify specific patterns in the texts, axial coding refers to the categorization of specific words, devices, and images, and finally, selective coding refers to the final stage of review wherein I examined the data once more to identify any additional patterns or evidence that

challenged my findings (Wesley 2011, 350-352). I conducted the open coding process by listing the myths, themes, narratives, and archetypes that appear in the texts and then grouped them according to overarching themes. I then positioned these themes in relation to whether they upheld or contested notions of a state/provincial support for the privatized nuclear family. For example, an open coding that highlighted comments about parents as “experts in child care” was coded in “gender”. Depending on the nature of the comments, “gender” as a theme might uphold or contest ideals of the nuclear family.

As Howard and Prividera suggest, “critiques of dominant discourse are critiques of the dominant system” (209, 91). My research aims to contribute to Howard and Prividera’s analysis through an emulation of their position that “the practice of critical rhetoric requires that we address domination, power (both explicit and hegemonic), and ideology as producers of and reproductions of discourse” (ibid.). In policy studies, feminist analyses have led to significant criticisms of how the welfare state model failed to understand social policy as a “gendered project” (Smith 2007, 103). As such, feminist public policy research challenges “existing structures of citizenship and public policy in liberal democracies arguing that liberal citizenship is fundamentally gendered and that public policies...rest on the assumptions of a patriarchal society” (ibid.). Smith argues that the heteronormative social organization of social policy has not yet been fully theorized and so I aim to consider how women’s intimate and sexual freedom is debated and constituted in parliamentary and legislative debates surrounding child care benefits and in the articulation of the policies themselves.

Selection of Texts

I selected texts based on a comprehensive literature review. These sources included academic works including books and journal articles, traditional news media; government (federal and provincial) reports/documents; publications by child care advocacy organizations; and academic and non-academic writings by mothers about their experiences parenting without a co-parent. These resources enabled me to ground my research within existing scholarly and popular debates; assisted in refining my research question, central concepts, and formulating an appropriate research design; and helped me to identify what research has already established regarding family, social policy, and the influence of the state, and what silences exist.

To gain a deeper understanding of the depth and complexity of contemporary family policy debates in Canada and Alberta, I performed a critical analysis of a series of reports made by research institutes about approaches to family policy nationally and provincially in Alberta. These reports contributed both to my literature review and to my analysis in that they provide social, economic, and political critiques of social policy *and* alternatives to current policy approaches. I chose a selection of online reports and papers written about the Universal Child Care Benefit, the Canada Child Tax Benefit, childcare subsidies in Alberta, and child care policy debates in Canada more generally. A breadth of scholarly literature and government documents will support my analysis, but these reports were particularly formative in my critical policy studies and critical feminist policy analysis approach.

For the discourse analysis, I chose a selection of interventions made during House of Commons debates by MPs and MLAs from governing and opposition parties between

1996 and 2015. I chose this timeline to capture the collapse of Canada Assistance Plan into the Canada Health and Social Transfer, to examine the impacts of this shift on provincial social policy, to examine how shifts in the federal governing parties impacted approaches to child care policies, and to understand how Harper’s approach to “family values” is articulated through social policy and its impacts on autonomous mothers. I chose Alberta as a second case study to gain a deeper understanding of how federal shifts in social policy impact provincial approaches to social policies, because there has been little academic attention paid to Alberta’s approach to child care (compared to Ontario or Quebec), and because my “story” – the inspiration for this research – is rooted in Alberta politics. To access these texts I used the online Parliament of Canada Hansard (www.parl.gc.ca/HouseChamberBusiness) and the Legislative Assembly of Alberta Hansard (www.assembly.ab.ca) archives and searched for comments made by MPs and MLAs using the following search terms “universal child care benefit”, “Canada child tax benefit”, “child care subsidy”, and “child care benefits”, “single mother”, “lone mother”, and “single parent”. I chose to examine what legislators had to say about child care and single motherhood to illuminate debates surrounding the development of, and challenges to, these policies. Not all MLAs and MPs contribute meaningfully, or at all to the policy-making process, and certainly backbenchers have no impact on policy design (although they may influence general policy prescription). However I included comments from backbench MLAs and MPs precisely because they are not as high profile and thus are less censored than cabinet ministers or leaders, but still help create the discursive environment in which the real power brokers operate. Further, as Savoie (1999) notes, federal political power has been concentrated in the hands of the Prime Minister and his

inner “court government” so indeed the remarks of private members are not as closely related to official policy as are throne speeches. That said, the notoriously tight control that Prime Minister Stephen Harper and the Prime Minister’s Office (“PMO”) kept over official communication (Martin 2010) has led some Conservative MPs to balk at the PMO’s efforts to exercise control over them, most notably arising in private members making statements, un-sanitized by communications consultants in the PMO, that are more honest and transparent in their ideological underpinnings (as with private members’ efforts to reignite the abortion debate). Furthermore, while private members do not retain the same direct influence over policy that, say, cabinet ministers do, they do sit in caucus, interact with their senior colleagues, and contribute to an environment in which the Prime Minister and cabinet ministers exist. Moreover, private members have some access to institutional power, through Minister’s Caucus Advisory Committees, upon which private members advise cabinet ministers on questions of policy (Wilson 2015).

Limitations of the Study

First, discourse analysis as a method is subject to some limitations. While a deconstruction of political commentary reveals hidden meanings and metanarratives, one cannot know for sure how the public interprets these comments (and subsequent policy actions) as limitations on their intimate life. As such, I do not attempt to infer how individuals interpret these policies intellectually, only how these policies order social life more broadly, the social and political impacts of these policies, and the gendered meanings that can be derived from these texts and the policies themselves. Second, I did not conduct interviews with legislators or public servants, which might have given me

deeper insight into the intentions of these policies. Instead, this study examines the publicized (or, publically available) commentary surrounding family policy. In my future doctoral research, I intend to incorporate interviews from policy makers *and* from autonomous mothers who bear the weight of these policies.

Conclusion

Motherhood is a contentious subject for politicians, feminist theorists, and the public. Motherhood involves concepts including sex, gender, desire, oppression, equality, freedom, liberation, autonomy, capital, nation, citizenship, sexuality, race, ability, and power. Further, mothering is a site at which these concepts are contested, reconstituted, and (re)produced, such that mothering often acts as a “lighting rod”; social ills or theoretical tensions are expressed in terms of mothering or get attached to the issue of mothering (DiQuinzio 1999, xi). Feminist movements have made enormous efforts to articulate the importance of women’s reproductive autonomy and have brought forth incredible social change that has given women more options for motherhood. But despite advances in women’s political and economic status, mothers - single, married, autonomous, adolescent, lesbian, poor, disabled - are the focus of scrutiny and debate (ibid., vii). I anticipated that examining political commentary on family policy in Canada and Alberta would reveal explicit and implicit assumptions about desirable and undesirable family forms, the political regulation of families, and narratives of motherhood. Further, I suspected that nothing would be said about women who choose to parent without a co-parent. Those omissions reflect presuppositions about how women should mother and what kinds of mothers should receive financial and/or policy support.

My choice to incorporate family policy in this thesis reflects my desire to “...analyze the significance of a phenomenon for future events, and to analyze the relation among parts of a phenomenon” (Reinharz 1992, 164). Using child care policies as case studies allows me to test a hypothesis, illustrate my observations of, and concerns for, current child care policy frameworks, and pose directions for future research (ibid., 167). Additionally, using case studies in feminist research is a method to document history, generate theory, and combat generalizations by looking for particularities and nuances to existing understandings of social phenomenon (ibid., 174). In the following chapter I demonstrate how, through speech acts and policy development, federal and provincial politicians (re)produce metanarratives about gender, family, nation, and the public/private divide through explicit and implicit references to the ideal family form and who (the family or the state) is properly in charge of childcare.

Chapter 4: Feminist Critical Policy Analysis

[Motion 507] comes from a man that [sic] believes that there is no replacement for a mother and a mother's love. It is vital in the first year of a child's life. Not a dad nor an institution, government or otherwise, can provide the love and care a baby needs to shape their [sic] personality and develop their human character. Mother's greatness is illustrated by a phrase recited by a man, Bill Sunday, in 1806: mothers fill places so great that there isn't an angel in Heaven who wouldn't be glad to give a bushel of diamonds to come down here and take their places.⁷

Introduction

Previous studies of federal family policies and family policies in Alberta since 1996 show that Canada and Alberta have increasingly oriented their child care policies in neoliberal directions, relying heavily on tax-delivered benefits to provide families with “choices” in child care. This type of policy design emphasizes investment in children (rather than women and gender equality) (Bashevkin 2002), has done very little to ensure women’s social and economic equality, and has profound implications for the stability and security of families (Jenson 2009). The traditional (nuclear) family form benefits most from family policies federally and provincially even though the nuclear family has been steadily declining since the 1960s and blended-, step-, and lone-parent families are increasing (Statistics Canada 2011). Moreover, the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development have found that families with two income-earners are more financially stable and prosperous than those with one paid and one unpaid worker (Lahey 2014). And yet, despite a wealth of critiques of the family policy landscape since 1996, politicians are silent on the topic of

⁷ Robert Fischer, PC MLA, 1997.

autonomous (as distinct from lone) motherhood and academics do little better.

Discussions regarding how these policies impact women differentially, and single mothers most dramatically, do not venture to discuss the possibility of women who have chosen to parent without a co-parent and how they are, or are not, interpolated into the federal and provincial family policy landscape.

Despite the advances of the women's movement, patriarchal notions of the nuclear family and of women's sexuality profoundly limit the conditions of possibility for motherhood. First, when conversations of single motherhood appear in political speech, comments are limited to discussions of poverty and intimate partner violence. Even MLAs and MPs from centre and left-of-centre parties do not discuss single motherhood by choice. One could argue that autonomous motherhood is subsumed by "single motherhood", but the fact that autonomous motherhood continues to confound politicians, policy makers and the broader public, demonstrates that for most, single motherhood is a circumstance and not choice. Second, while Harper's policies were demonstrably pro-nuclear family, comments during parliamentary debate around family values, family form and child care policies are more subtle. This suggests that Harper's Conservatives understand that there is a conflict, or tension, between his government's policies and what Canadians actually need and want from social policy, not to mention how they actually live. Third, family policies continue to be framed in terms of what is best for children, instead of what is best for mothers. Framing policies in terms of children's rights is not a new trend. However, I am deeply troubled by politicians' continued resistance towards discussing women's rights, women's bodily and

reproductive autonomy, and the prevalence of the nuclear family in policy debates, despite rhetorical gestures towards incorporating diverse families into child care policies.

McPhail's approach to policy analysis is predicated upon the belief that society is gendered and social policy is one of many tools that regulates the production of gender and gendered ideologies. She writes, "no policy analysis can be considered complete until the gendered impacts are enumerated, considered, and evaluated" (2003, 58). In this section I enumerate, consider, and evaluate these policies as a whole, answer the policy analysis questions listed in Chapter 3, and incorporate analyses drawn from research institutes and academic literature to contextualize my findings.

The Canada Child Tax Benefit

In 1993, the Family Allowance, the non-refundable child tax credit, and the refundable child tax credit were replaced by the Child Tax Credit ("CTC"), which increased benefits for working-poor families; maintained benefits for other low-income families; reduced payments to middle-income families; and removed benefits for high-income families (Battle 2008, 8). The Family Allowance was "mildly progressive and universal", the non-refundable child tax credit delivered tax savings to all families except the poor, and the refundable child tax credit was very progressive and geared to poor families (Battle 2008, 1). However, this trifecta of benefits left Canadians with a mismatch of supports from the federal government and the aims of the benefits – the aims of reducing poverty and assisting parents with child care costs – "were in tension" (ibid.). Instead, the CTC was an "inclusive" provision that delivered benefits to a majority of Canadians through a single policy (ibid.). At the same time, provinces and territories

were delivering their own forms of child care subsidies to families receiving social assistance, which resulted in many families on welfare receiving twice the amount of benefits as working poor families (ibid., 3). In an effort to combat this inequality and minimize the “welfare wall”⁸, the federal government, in cooperation with the provinces and territories, launched the National Child Benefit reform in 1998.

The primary “vehicle” of the NCB reform was the Canada Child Tax Benefit, a restructured version of the 1993 CTC (ibid., 1). The CCTB is composed of two parts: a basic benefit that is delivered to poor and non-poor families and the National Child Benefit Supplement (“NCBS”), targeted to low-income families (Battle 2008, 10). As Ottawa slowly increased the amount of the NCBS portion of the CCTB, the province and territories were expected to reduce their social assistance-provided child benefits by the amount that the NCBS was increased, and reinvest these “savings” into other social programs (although this invariably did not happen) (ibid.). The hope with the CCTB was that the amount alone, or in combination with other provincial/territorial support, would replace welfare-delivered benefits (ibid.). By 2004, Ottawa was spending \$9.6 billion on child care benefits, which is 1/3 more than it was spending in 1984 (ibid., 11).

The CCTB does a better job at attempting to establish some equity between Canadian families, because the benefit is not taxable (unlike the UCCB), it is “portable” in that it is a “stable and assured” supplement to a family’s income regardless of where they live or work (or do not work) (Battle 2008, 7), and it is truly a progressive benefit in

⁸ This term was coined by Sherri Torjman in a 1993 study commissioned by the Ontario Fair Tax Commission. “Welfare wall” refers to the proverbial wall of high marginal tax rates faced by those who try to supplement their social assistance benefits with outside income, caused by the high welfare tax-back which reduces benefits for any earnings above a low level of “exempt earnings”. The Caledon Institute extends this term to a study of child care provisions to describe the situation wherein families on welfare risk losing thousands of dollars in child care supplements if they choose to enter the paid labour force (Battle 1995, 5).

that it delivers the same amount of money to families regardless of the province or territory in which they reside, the type of family, the sources of income, and the benefit decreases as income increases (ibid.). Further, policy reviews of the CCTB conducted by the Caledon Institute consistently report that the benefit is worth keeping, because the policy design and distribution is equitable, and reaches the majority of Canadians (Battle 2008). The foundations of the benefit are helpful for Canadian families; however, as it stands, the CCTB does not assist in addressing the root causes of child, or family, poverty or decrease the income disparity among families with children. Most provinces and territories reduce the amount of social assistance that families receive by the amount of NCBS received (Langford 2011), and a portion of CCTB, the young child supplement, was clawed-back by the introduction of the UCCB, a move not publicized by the government, although surely felt by the families who relied on that monthly supplement (ibid., 15). With respect to autonomous mothers, because the benefit is based on *family* income, rather than individual income, sole mothers of every variety are, in some senses better off – their autonomous earnings are respected. On the other hand, partnered women are presumed to be in relationships where income is pooled and the family income is used to support the children. Because the benefit phase out is based on income, women in partnered relationships end up losing support a lot faster. In sum, while it is a much stronger benefit than the UCCB and does not contain explicit disadvantages to autonomous mothers, the CCTB has subtle complexities in its understanding of family form, namely how income is shared in families. Here, the devil is, indeed, in the details. While the policy design of the CCTB is progressive and reaches most Canadians, a component of its provision, the NCBS, is responsible for lowering the amount of social

assistance delivered by the provinces and territories. So while this does not explicitly exclude one-parent families from its policy design, surely it penalizes them by lowering the amount of social assistance they receive and reinforcing the material benefits of either a dual-income family or a nuclear family. In sum, the NCBS will not substantially reduce the poverty levels of Canadians or close the gap between the poor and the middle class; it will not change the gendered-order of women's unpaid labour or the financial consequences women face for their unpaid labour; the benefit "obscures multiple constraints on labour force participation" faced by the already most marginalized – women and the poor (Wiegers 2002, 31).

The Universal Child Care Benefit

The Universal Child Care Benefit – designed to "help Canadian families, as they try to balance work and family life, by supporting their child care choices through direct financial support" (Canada's Economic Action Plan 2014) – ignores the social investment and economic investment research on quality, affordable, and accessible child care by returning to earlier models of tax benefits and allowances (Amoroso 2010, 44.). Because of the language and framing used by the Conservative Party to support the UCCB, proponents of a national child care program have to confront ideological rhetoric that emphasizes "choice" and "maternal care" (ibid.) and attempt to navigate the hall of mirrors that Harper's Conservatives have constructed. For example, the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer reports that recent enhancements to the UCCB will increase federal fiscal contributions to "child care" by an historical record of almost \$7.7 billion (2015, 14). Critics need to be able to point out how incredibly inefficient this

significant investment actually is in delivering substantive child care to Canadians. Second, the claim that the UCCB supports investment in children's long term development is unsubstantiated (indeed, there is no effort to even evaluate this claim). And third, women are absent from the conversation that moves public attention away from women's rights (Amoroso 2010, Jenson 2009).

The UCCB is a monthly taxable benefit delivered directly to families and is taxable in the hands of the lower-earning spouse or the parent, in the case of lone-parent families (Parliamentary Budget Office 2015, 5). Families may receive up to \$160/month/child under the age of 6 and up to \$60/month/child under the age of 17 (ibid., 9). So, while the UCCB has increased marginally from \$100/month/child under the age of 6 and additional monies were added for children over the age of 6, most families do not receive the full monthly benefit because they repay part of the amount through income tax. Further, to help pay for the UCCB, the federal government abolished the Canada Child Tax Benefit's young child supplement (Battle et. al. 2006, 1). These features create enormous disparities between families, with particular impacts for autonomous mothers (ibid.). First, when the UCCB was introduced in 2006, families with the same income but different type (for example, a two-parent versus one-parent family) will receive different after-tax benefits (ibid., 2). For example, in a two-earner family, the UCCB is taxed in the hands of the lower-earning spouse who will pay federal and provincial/territorial tax on the benefit. If a spouse is not engaged in paid labour, the family will enjoy the full benefit. However, in the one-parent family where absence from the paid labour market is barely an option, the parent adds the benefit amount to her taxable income and will often pay more than the two-earning family (ibid.). The single-

earner tax discrimination in the UCCB was addressed in Budget 2010 by providing additional money to single earner homes as an offsetting measure so that they are not disadvantageously taxed. However, the additional “chump change” that sole-earners receive is almost as useless as the UCCB itself, representing a \$168 dollar reduction in the tax payable on the UCCB (Manu 2010, 245). So, for a low-income autonomous mother this savings might pay a utility bill, but it certainly will not help with child care costs. Further, after-tax disparities between families still exist across the provinces (Manu 2010). Second, the removal of the young child supplement from the CCTB to pay for the UCCB lowers the overall amount of federal benefits received by low-income families who require the most assistance, and because of the way that the UCCB is taxed and the claw-back of the NCBS, the addition of the UCCB does not compensate for the loss of the young child supplement (ibid.). The loss of the young child supplement creates an even bigger divide between low- and high-income families because high-income families did not receive that portion of the CCTB to begin with (ibid.). Single income families, like autonomous mothers, receive the least benefit from the UCCB while dual-earner couples receive the most, and yet it is precisely single-income families who would most benefit from monetary assistance (ibid., 3).

As a taxable benefit, the UCCB will increase families’ taxable income by \$1,920/year but the poorest families, who are below the tax-paying threshold, will pay no income tax on the UCCB. At the same time though, their cumulative federal benefits will be reduced by the abolishment of the CCTB’s young child supplement (ibid., 1). The tax-distribution of the UCCB is progressive: families who receive welfare are not taxed on their UCCB; modest-income families pay a small tax on their UCCB; middle-income

families pay more tax on their UCCB; and, high-income families pay the most tax on their UCCB (ibid.). That said, the UCCB is not indexed to inflation, so while it is progressive overall, the impact of the benefit will be reduced overtime (ibid., 14). Harper's Conservatives sought to impose a neoliberal agenda by providing families with "choice" in child care, by shifting (even more so than under previous Liberal governments) responsibilities for care from the state to the family (ibid.). The increasingly privatized responsibilities for care that families are facing – exemplified through the paltry assistance of the UCCB – demonstrates the individualization of federal family policy and an increased emphasis on self-reliance (ibid., 49).

In a recent Globe and Mail article, journalist Doug Saunders says "the way to have more and better families today is to get away from "family values"" (2015). In this article he notes that the most "feminist" countries in the world – those with the highest paid labour force participation by women – have the highest fertility rates. And so, it would appear that Saunders supports the idea that what is good for women is good for families and that Canada's stagnant birth rate may have something to do with the increasing conservatism and family values approach to social policy. Of course, feminists have said this for decades and his note that "subsidizing childcare, requiring flexible work schedules and offering maternity leave" is not new for those critical of the lack of policy supports for women. This article does, however, point to the fact that "family values" are not about ensuring economic growth or national prosperity but instead about the retrenchment of archaic social mores around sexuality, monogamy, and marriage. Indeed, the way child care provisions are organized in Canada (and in Alberta) reflects the belief that parents are primarily responsible for the care of children (Prentice 1999,

138). In Harper's 2006 Speech to the Throne he said "let parents choose what's best for their children, and provide parents with the resources to balance work and family life as they see fit..." (31). While it is all well and good that families should have the opportunities to find child care arrangements that meet their needs, the current UCCB amount is more usefully thought of as a token monthly allowance, a very meagre contribution to annual child care expenses that cost thousands.

Alberta child care subsidies

One of my primary concerns with the current state of childcare policies in Alberta and at the federal level in Canada is the governments' reinforcing of the implicit message that childcare is a familial and private responsibility, and not a public good. In Alberta, discussions of childcare have been dominated by 44 years of conservative governments and child care provision has always been remarkably miserly compared to other provinces (Langford 2011). Of course, opposition parties have pushed for a much more comprehensive provincial program but these requests fell on deaf ears. Like Harper's Conservatives, Alberta long ago adopted the euphemistic "choice" model of care and delivered financial assistance and subsidies directly to families. The child care debate of the 1990s was a return to the earlier thinking of the 1940s and 1960s in Alberta – "when daycare itself was questioned as appropriate public policy for Albertans" (ibid., 201). These changes were instigated by then Premier Ralph Klein in the early 1990s. His swift and regressive policy reforms to child care were based on the model of "responsible social programs that help people help themselves" (Mansell 1997, 57) and their negative effects were then compounded by changes to CAP in 1996. Klein's 1994 budget

announced that 18.3% of funding to Family and Social Services programs would be cut. In daycare centers this meant reducing the operating allowances by \$20/space (ibid., 58). This change resulted in a rapid decline in the number of daycare centers across the province between 1994 and 1997. This reduction, in combination with key changes to social assistance eligibility requirements in 1995 made it nearly impossible for lone-mothers to receive government assistance. Further, by cutting social assistance without re-investing the savings into child care subsidies, most families were required to look for unregulated and low-cost or free child care (Langford 2011, 216).

In 1998 there was a modest increase in provincial spending for child care, thanks to the federal government's contributions to the National Childcare Benefit. By increasing the amount of federal monies that low-income families received, the provinces were expected to reduce social assistance payments by that same amount and reinvest those funds in labour market supports for families with children - programs like child care (ibid., 219). Alberta's initial reinvestment of that money was directed at the low-income subsidies that families received for child care, a strategic political move that took the sting out of opposition party criticisms that the Klein government was doing little to help families with child care costs (ibid.). However, although the federal government continued to increase the NCB payments, Alberta did not reinvest any more of its savings to enhance child care subsidies for people in low-income. Thus, families whose incomes surpassed the low income threshold but did not earn enough to cover the costs of child care were abandoned by the province and required to find unregulated or family care (ibid., 220). The investment in subsidies to families and the termination of operating allowances for daycare centres in Alberta indicated that the province did not favour

regulated care as an option for young children, effectively reprivatizing child care as a familial responsibility (ibid.).

In 2005, with the federal Liberal's announcement of a national childcare strategy, it seemed that Alberta's investment in child care would increase significantly. Federal investments in the province, equivalent to \$93.2 million would have surpassed Alberta's child care budget from the previous year by \$14.9 million dollars (ibid., 307; Edmonton Journal March 7, 2008). Langford notes that with such large sums of money at stake it is not surprising that in July 2005 Alberta signed an Early Learning and Child Care ("ELCC") plan to enhance its regulated early learning and child care system (ibid.). With the 2006 election of Stephen Harper's Conservatives, however, this plan was abolished (ibid., 315). Subsequently, Alberta has maintained its strategy of child care provision through direct income support to parents. This strategy assumes that two parent families pool their income, entirely rejecting the notion of women's financial autonomy (and men's too) while continuing to fall short of meeting the costs of childcare. Even with the addition of the UCCB (and unsurprising, given its meagerness), these public supports do not actually offset the costs of child care.

"Pro-family conservatism" has been the backdrop of child care provisions in Alberta for decades (ibid., 322). This "blueprint" assumes that children are ideally cared for by a stay-at-home parent and that the government should support this ideal through its taxation powers. Indeed, the year after the ELCC plan was signed, Klein introduced a subsidy of up to \$100/month/child specifically for stay-at-home parents (ibid.). Alberta's approach to child care provisions has regularly been "anomalous" when compared with other provinces and territories (ibid., 1). The province's approach to investing in child

care has shown relative indifference to the quality of care provided and instead a subtle, yet marked, interest in supporting familial, privatized care delivered through the nuclear family. In fact, there are few other ways a family could secure child care with the nominal subsidies that Alberta provided if it were not for family support.

Conclusion:

The CCTB, UCCB, and childcare policies in Alberta require, but do not state, that women's unpaid and reproductive / social labour is a requirement in the success of these policies. Bezanson and Luxton define social reproduction and reproductive labour as "the processes involved in maintaining and reproducing people, specifically the laboring population and their labour on a daily and generational basis" (2006, 3). This concept is critical for a project on child care because it links the state, market, and family to a discussion of power and gender (ibid.). While conversations around social reproduction tend to be marginalized and considered important only for women, neoliberal policy approaches download the state's responsibility in social reproduction to the family (Cohen 2013, 2). While neoliberal rationalities have implications for both women and men, there is a disproportionate impact on women (ibid.). Braedly and Luxton suggest that women are unevenly impacted by neoliberal projects because women remain responsible for unpaid social reproduction, their paid work is poorly remunerated, and the changing global economic order has further increased women's poverty (2010, 13-15). Political debates surrounding these policies imply strongly that families are chiefly responsible for care and conservative MLAs and MPs do not hesitate to beat their chests while discussing the value of maternal care in the "healthy" development of children.

When families are responsible for childcare, women are responsible for childcare. Because these models of financial support do not significantly or meaningfully offset the costs of paid or unpaid childcare, these models do in fact require the ongoing labour given mostly by women to childrearing and care. This policy paradox reveals that political power is also in the “sedimentation of social relations via various techniques of political management” and in this case, this regulation “naturalizes relations of domination” wherein women are expected to co-parent and be the primary caregiver (Howarth 2009, 309). Indeed, Orloff argues that women should be able to survive, and to form autonomous households, without having “to marry to gain access to a breadwinner’s income” (Orloff 1993, 319).

In 2003, the OECD Directorate for Education conducted a review of early childhood care and education programs in Canada and made several recommendations to improve the policy landscape. Without explicitly saying that Canada should develop a national and universal child care system, the document endorses a more “unified” and regulated system of provisions including: “more effective investment in young children... and better integration of services; and, more coherent policy and greater consistency across the sectors in regulations, funding and staffing regimes” (ibid., 7). Key demographic and social trends in Canada, including an increase in the number of lone-parent families, are increasing the needs for more effective, comprehensive, and accessible child care (ibid., 21). Although the birth rate in Canada has been declining for decades (ibid.), the number of mothers entering the paid labour force requires that changes to child care provisions be made to support them. What does it mean, then, if federal and provincial policies directed at supporting families with childcare costs do not

cover the cost of childcare, are not available to all families, are not, in fact, required to be spent to offset childcare costs, and produce inequalities between families? Other than providing “choices” to Canadians, these policies indicate that it is better to have children with a spouse, and that it is important to have disposable income.⁹ Under these circumstances it is almost certainly required that families have the financial and human resources of at least two adults. Interestingly, when lone-parent families are discussed in relation to these policies, the assumption is that these parents are lone by circumstance and not choice, and thus they can still rely on financial support from the second parent.

First, because women, on average, earn less than men, and are almost always the lower earning spouse, the UCCB, CTTB, and subsidy models in Alberta policy encourage women’s dependence or require attachment to a secondary earner. Both Alberta and Canada have registered impressive achievements in reducing families’ dependence on government for financial support, but only because that public support has been so significantly reduced that it is inconsequential to most families’ incomes (Lahey 2013; Langford, 2011; Yalniziyan 2005). Yet these benefit reductions have increased women’s dependence on others in their intimate lives and make parenting alone – either by circumstance or choice – a highly fraught option. Despite co-opting social movement language like “choice”, “family”, and “discrimination” to frame childcare policies, the disparate impacts on women’s lives are profound. These policies demonstrate the government’s bias toward the nuclear family and towards relying on women’s unpaid reproductive labour to reproduce and sustain the nation. Additionally, these policies conceive of very narrow roles for men and their contributions to family life, benefiting

⁹ Lahey (2014) notes that in Alberta quality child care costs on average 25-30% of a woman’s income), and parents (mothers) are required to sacrifice significant time and/or money to support their family’s childcare requirements

most families who have a (male) breadwinner and low- or unpaid spouse providing childcare.

Second, families experience inequalities as a result of how the UCCB is taxed. For example, families of similar form but in different provinces will receive different after-tax UCCB benefits (Battle 2006). Third, a major selling feature of tax-delivered benefits, leveraged by both provincial and federal Conservatives, is that tax breaks and income top-ups give families choices in childcare that meet their own needs, instead of a blanket approach like a national child care program. Even the use of “universal” in the name “Universal Child Care Benefit” plays on the very distinct set of meanings that “universality” has in early childhood education and care discussions. In these conversations, universality refers to a comprehensive childcare plan that is based on the tenets of quality, affordable, universal accessibility, and development-oriented care. By invoking the language of universality in the UCCB, Harper’s Conservatives appropriated a well-known discourse frame for childcare discussions. I argue that this rhetorical choice represents a cynical attempt to mask the overwhelming inequities the policy produces and the ideological assumptions underpinning these policies.

Chapter 5: Critical Discourse Analysis

Introduction:

In Harper's 2013 Speech from the Throne he noted, "families are better placed to make spending decisions than governments" (11), "families are the cornerstone of our society", and "families raise our children and build our communities" (13). Harper reassures Canadians that his government is working to "strengthen families, not replace them" because the "real experts in childcare" are "mom and dad" (ibid.). Rhetoric like this makes my role as a researcher rather easy; Prime Minister Stephen Harper boldly and publicly identified his government's idealized family form as a nuclear family. He also communicated how his party wishes to regulate intimate life – by downloading the responsibilities for care onto families, privatizing childcare, and incentivizing the nuclear family. While Alberta is currently experiencing a change of political tides, for decades its approach to childcare was similar to that of the federal Conservatives. The message that Albertans received was that government subsidies were "un-Albertan". There were fewer explicit references to the nuclear family in Alberta's legislative debates, in the period under consideration, but the childcare subsidy policy model that the government championed requires that those wishing to have children (and not live below the poverty line while doing so) include an affluent single-earner, a two-income household, or a traditional, two-parent, sole-breadwinner nuclear family. As McKeen argues, social programs should "offer women a genuine alternative to marriage and the family through an ability to form autonomous households" but those policies are only achievable within a socio-political environment that places the "social individual" at the centre of the

policy-making process (2004, 121).

Since the early 1990s, both Liberal and Conservative governments supported the neoliberalization of social policy that “privilege[s] individualism, freedom of choice, and self-reliance” and that undermines the “legitimacy of collective social projects” (Patten 2013, 61). Neoliberal governance requires that the free-market is central to achieving “social well-being,” and that rolling back government and limiting public spending includes a reassessment of policy and social programs to accord with “fiscalization” (ibid.). With the exception of the 2005 national childcare plan, the federal government and decades of conservative Alberta governments have constructed, and naturalized, a fantasy that a national and/or provincial childcare plan is inappropriate intervention into intimate life, which coincides with Howarth’s argument that “policies are often stabilized and maintained by the construction of fantasies and ideologies that secure the consent of subjects” (2009, 309).

In my readings of federal and provincial debates, I was attuned to comments made specifically about lone-mother or lone-parent families. The comments that MLAs and MPs made about a dramatic rise in lone-parent families alerts us to much more than attempts at presenting a quantitative analysis of changing family form in Canada. First, the attempt at gender-neutrality when discussing “lone-parents” is at best a thinly veiled nod to equality. McPhail notes that the liberal feminist goal of gender-neutrality is often equated with equality, however, these concepts can also harm women and work against feminist gains (2003, 50). Political debates have long been co-opting the feminist language of equality and, in fact, Reform MPs made several comments about the discrimination and oppression faced by stay-at-home mothers, a rhetorical maneuver to

redirect the language of oppression, rights, and equality at an already socially privileged family form. Gender neutrality can harm women (and men) in a variety of ways, but Conway, Ahern, and Steurenagal (1995) highlight two impacts of note to my research. First, commitments to gender neutrality can eliminate policies that advantage women and second, gender neutrality can divert attention away from “women who are unwilling, or unable, to adopt the life plan of the middle-class, white, heterosexual man” (McPhail 2003, 50).

While lone-father families do exist, approximately 80% of of “lone-parents” in Canada are mothers (Statistics Canada 2011) and so discussions around lone-parenthood are gendered in such a way that conversations about the decline of moral values, the sanctity of marriage, and the threat to children’s wellbeing are necessarily about the threat that lone-*mothers* pose to society. Mothers, not fathers, are the most common “threat” to children’s welfare because mothers’ roles are undergirded by the “assumption that a naturalized notion of mothering is the key to children's well-being” (Lessard 2002, 719). As “inadequate providers, nurturers or protectors”, lone-mothers threaten the well-being of the next generation of citizens. The language of “parenthood” then obscures – but does not eliminate – the actual references to the damage of lone-motherhood on society. The gender-neutral language of “parenthood” and “family” were used, federally and provincially, to cloak the very gendered outcomes of child care policies and political debate. As McPhail notes, the language of gender-neutrality is much more than simple “semantics”; when women are rendered invisible in political text and speech, they “remain invisible in solutions as well as policy formations” (2003, 51). This absence does not indicate a progressive move towards reimagining the possibilities for women outside

of their procreative capacities, but instead indicates that mothers are understood so clearly as childcare providers for their families that they go unmentioned. So, while childcare for many years was considered exclusively a “women’s issue” it is now framed provincially and federally as a “family issue”, while still in fact being a “women’s issue”. Childcare is, of course, a family issue, but conservative ideology has effectively utilized the language of equality so that gender-neutral framings of these debates mask the very gendered nature of these conversations. While political debates are not sub-dividing family-members or roles into gendered categories, the state is gendering the family as a private, effeminate space that is beyond the purview of politics and government. In a set of policies that directly impact women, and especially mothers, women are explicitly missing from the debate, while traditional conceptions of their familial and social roles are assumed in policy designs. Moreover these expectations give women little reproductive autonomy or flexibility.

Alberta, 1996-2015

On election night in March 2001, after winning a third consecutive term, then Premier Ralph Klein addressed supporters by saying “Welcome to Ralph’s world” (CBC News 2013). Although Alberta was not a hub of progressive child care policy prior to Klein’s election in 1993, the world he created was a particular neoliberal and neoconservative configuration that had devastating impacts on child care provisions and women’s economic and social autonomy. Given that the Progressive Conservatives formed the governing party in Alberta for the 44 years preceding the May 2015 provincial election, the province’s approach to childcare policy has remained relatively

consistent. Alberta has relied on a modest childcare subsidy model for decades, giving small monthly allowances directly to parents to use towards whatever childcare model they chose. Since the federal government collapsed CAP into CHST in 1996, reducing provincial transfers and virtually eliminating national standards for social provision, Alberta has had even more discretionary power over how to support and finance childcare programs and subsidies¹⁰. As a result of this shift, childcare responsibilities were increasingly downloaded onto families as a way of “empowering citizens by devolving state responsibilities back onto individuals” (Hayden 1998, 2). With the dissolution of CAP, Alberta began to redefine what “essential services” included – and a high quality, affordable, and accessible child care program was not on the agenda. In fact, until Premier Notley’s recent election, this continued to be the case.

A cursory overview of childcare regulation in Alberta gives the impression that Alberta’s Conservative government took on the responsibility for childcare by providing subsidies to families and supporting accreditation and licensing programs for childcare centres. However, Hayden argues that Alberta’s childcare policies in the early 1990s lacked a commitment to quality, affordable, and accessible childcare (1996, 11). Further, she suggests that four mechanisms were used to prevent the development of a comprehensive and accessible childcare system in Alberta. First, failure to develop a bureaucratic infrastructure; second, creating tensions in the childcare community; third, limiting fiscal and human resources for policy implementation; and four, delaying action

¹⁰ The CHST was a “child of federal deficit reduction and a cousin of provincial demands for greater autonomy in social policy” (Prince 2006, 215). Under the CHST, the Canada Health Act remains in force, so national standards are still in place for health care provision – accessibility, comprehensiveness, portability, public administration and universality (ibid., 229) –but for provincially administered social programs, only the prohibition of a residency requirement remains as a national standard (ibid., 215).

by studying the issues (ibid., 12). Although Hayden's study of Alberta's responses to childcare concludes in 1996, her historical analysis and framework continued to apply to Alberta's approach to child care policy until the recent election of the NDP in May 2015. In Chapter 5 I discuss how the recent change in provincial government may impact ongoing discussions of childcare and family policy.

Unlike the abandoned federal efforts at a national childcare plan, Alberta's approach to childcare has never included concerted efforts at designing a quality, affordable, and universal childcare program. Liberal and NDP MLAs consistently voiced their advocacy in favour of child care, but their arguments fell on deaf ears. Curiously, opposition debates did not often phrase the importance of universal childcare in terms of how it would benefit women. The Progressive Conservatives were successfully able to dominate the debate and frame most of the childcare discussions around sub-themes that evaded women's rights and equality issues. Of course, any good feminist social scientist would see that *all* these issues are women's issues, but these themes were framed either as family issues or as children's issues – effectively “de-gendering” discussions of children and family. The most common discourses in Alberta surrounding children and family were child welfare; poverty and low-income families; family tax breaks and subsidies; and family values. These are, of course, all very important topics in the childcare debate, however, the focus on these topics to the exclusion of a broader conversation about universal childcare represents deeply problematic assumptions about childcare and family, and in particular, motherhood. I address these sub-themes below, and, using Lazar's approach I aim to expose the interlocking sites of gender, power, and ideology in discourse (2005).

Although the timeline for this project examines 20 years of legislative and parliamentary debates, it is noteworthy that in the last 42 years (which is the extent of the availability for digitized Alberta Hansard debates), “single-” and/or “lone-mother” has only been mentioned 656 times in 219 separate debates. By comparison, “family” is mentioned 33,255 times in 1000 separate debates over that same time period and “parent” is mentioned 27,878 times in 1000 separate debates. Not only were single- or lone-mothers rarely mentioned, the few discussions that did occur did little to disrupt tropes about single motherhood, and certainly did not discuss autonomous motherhood. Discussions of single motherhood centered on poverty and access to social assistance and sometimes child care affordability, which is not surprising given the array of scholarly and popular literature which either portrays single mothers in those very terms or notes how few frames are used to interpret single motherhood. I wish to note that a discussion of lone-mothers and the very high rates of poverty *is* an important policy problem and one that has not yet been satisfactorily addressed. That said, poverty and single-motherhood are so often conflated that they have come to form an associational “common sense”; single motherhood and poverty are synonymous experiences, mystifying both the economic and social forces that produce poverty and the patriarchal and sexist ideologies that sustain negative conceptions of single motherhood. Even comments from opposition MLAs did not change the nature of single motherhood conversations, albeit their tone is less “pro-family” and certainly their aim, it appears, was not to blame single mothers for being single mothers, which seemed to be the case in Conservative commentary. For example, in 1997, Liberal Leader of the Official Opposition Grant Mitchell said “We have the third-highest level of poverty in the entire

country. We have the third-highest level of children living in poverty in the entire country. We have the fourth-highest level of single mothers living in poverty in the entire country. Mr. Speaker, who is it exactly who is getting the Alberta advantage?"¹¹ A year later Mitchell made a thinly-veiled reference reminiscent of a "deserving poor" argument about single mothers when he said "Secondly, some of the people who most need a chance... at an education to dig their way out of a circumstance that often wasn't of their making are single mothers".¹² This last comment raises the question, what services and support were available for mothers who chose to parent without a co-parent? Are they just as deserving as those mothers who happened into their tragic circumstance of lone-motherhood? Mitchell's comments are not as off-putting as Lyle Oberg's, then Minister of Family and Social Services: "The incidence of teenage mothers applying for assistance [is a statistic the government does not record]. Obviously teenage mothers are something that is not desirable in a province".¹³ Oberg's comment highlights the ease with which Conservative MLAs felt they could speak about the parameters of deviant motherhood. While not making a specific reference to single-mothers, discourses surrounding teenage mothers are just as laden with shame and blame as overt conversations about single motherhood. Further, many teenage mothers are also single mothers, and so once again the experiences become conflated and the cultural resonance of these comments speaks volumes.

There was little difference between what the Liberals and New Democrats said about child care policies in Alberta and while neither focused much on single mothers, both parties did critique the government's devaluation of women's unpaid labour. In

¹¹ April 16, p. 41.

¹² February 23, 1998, p. 501, my emphasis.

¹³ March 19, 1999.

discussing the Auditor General's report of Children's Services, Linda Sloan, Liberal opposition critic for social services and child welfare said "the largest group of people receiving public assistance in Alberta is single mothers... The pressures on these women... suggests that caring for children is undervalued when compared with the ability to be independent of public assistance".¹⁴ Certainly this dynamic is not unique to Alberta, but as both Lahey (2015) and Langford (2011) note, the challenges that mothers experience, in relation to their unpaid labour, access to financial supports, and child care accessibility, were exacerbated by the particular economic and political challenges in Alberta. And yet, for Iris Evans, the solutions for single mothers-in-need were quite simple:

A single mother calls the local office, to ask for help for her teenaged daughter. The teen has been a handful all her life but in the past two years has become what she describes as a nightmare. She has been skipping school, becoming very involved with drugs, and starting to steal. After screening to rule out any possible child protection concerns, a family assessment is done, and the mother is referred to an appropriate agency to deal with parent/teen conflict. The mother along with a parent resource co-ordinator and the teen school counselor work together to develop an action plan. They agree that substance abuse is the first critical issue needing to be addressed, and they work together with the teenager to involve a local treatment program and help her to continue her education, working with the family, with the teen, and with the agency.¹⁵

I must note Evans' choice to give a hypothetical single mother a "problem teen" who is addicted to drugs and having troubles in school; the combination of these stereotypes is too powerful to ignore. Her statement draws on stereotypes of single mothers and broken homes, producing wayward youth who suffer as a result of not having a disciplinary

¹⁴ November 15, 2000, p. 1902.

¹⁵ April 30, 2003, p. 1343.

father figure. Once again, these comments do not reference autonomous mothers, but they do not have to; the silences are just as telling. Autonomous mothers cannot be conceived of because the only possible mode of conceptualizing single mothers is through misfortune and tragedy, characterized by teenage mothers, mothers requiring social assistance, and mothers who have problem children.

Indeed, child welfare and poverty came up so frequently in my searches for “childcare and family” that I initially thought I should adjust my search terms. With a closer reading of these debates, I soon realized that the prevalence of these themes confirms Hayden’s analysis of Alberta’s childcare assumptions; state-funded childcare encourages the breakdown of “natural” familial and communal care networks and that “childcare as a female equity program constrains mothers from taking responsibility for their offspring” (1996, 15). In Alberta, childcare subsidies were developed as a way to “buttress a welfare system for needy families and/or to support increased employment” (ibid.). Childcare as a welfare program then only becomes necessary when parents have failed to manage the care of their children or “assume responsibility” for children in light of their labour market obligations – a presupposition that is well-documented in legislative debates. I found that PC MLAs were bold in their framing of how government subsidies should be used and in their messaging that “real” Albertans did not want to rely on government funding to provide for their families. For example, PC MLA Mary Anne Jablonski asserted that,

I believe that Albertans would prefer to earn their own way rather than rely on government assistance... This government decided a long time ago that people should

not be living off Alberta's support system if they were able to work.¹⁶

Given Alberta's history of social and fiscal conservatism it was not surprising to find excerpts like this, arguing that government assistance is undesirable and un-Albertan. Jablonski's comment attempts to naturalize the very conservative ideal that to be a "true" Albertan is to be self-sufficient and not rely on social assistance, which was articulated and re-articulated in various ways by conservative MLAs from 1996-2015. That these comments came up so frequently during debates surrounding childcare suggests that childcare allowance is considered a necessary evil in light of the priority placed on labour force participation. Providing no assistance to families would be a very unpopular political move, but the ideology behind these policies positions childcare as a properly familial responsibility. Opposition parties resisted this approach, but without a change in regime, the opposition made few gains. Liberal MP Laurie Blakeman commented on the inequities in a system that focuses its efforts only on low-income families. She said, "It seems the governments in this country decided this was a waste, and we now have a system of assistance for low-income families only."¹⁷ But, similar to both federal Liberal and Conservative approaches, Alberta believed strongly in giving inadequate financial assistance directly to parents, instead of investing in a bricks and mortar institution with regulated fees, expectations of quality and training, and accessibility of spaces – similar to our public school system (although, that system also has its challenges). Pearl Calahasen, a long time Conservative MLA notes, "We are addressing the needs of low-income families through the Alberta Family Employment Tax Credit [AFETC] and a National Child Benefit [NCB]. We are increasing day care

¹⁶ February 24, 2003.

¹⁷ June 10, 1997, p. 1143.

subsidies for low-income families...The dollars will go to the people instead of the day care”.¹⁸ These excerpts demonstrate Alberta’s efforts at encouraging families’ independence from the government, self-sufficiency, and its focus on targeting the needs of “at-risk” populations. The focus on individuals over institutions celebrates “the home” and “the family”, even a harkening of the Ward and June Cleaver image.¹⁹ And so, the hierarchy in preferred family forms is visible in that the government expects that families are comprised of two earners, or at least one earner who makes a considerable amount of money.

This approach is consistent with both Liberal and Conservative government actions on childcare policies nationally. Amoroso found that since the 1990s, conversations surrounding childcare began to deviate sharply from women’s equality to focus on childhood *development* (and not *child care*) and issues like child welfare and poverty. The provincial PCs focused their rhetoric intensely on children’s health and wellbeing with little discussion of how policies that support women and families may better serve the needs of children, but the government’s preference for commercial and kin care belies any rhetorical comments they made. In fact, Alberta continues to have one of the lowest salary rates for childcare workers in Canada – creating a complex care chain whereby if families are able to access paid childcare, they are likely doing so on the backs of women who are underpaid and undervalued. Consistent with its conservative ideology, this particular problem appeared to be inconsequential to provincial officials.

¹⁸ January 29, 1998, p. 68.

¹⁹ Paradoxically, the focus on the individual and family also supports private/commercial providers who make their money by cutting corners on wages, facilities, and activities for children, which invariably has negative impacts on the families who pay for the services but also the workers who must support themselves on low wages.

Evans, for example, attested “I have great confidence in what one worker told me recently. She said: I’m not here for the money; I’m here for the love of the children”.²⁰ I hope that childcare workers are indeed working with children because they love their work, but Evans’ response demonstrates just how little the government values the work of childcare and those who perform it; childcare is assumed, and expected, to be a “labour of love” that does not require remuneration or recognition. Such a perspective reinforces the idea that child care is a private responsibility, properly outside of the market and certainly outside of state purview.

Discussions of child welfare and poverty are deeply intertwined with social constructions of family and morality. Debates in the Legislature were rife with bold commentary on family values and the primacy of family to Albertans. Indeed, I could have focused solely on this particular theme to explore conceptions of motherhood and the role of social policy in governing and mediating gender. It is in the articulation of family values that expectations about family form become most apparent. In a lengthy, but striking, monologue on the value of family, Robert Fischer (then Minister of Transportation and Utilities) exposed the underlying ideology of Alberta’s social policy approach. He said,

There is no other bond that ties our society, this country, together more than the strong, vibrant family. I believe that we as politicians have a responsibility to ensure that taxation does not discriminate or discourage families from providing an environment to raise healthy children. A strong family means strong communities and a strong country. A child is a person who will carry on what you have started... I want people to understand that this motion should not be interpreted as wanting to force women to be in the home or to deny them day care or the

²⁰ March 21, 2002, p. 498.

right to be in the workforce. This motion is intended to offer options to parents and provide a level playing field for all families, give them the financial freedom to allow mothers or one parent to be in the home with the children.... Over the years, the last 30 or 40 in particular, the structure of the family has changed. However, the expectation of how the family contributes to society has not. We still expect the family to raise their children, care for the aged and disabled, and contribute to the community. I expect this, and I believe most Albertans do as well. When healthy and happy families are fulfilling these functions, they are doing much to prevent the social problems that cost our society so dearly in our health care system, our educational institutions, justice and law enforcement, labour and training programs.... I'm not saying that every child who is cared for outside of the home will have severe emotional problems leading to delinquency and suicide, but I am saying that they have a greater potential of experiencing some sort of emotional problems affecting their ability to live healthy lives.²¹

Without actually using the phrase “nuclear family”, these comments very clearly indicate that, at least in the minds of the speaker, the desired family form is that of two parents, where one can provide full-time care, at least in a child’s early years. Many two-parent families cannot afford this option, but families who do not conform to the nuclear model have little hope of social, political, or financial support when the government so clearly favors the two parent, sole-breadwinner model. While uncommon, both Liberal and NDP MLAs voiced resistance to the assumption that all Albertans should model the nuclear family. In 1998 Grant Mitchell said,

The question of day care, again, is an issue that faces women particularly, because to this point in our society women take more responsibility generally for child care than men do... Cutting subsidies the way that that has been done is going to hurt children and is going to hurt women in particular, who take a particular responsibility for raising children... I'm getting very, very disturbed at

²¹ June 3, 1997, p. 956-7.

an emerging and sustained philosophy... forgetting that 52 percent of Albertans are actually women and forgetting that in fact Alberta was never built on any kind of premise that it was everyone for themselves, ever, ever, ever. The logical conclusion of that philosophy is that somehow every individual Albertan built their little bit of Alberta all by themselves and that they're entitled to it and that they're going to stand and defend it.²²

Ever confident though, PC MLA Bryce Jacobs said:

The family is the basic unit of society, and I believe that for a province or a nation to be strong, it must have strong families. These should be families that are accountable and responsible for their own welfare and ones that work together to achieve their goals and objectives. I would like to note that when I speak of families, I refer, for the most part, to the traditional family, consisting of a father, mother, and children, where each member of the family recognizes their role and responsibility and works hard to succeed. These are the kinds of families that created the foundation for what this province is today.²³

It is clear that for Alberta's Progressive Conservatives, "the most important job in society is raising the next generation."²⁴ MacDonald makes clear that his support of a motion for a spousal tax exemption is not "just for the stay-at-home mother", indeed, he reassures the Assembly, "in the last 40 years women have been entering the workforce in larger numbers. In some couples it would be the woman who would have the greatest earning power... in some cases it would be the father that would remain home, not the mother." In fact, MacDonald goes so far as to remind his colleagues that raising kids is *work*: "the term "stay-at-home parent" is very misleading. These parents are not simply staying at home. They are working."²⁵ Utilizing feminist arguments that care work is unpaid *labour*, MacDonald endeavours to show that government support for parents (who will almost

²² February 23, 1998, p. 501.

²³ February 19, 2003, p. 21.

²⁴ MacDonald, April 4, 2000, p. 707.

²⁵ MacDonald, April 4, 2000, p. 707.

always be women) to stay at home to care for children is actually a progressive policy position. Here, it appears that the PCs are leveling the playing field to ensure that both stay-at-home parents and parents who pay for care have “equal” treatment.

Most often the references to families, family values, and the role of the government in providing childcare are boldly traditional, as in Fischer’s comments in the epigraph to this chapter. In 1997 Robert Fischer (MLA for Wainwright) introduced a motion to urge Alberta to negotiate with the federal government to find a tax system to benefit two-parent families where one parent chooses to stay home (Alberta 1997).

Fischer clarified that his motion should not be interpreted as:

...wanting to force women to be in the home or to deny them day care or the right to be in the workforce. This motion is intended to offer options to parents and provide a level playing field for all families, give them the financial freedom to allow mother or one parent to be in the home with the children.²⁶

Here, he makes references to diverse family forms (“all families”), equality (“level playing field”), and women’s rights and women’s labour market participation (“...right to be in the workforce”). His deployment of feminist language of empowerment and equality glosses over the root of his argument: governments should support women staying home to raise children. Unless Fischer also proposed that, while raising their children, women are paid a living wage, he clearly assumes that mothers are in relationships with a primary breadwinner. Laurie Blakeman proposed an amendment to Motion 507 to replace “parent” with “caregiver”, so that “we recognize the many types of families which are supporting Alberta today. There is a wide variety... for instance, an adult brother and his children are supported by their sister staying at home to care for

²⁶ 1997, p. 957.

children or perhaps a mother or even the father of that adult”.²⁷ Given Blakeman’s reputation as a progressive voice in Alberta and her activism and support around women’s rights, I suspect that she is amenable to supporting family forms that do not use parental child care, as in her example. However, in mentioning “the many types of families” in Alberta, her references for caregiving are always familial: “This could be a mother or a father or, as I said before, a sister, an aunt, any number of people either affiliated by blood or by marriage and now even by common law”.²⁸ Perhaps it is the context of the scope of the motion that constrains her suggestions or perhaps she is simply trying to make a regressive motion slightly more flexible and is bound by the parameters of the debate. What she does not do is expand the debate or comment on the significance of maintaining kin care systems, nor does she point out the very obvious loss of women’s labour force participation and contribution to GDP that such a tax system would support.

The PC’s appropriation of equality language reared its ugly head more than once during debates. From 1984 until 1999, Alberta’s child care policy landscape was characterized by federal/provincial cost-sharing, the rise of a pro-family movement that called for the re-direction of resources away from daycares and towards stay-at-home parents, and a move toward policies that encouraged greater private responsibility for child care (Langford 2011, 191). As such, legislative debates at this time, and well into the early 2000s were characterized by this pro-family stance. In 2000, Hugh MacDonald presented a motion asking the government to “demonstrate its recognition of the contribution made by parents who stay at home to care for their children by providing

²⁷ 1997, p. 1143.

²⁸ *ibid.*

support equal to that received by parents choosing other child care options”.²⁹ By asking for “recognition” for equal support, MacDonald is positioning the nuclear family as politically and socially disadvantaged, compared to other family forms. The debate is then organized such that opposition to these types of motions are framed as anti-family and anti-woman. The debate is reduced to a discussion between who does and who does not support stay-at-home parenting, instead of complex discussions about care work, women’s autonomy, and equality of opportunity. During bilateral discussions with the federal government over Martin’s proposed national childcare plan, PC MLA Heather Forsyth notes,

I can assure the member that we have been very, very adamant that we want to respect Alberta's rights and let Albertans make the choices for their children, what's in the best interests of the children, whether it's non-profit, for-profit, kinder care. We look at ourselves in Alberta at providing tax relief for stay-at-home parents.³⁰

Further, she notes:

We want an agreement that gives our parents in this province the flexibility to choose from a number of child care options. It's a parental choice in our province. We want a share of the federal money on the per capita. We want flexibility for the parents in our province. It's important for our parents to be able to have a choice in this province for their own children.³¹

Overall in Alberta I found the opposition parties relatively ineffective in their criticisms of the Progressive Conservatives. They failed, in my assessment, to commit to gender equity as a fundamental value and to maintain, unwaveringly, that focus throughout child care debates. That said, politicians are not necessarily experts in every

²⁹ p. 707.

³⁰ April 27, 2005, p. 1076.

³¹ May 10, 2005, p. 1388-9.

policy topic in which they debate, and they are products of the political moment in which they speak. So, if national debates about childcare are predominantly focused on child development, then that is likely where MLAs or MPs will focus their attention. I did, however, hope that certain MLAs would engage more deeply with the topic of women's rights and motherhood during legislative debates, although it appears that their opposition was constrained by the parameters of the national child care debates. Of course, a whole career cannot be accurately captured in one excerpt, but in canvassing 20 years of debates, I was not impressed by any of the NDP criticisms of Alberta's childcare subsidy policies. For example, Dr. Raj Pannu said:

Alberta in the new century must provide special opportunities to young children, preschool children. There is an opportunity now for us to make serious investments in our own future by investing in the care of our children, child care that includes a robust vision of child development and early childhood education... embracing that opportunity to make sure that children who are two, three years old today, the ones who are going to build this new century, who are going to build the new Alberta, will not be deprived of the very fundamental experiences that all children need at that age.³²

Discussing children as the "future" and the importance of investing in that future was a common tactic across party lines. This rhetoric is consistent with the child investment paradigm that Amoroso (2010) notes and is also consistent with how childcare conversations were framed more generally from the 1990s onwards. Curiously, in his comment on childcare, Dr. Pannu does not actually mention childcare, he does not mention the value of universal childcare for women, and he makes specific reference to early childhood development and education. I am not perturbed by what Pannu does say – I agree wholeheartedly that children have a right to quality, universal, affordable,

³² March 7, 2005, p. 63.

and development-focused care and education and I applaud efforts to demonstrate that this care is education and not a form of babysitting. But I am concerned about what he, and the NDP more broadly did not say. A comprehensive, development-focused model of early learning is invaluable for children, their parents, and our communities. What is not said is that this approach is of utmost importance for the realization of women's reproductive, political, and social autonomy. This relative silence on behalf of the opposition parties – with the exception of speeches made on International Women's Days – alerts me to the fact that even in critiques of the PCs' antiquated ideology concerning the family, opposition MLAs did not push the boundaries of the debate.

What conclusions can be drawn around child care and autonomous mothers in Alberta? First that, as the academic literature suggests, autonomous mothers are nowhere to be found. Neither, really, are mothers or single mothers. What is said about single mothers paints a very particular image of a “welfare queen” or a teenage mother, akin to the images available on popular TV shows like TLC's “Teen Mom”. Second, “the family” was ever-present in debates of child care and social policy, rooted in conservative, and neoliberal, pro-family ideologies of privatization, hyper-individualism, and the superiority of kin care over public provisions of child care. In 2009, Iris Evans (then Minister of Finance and Enterprise) generated a flurry of controversy over her comment that “when you're raising children you don't go off to work and leave them for somebody else to raise. This is not a statement against daycare. It's a belief about the importance of raising children properly” (Canadian Free Press). Charchun notes that these remarks were particularly “inflammatory, partly, because they touched on Albertan's personal ideological beliefs about who is responsible for the care of children”

(2010, 1). Third, opposition parties in Alberta were largely ineffective at criticizing the Progressive Conservatives in a way that disrupted dominant narratives about family and motherhood. Instead, either their interventions were constrained by debates framed by the Progressive Conservatives, or they failed to push the boundaries of the debate in a meaningful way. The weak opposition to child care policy retrenchment and pro-family ideology is not, however, unique to Alberta. Federally the landscape appeared quite similar, and once again, autonomous mothers, and mothers generally, featured little in debates that concerned them the most. While social policy “looms large on our political landscape and in our personal lives” (Price 2006, 211) federal debates surrounding the CCTB and UCCB are strikingly neoconservative and neoliberal, regardless of the party in power.

Canada, 1996-2015

Social policy is an “expenditure-intensive” area of government, evident in the variety of income benefit programs delivered to the elderly, unemployed, and families and in the transfer payments made to the province and territories through the CHST to contribute to the costs of education, health care, social services, and social assistance (ibid., 213). Canada’s family policy debate has long engaged with conversations about childcare, the role of the state in providing childcare, how the government should best support families and who is properly responsible for child care (Prentice 1999, 137). And yet, in 20 years – and between Liberal and Conservative governments – little has changed in the way that child care policies are discussed and implemented. As Prentice argues in her work on child care and family, “the family is positioned as the main locus of caregiving and care receiving” which also means that this work falls to women (ibid.).

Child care has remained a “massive yet curiously invisible social problem” that creates huge inequities for mothers, but also reinforces conservative familial ideology that marginalizes non-nuclear family forms.

While conservative parties have co-opted the language of choice in their child care policies, federally and provincially, even centre and left-of-centre parties do not discuss motherhood outside the bounds of nuclear or lone motherhood. In fact, Liberal and New Democrat MPs’ references to families were often unremarkable because their comments did nothing to disrupt conventional wisdom of what families look like – mother, father, and sometimes grandparents. Even with occasional nods to “changing family forms”, those references never mentioned autonomous motherhood or non-biological kinship. Indeed, references to changing family forms did not actually reference changes to the status quo. One could argue that those types of debates are not mainstream enough to occur in forums like Parliament, but popular culture is increasingly engaging debates about changing and diverse family forms and there is a considerable body of academic literature about the changing nature of family forms. Perhaps then, political debates have not yet caught up to these conversations. Nonetheless, what these changing family form conversations fail to account for is that families have *always* been diverse. People have always organized their intimate life and parentage decisions in non-normative ways. Autonomous motherhood is not a “new” phenomenon, nor are blended families or lesbian or gay parents, but these diverse family forms are rendered undesirable, and even inconceivable, by patriarchal ideology. If these family forms are not new, then their absence from political conversation is ideologically driven and intentional.

One of the most prominent discourse themes federally – for New Democrat, Liberal, and Conservative MPs – was discrimination, equality, and choice. Of course, these debates were framed differently depending on which party was represented, but similar to Alberta, conversations about discrimination, equality, and choice were most often championed by conservative MPs in an effort to demonstrate how the traditional family form is disadvantaged by social policy. For example,

This government has not only failed to address the importance of parents who choose to stay home to raise their children and the value they bring into society, but it is discriminating against them, which is worse. When a person chooses to stay home and care for their families, it is in my view probably the single most important role we have in our society today, and this government puts zero importance on that. When these people apply for a bank loan they are asked what they do. They say, for example, “I am just a housewife”.³³

And,

In Canada we pride ourselves on being fair and non-prejudicial. Yet for years we have tolerated an injustice perpetrated on the families of Canada. The tax policies of this “liberal” government send a signal to parents who wish to be the primary caregivers of their children and raise them at home. That message is that this choice has no value.³⁴

In the late 1990s, Reform and Canadian Alliance MPs were deeply concerned with the prejudicial and discriminatory actions of the Liberal government towards two-parent, single earner families. They observed this discrimination in tax policies and childcare allowances which disadvantaged the nuclear family and those whose “importance, value and contribution” to society were not recognized by the Liberal government. Instead, the

³³ Gary Lunn, Reform Party, March 9, 1998.

³⁴ Eric Lowther, Reform Party, March 31, 1998.

Reform party believed that families should “not be forced to take their children outside of the home”³⁵ and that the government should “let families make the decisions by allowing them to keep more of the money they have earned... rather than using the tax code to engineer social outcomes”.³⁶ The accusation that the Liberals were “engineering social outcomes” is an interesting charge given that, once elected, Harper’s Conservatives redesigned child care allowances to do just that. The engineering they championed is to provide parents with “choices in childcare”, but this too is a particular kind of social engineering that reproduces gender in a very particular way. Like Alberta, federal Conservatives positioned the nuclear family as a socially disadvantaged and persecuted family form and the only way to equalize this disadvantaged family was to provide choice: “Currently Canadian families that choose to provide child care in their own home are penalized by a tax system that does not recognize the value of parent provided child care”³⁷. In fact, Harper’s 2006 language of “parents know best” is rooted in early Reform Party commentary: “parents can determine what is the best option for the rearing of their children... parents are the best ones to make the decision for their children rather than being biased in one direction or another by discriminatory tax policies.”³⁸ According to the Reformers “the government penalizes them for wanting to raise their own families”.³⁹ I was both stunned and entertained by these remarks, and I include them in this section to provide some ideological context for later policies of the Conservatives (a party comprised of Progressive Conservative and Reform/Alliance MPs) and to note how outrageous the claims of disadvantaging the traditional family are, from a tax perspective,

³⁵ Garry Breitkreuz, Reform Party, March 10, 1998.

³⁶ Jason Kenney, Reform Party, March 24, 1998.

³⁷ Paul Forseth, Reform Party, February 2, 1999.

³⁸ Eric Lowther, Reform Party, February 2, 1999.

³⁹ Reed Elley, Reform Party, March 4, 1999.

given that family income is the basis for calculating the GST and all family tax credits favour sole-earner (though low-income) families. There is not a single vector of social policy or tax wherein the nuclear family is disadvantaged.

As in Alberta, single mothers seldom featured in Parliamentary debates, and when they did they were used as a trope – by all parties – either to demonstrate the benefit a policy would have “even for single mothers” (“A single mother with two kids, earning \$30,000, would benefit by almost \$1,500 per year.”⁴⁰) or the detrimental impact policies will have “for single mothers” (“a single mother is looking to get basic support for her child, they will jump through hoop after hoop”⁴¹). Without truly doing anything to improve the lives of women who are parenting without a co-parent, politicians were able to pay lip service to single mothers by invoking her plight when it was convenient for their policy debates. Like Alberta, there were also examples where single mothers were only discussed in the context of poverty, like “Think for a moment of the young single mother who has to figure out her budget to the dollar when she has no income for two weeks”⁴² and “[there are] thousands of families out there struggling to make ends meet, whether it is that single mother worrying about how she will put food on the table for her children...”⁴³ The limited conceptions of single motherhood, and the silence on autonomous motherhood, demonstrate that federal child care debates were just as limited and constrained as provincial Alberta debates. The collapse of the Reform and Canadian Alliance into the Conservative Party has quieted the pro-family rhetoric that was flowed in the mid- to late-1990s, but the underlying messages of more contemporary debates

⁴⁰ Rick Dyckstra, CPC, December 8, 2014.

⁴¹ Charlie Angus, NDP, February 3, 2015, p. 11013.

⁴² France Bonsant, BQ, September 21, 2006, p. 3118.

⁴³ Ruby Dhalla, LPC, January 29, 2009, p. 126.

remain the same: there is no room for single mothers in child care policy, and there is certainly no room for women who choose to parent without a co-parent.

Conservative MPs and occasionally even Liberal MPs were quite vocal about the importance of family values and the crisis of the family that Canadians were experiencing. Even Conservative MP Sylvie Boucher touted, as a single mother, the positive change that her party brought about through the UCCB⁴⁴. However, despite Boucher's support for her party's contributions to single mothers, it was clear that debates around single parenthood (read: single motherhood) signaled the demise of the traditional family and the ruin of the very foundation of moral society. For example, Liberal MP Paul Szabo said,

... Lone parent families are growing dramatically. The family breakdown rate in Canada is rising to a level above 50%. In 1994 when I came here lone parent families represented 12% of all families. Stats Canada now reports that one out of every six families is a lone parent family...

Comments about a dramatic rise in lone-parent families alert us to more than an MP's simple quantitative analysis of family form in Canada. First, the attempt at gender-neutrality when discussing "lone-parents" is at best a thinly veiled nod to equality. McPhail notes that the liberal feminist goal of gender-neutrality is often equated with equality, however, these concepts can also harm women and work against feminist gains (2003, 50). Political debates have long been co-opting the feminist language of equality and, in fact, Reform MPs made several comments about the discrimination and oppression faced by stay-at-home mothers, a stealth maneuver to redirect the language of oppression, rights, and equality at an already socially privileged family form. Gender neutrality can harm women (and men) in a variety of ways but Conway et. al. (1995)

⁴⁴ May 8, 2008, CPC, p. 5641.

highlight two impacts of note to my research: first, commitments to gender neutrality can eliminate policies that provide substantive equality to women and second, gender neutrality can divert attention away from “women who are unwilling, or unable, to adopt the life plan of the middle-class, white, heterosexual man” (McPhail 2003, 50).

The counter to family breakdown is to provide families with choices in childcare because “the government should not choose the type of child care [parents] use. It should allow them to make the decision...parents or families can make that decision better than the government can”⁴⁵. This “experts in care” approach persisted from the late 1990s through to Harper’s election and in his government’s attitude towards the UCCB. For Harper’s Conservatives, as I have already noted, parents are “the real child care experts”⁴⁶. For example, when the UCCB was introduced in 2006, Harper noted:

Mr. Speaker, we also need to turn over a new leaf in the way the federal government helps families. The Canadian family is the foundation upon which our society is built and it still represents all that is best in all parts of this country. But the truth is that many families are under pressure as never before. To help them we will provide parents with real choice in child care, so they can do a better job of balancing workplace and home responsibilities. The idea here is to help parents pay for child care that makes the most sense to them, not to some bureaucrat or special interest group in Ottawa. We understand that every Canadian family is different. What works for one may not work for another.⁴⁷

According to this logic, by proposing to invest in universal child care or any comprehensive social program, opposition parties are crippling Canada’s social foundation and invading private, intimate life: “members of the high-tax parties believe that governments must run the lives and spend the money of struggling families, that they

⁴⁵ Chuck Strahl, Reform Party, March 23, 1998.

⁴⁶ Pierre Poiliviere, CPC, April 23, 2015, p. 12960.

⁴⁷ Stephen Harper, CPC, April 5, 2006, p. 39.

can reduce poverty by taking money from working families and spending it for them. Conservatives believe that the best social safety net is a strong family and that the best anti-poverty plan is a good job”⁴⁸. Further Kellie Leitch, past Minister of Labour and Status of Women noted,

Our government recognizes that families are the building blocks of our society and that getting the best possible start in life is crucial to ensuring that children reach their full potential. Our approach to child care, the universal child care plan, respects the role of parents in determining how best to care for their children and recognizes the responsibility of the provincial and territorial governments for the delivery of child care services. Our plan puts choice in the hands of parents and helps them choose the child care option that suits their families’ needs.⁴⁹

The Conservatives have faced considerable resistance to the UCCB and their refusal to develop a national childcare plan. Tellingly, in Leitch’s comment above she refers to the UCCB as a plan – which of course, it is not. The language is highly obfuscating: on the one hand, the Conservatives suggest that a national plan is too bureaucratic and inappropriate for Canadians, but when it suits them, when they feel the need to reassure Canadians that they have a comprehensive strategy for child care, then they mobilize a child care “plan”. This is a calculated political move, just like Harper’s mail-out of UCCB cheques prior to the 2015 federal election, and shows just how cunning the Conservatives are in their execution of child care provisions.

Unfortunately, on occasions when women were mentioned, there were references to how childcare was not a women’s or family issue. For example, “universal childcare is not a women's issue or even a family issue, for that matter. It is an economic issue. Not surprisingly, the United Nations reported Canada dead last among developed nations

⁴⁸ Pierre Poilivere, CPC, March 10, 2015, p. 11907.

⁴⁹ October 3, 2011, p. 1795

when it comes to providing affordable quality day care”⁵⁰. While the NDP has always been quite clear in their support for a universal childcare plan, the framing of the issue is rarely about women’s rights to equality and more often, about development, child welfare, poverty, and children’s futures because “quality child care and early learning offer children a head start in life while easing poverty”⁵¹. The strategic decision to remove feminist arguments from the child care debate is a way of maintaining the prospect of policy development in this area while circumventing unpopular political debates concerning women and feminism (Amoroso 2010; Prentice 2007, 2009). Prentice argues that promises to end child poverty or to invest in children garner all party support whereas efforts focused on enhancing women’s equality do not (Prentice 2007). The drawback to this approach is the deradicalization of feminist politics and a slow erasure of women from debates that impact them the most. Further, the focus on children “relies on the dominant contemporary construction of children as passive, innocent victims” deserving of our collective attention and investment, which reinforces “the general principle of adult responsibility and independence” (Wiegers 2001, 85) and, by implication, that women who cannot meet norms of responsibility and independence are undeserving (ibid., 80).

Parties across the political spectrum often used the “children are our future” trope in parliamentary debates. This sub-theme is a fascinating discourse to analyze because of the Conservative’s rhetorical commitments to child development using methods that do not actually provide a significant investment in early childhood development and care and the hesitancy with which the Liberals also approached the national child care plan.

⁵⁰ Bonnie Crombie, LPC, February 10, 2009, p. 608.

⁵¹ Matthew Kellway, NDP, March 30, 2015, p. 12534.

Even when Liberal MP Michael Savage noted that Canada should absolutely invest in childcare, even in times of economic uncertainty, his argument was that childcare is good for the economy – not that it is good for women or even good for children specifically: “Some say that, in uncertain times, Canada cannot afford to invest in child care. We say, nothing could be further from the truth. Child care services are an essential part of every community's economic and social infrastructure—an economic stimulus with long-term benefits for Canada”⁵². Most often, Reform MPs and later, Conservative MPs, framed the “investment in children” debate and positioned Liberal and NDP MPs as threats to Canadian children’s futures. For example,

Let me start at an obvious point: our children. A caring party would see children as the key to Canada's future. It would want to make sure that they get the very best start in life possible. A caring party would make the families of these children the highest priority in a budget, but the Liberal budget does not do this.⁵³

And,

According to the experts, this restriction on the parents' desire to directly care for their children has raised costs in four areas. Costs to society increase because parents are restricted in their choices. In their desire to spend time with their children, psychologists have told us that it is absolutely necessary that they be with their children, yet the social engineering of the Liberals has raised costs in four areas. These four areas are education, social costs, justice and health care costs.⁵⁴

Conservative MPs were deeply concerned about the health and vitality of the nation and they saw children as a key rhetorical component to ensuring prosperity. These fears were

⁵² May 4, 2009, p. 3034.

⁵³ Dick Harris, Reform Party, March 9, 1998.

⁵⁴ Garry Breitkreuz, Reform Party, March 4, 1999.

most often articulated in terms of the importance of parent-child bonding, which can safely be interpreted as a mother-child relationship. This bond is “the most important relationship for the long term health of the nation...The family is the building block of society”⁵⁵. While this was a comment from 1998, I suspect that the ideology behind Vellacott’s remark is still percolating in Conservative dialogue and can be observed in more subtle messaging about the importance of the family to Canadians. Given that NDP and Liberal MPs also discuss children as Canada’s future, intervening in this debate is challenging. MPs must then frame their criticisms carefully, lest they appear to demean the importance of children in our society. Consistent with national child care debates more broadly, few discussions of children’s health and wellbeing were situated in terms of family health and wellbeing. But on occasion, the NDP presented a more nuanced analysis: “This Liberal government does not seem to understand that in order to eliminate child poverty we need to do away with their parents' poverty.”⁵⁶ Unfortunately, that goal seems incredibly far away because child care policy debates fail to account for women and mothers and the policies themselves are a colossal failure when it comes to supporting non-nuclear families.

Discourse “takes the form of cultural and discursive frames that actors use to challenge or justify existing policy arrangements” (Béland 2009, 568) and political discourse can be understood as a “series of political choices that should be analyzed while keeping in mind the historical context in which they were made” (Holland 2012, 42). The discourses of choice, family, and individualism in child care debates federally demonstrate the Conservative’s attempt to “finalize the policy paradigm shift in Canada

⁵⁵ Maurice Vellacott, Reform Party, March 31, 1998.

⁵⁶ Angela Vautour, NDP, February 19, 1998.

away from social liberal values” (ibid.). By creating the UCCB, Harper’s Conservatives were adhering to neoliberal tenets of increased privatization that are legitimized through discourses that naturalize the family as the primary site of care while simultaneously discrediting other models of child care provisions (Holland 2012, 50). That mothers factored so little into discourse, but so profoundly into policy design (given the amount of unpaid labour that the CCTB and UCCB require of women), signals that mothers are “everywhere and nowhere” in Parliamentary debates about child care provisions because they are assumed – and expected – to be absorbed into the nuclear family. If they are not, then they are a rather clunky “single mother” trope used by politicians to describe the strengths and/or stretches of social policy.

Conclusion:

A person’s right to choose if, with whom, and how they wish to order their intimate lives is fundamental to the full expression of their autonomy, personhood, and liberal democratic citizenship (Harder 2007, 55). While on the surface it appears that women have indeed made enormous gains to order their lives as they see fit, there are significant political and social limitations to this freedom. Federal and provincial social policies govern how women are able to conduct their intimate lives and this governance manifests in political speech and text, with implicit and explicit references to family values, child welfare, and “choice”. By providing choice in childcare, these policies are designed to reinforce the nuclear family, despite protestations such as that made by then federal Progressive Conservative MP Scott Brison that the parties are not trying to

support a “Ward and June Cleaver” family⁵⁷ (in 2003 Brison, a now out-gay man, crossed the floor to join the Liberals, so perhaps he did notice that the Conservatives were Cleaver-esque in their policy design). These policies enforce the ideology of a patriarchal state onto the family by requiring that families subsist on paltry financial contributions towards childcare or benefit from unpaid live-in child care, which is largely provided by mothers. While childcare costs (material, human, and financial) are exorbitant for many dual income families, the burden is astronomical for most lone-parent families.

Provincial and federal throne speeches have remarked on the level of prosperity and growth that Albertans and Canadians enjoy and the prominent place that families have in Canada’s social fabric. However, if indeed women enjoy gender equality in Canada, child care policy, at any rate, assumes that their roles and interests have changed little since the 1950s. The assumption that women do not choose to parent without a co-parent is revealed by the complete lack of discussion of this form of parenting in political speech. Moreover, this silence combined with inadequate financial support to parents signals that the state expects families (mothers) to prioritize the care of their children over other interests, like paid careers. For women who wish to parent without a co-parent this means either assuming an enormous financial burden to pay for childcare, benefiting from the (likely) unpaid support of family members for childcare and/or low-paid child care workers, or choosing not to have children at all. Women are caught between a rock and a hard place: refusing to mother is a complete disavowal of the ideology of motherhood – which dictates that motherhood is a teleological end to womanhood, but choosing to mother without a co-parent carries enormous economic, political, and social stigma. In sum, women are penalized for a refusal to accept traditional norms of

⁵⁷ March 4, 1999.

motherhood and femininity through implicit and explicit governance regimes provincially and federally.

In this chapter I demonstrated that through discourse and practice the federal and Alberta governments have privileged the nuclear family over other family forms, and in doing so, have significantly deprived women of the option to mother autonomously. Here, I find Stevens' work useful to summarize the state's interest in motherhood. She notes, men cannot "be" mothers, but through marriage they can "have" them and that the state itself, by controlling reproduction, appropriates the "reproduction for which mothers are responsible" (2006, 223). The state then is both the political father and the reproductive mother and through its insistence on intervening in intimate life, the state legitimates itself as being able to "distinguish and constitute the difference between the profane (sex as fornication, children as illegitimate) and sacred (sex within marriage and legitimate children) (ibid.). In the final chapter, I draw together the theoretical insights and challenges I presented in Chapter 2 with the findings in Chapter 4 to present a nuanced debate about the challenges of contemporary family policy in Canada and in Alberta and the challenges that the autonomous mother appears to present to social order.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

I hope that in this debate I can offer some constructive suggestions... I will diligently attempt to stay away from gender politics and all of the nonsense that goes with it.⁵⁸

When I came across John McKay's comment in the federal Hansard I could not decide whether I should be shocked at the audacity of his comments or shocked at my own surprise. At that point, after scanning only three years of Parliamentary debates it was clear that though the quantity of commentary on gender was meager, its content was rich indeed. McKay verbalized what would become the underlying theme of so many parliamentary debates surrounding childcare, family, and women: a deep aversion to "gender politics and all of the nonsense that goes with it". Instead of talking about gender (that is, women), he wanted to have a "constructive" discussion about changes to income tax and the impact those changes would have on families. He wanted to have a neutral debate where the distractions of women, their families, and their finances would not intrude on politics. I too wish to offer some "constructive suggestions", but unlike McKay, I wish to complicate already layered, deeply personal, and profoundly political debates in gender and politics. Part of this project was finding "mother" in "family" and in a culture that is obsessed with motherhood, on television, in advertisements, in books, in movies, and in magazines, yet mothers were curiously absent from the political conversations that impact them most profoundly. When mothers did appear, they were in the background of the conversation, either lovingly married (in a nuclear family) or tragically single (by circumstance and not choice). So, it seems that in 2015,

⁵⁸ John McKay, LPC, March 4, 1999.

conceptualizations of mothers, at least as they are represented in political speech and policy design, remain almost as limited as they were in 1950.

Of course, many women have benefited from the significant feminist gains we can identify in political, social, legal, and economic equality. Our foremothers worked tirelessly to assert the importance of sexual and reproductive autonomy to women's rights and equality, and these arguments were presented to the federal government in the *Royal Commission on the Status of Women* in 1970. Of the many contributions that the RCSW made to bringing "women's issues" to the forefront of political conversation, the Commission also highlighted the unpaid and reproductive labour that women do to sustain labourers, the economy, and political society (Luxton 2011, 20). Although the RCSW demonstrated that care work produces and sustains public goods, governments have not yet "relinquished their practice of assuming care is largely a private matter" (ibid.). McPhail argues that bringing mothers into focus in federal and provincial social policy "increases the opportunity for the liberation of women through policy while ending the regulation of women through policy" (2003, 59). However, I posit that bringing mothers into policy does something much more radical than increasing the possibility for liberation, indeed as Little and Morrison demonstrate in their study of Ontario Mothers' Allowance, while women benefited from the allowance, the OMA also opened up a space for the province to become "intimately involved" in the regulation of single mothers and their children (1999, 113). So, bringing autonomous mothers into focus disrupts the very foundations upon which social policy concerning the family rests. Centering autonomous mothers in policy and scholarship demonstrates that the regulation of motherhood and women's sexuality is as, or more, hidden today as it was prior to the

second wave of feminism; that while motherhood can constrain women's autonomy in a variety of ways (Boyd 2010), it can also be a site for the expression of radical political and social values; and, that despite the diversity of ways in which people have always ordered their intimate lives, social policy and political science scholarship have yet to account for those diversities or center them in the creation of policy or theory.

If, indeed, one of the goals of childcare subsidies is to promote parents' labour market attachment, why not mandate a living wage, or link child care subsidies and labour market attachment through higher wages for child care workers – thus ensuring more stable child care provision, and higher expectations for quality care and training of child care workers, which would allay parents' fears about whether their children really are being well cared for. Of course, those proposals do not line up with the free market mantra of conservative governments but the paradoxes remain. If governments are proposing policies that cannot “solve” the problem at hand, then what problem do they think they are solving? If the UCCB and childcare subsidies in Alberta do not provide families with enough financial flexibility to choose the right childcare options, what are the motivations behind those policies? I offer two explanations for the approach. First, the policy designs of the UCCB and childcare subsidies in Alberta are raw political calculations that appeal to a federal and provincial conservative electorate. Further, the policy nuances are so complex that most people do not know that the benefits give the most money to the people who least need it. The second explanation explores the ideological presuppositions behind such policies. Here, Howarth's work on “fantasmatic narratives” helps explain the deceptions of these policies. He writes, “the logic of fantasy operates by providing a fantasmatic narrative that promises fullness-to-come once a

named or implied obstacle is overcome, and which foretells of disaster if the obstacle is not removed” (2009, 322). For example, he notes that parties need to articulate a “dangerous threat” that prevents the attainment of a party’s policies and ideals. The contempt that conservative ideology holds for “alternative” family forms produces a fear about “the other”. This “object” serves as a barrier to those who are “gripped” by a particular discourse because that object – autonomous mothers, for example – “steals the possibility of enjoyment and fulfillment” (ibid., 323). The creation of these fantasies always involves boundaries of inclusion and exclusion; political and social fantasies about the ideal nuclear family require a threat to ensure the maintenance of the ideal. If the nuclear family was not under siege from ever-changing and diverse family forms, why then would it need political protection from discrimination?

And yet, “when the void or unpredictability at the heart of any social order is made visible by events, new forms of political agency are made possible. It is the *failure* of structures to provide stable points from which to speak or act that opens the space for a more radical form of subjectivity in which social actors are literally compelled to... identify new possibilities” (Howarth 2009, 314). The failure of these policies to provide coherent rationales or stable solutions demonstrates that radical changes are possible. The goal of this project was to illuminate the ideological rationales behind childcare policies in Alberta and in Canada and how these rationales work to disfavour autonomous motherhood. As Howarth explains, the purpose of critical policy studies is to explain “how and why a particular policy has been formulated and implemented” and to understand the “complicated logics of inclusion and exclusion and thus the exercise of political power” (ibid., 324). “Power and hegemony are constitutive practices of policy-

making” and the discourse analysis I performed of legislative and parliamentary debates reveals that the power to name a desired family form has enormous material implications for families who do not conform to the idealized standard of the nuclear family. The political practice of producing a fantasy/threat is to “give direction and energy by pointing to things that are desired or rejected” (ibid.). In the case of childcare policies federally and in Alberta, governments desire the “traditional family”; this family “haunts contemporary thinking and evokes nostalgia for an imagined, more secure family life” (Luxton 2011, 23).

Fears about how families are changing and what that means for Canadian society run deep in political debate, but that fear is not new. There is always, and has always been, a threat against which we must steel ourselves to protect the sanctity of family life. Luxton notes that resistances to changes in married and familial life have a long history and include interracial marriages, same-sex marriages, adoption, and polyamory as sites of political, social, and legal contestation. This begs the question, what is it about family life that is so important that it must be regulated by the state? Although fewer people marry now than in 1950, most people do, at some point in their lives, marry or form common law relationships, live with a spouse, and have children (Luxton 2011, 4). People have not abandoned families. In fact, for better or for worse, families remain a site of enormous emotional significance for many of us. In addition to the “deep investment” people have in families for a variety of emotional reasons, families serve very important political, social and economic roles (ibid., 5). We rely on our families for physical and emotional care and sustenance, for support, to maintain culture and language, and for material well being, and families are tasked with reproducing and maintaining the nation.

But, notably, mothers continue to have the primary responsibility for ensuring that all of these goals are accomplished. According to Luxton, the biggest change affecting families in the last 50 years in Canada has been the “gradual uncoupling of socially acceptable sexuality, marriage, parenting and cohabitation” (ibid., 7). And while, families have *never* embodied the conservative myth of the nuclear ideal (Coontz 2000), the increasing visibility to diverse family forms has pushed Canadians to rethink what families should or should not look like, what responsibilities families have to themselves and to their communities, and what responsibilities the government has to families. In short, these changes challenge, or should challenge, people, and especially their governments, to rethink their assumptions about “the family”. But in austere times, people’s investment in both the familial ideal and in their own families also comes from a “remarkable lack of alternatives” in our society for meeting our care needs (ibid.). So, while there is immense diversity in family forms and collective living arrangements, families are still expected to provide where the state cannot, or does not. Although families have always, and will always be, diverse, the social, political, and economic need for the family has not changed.

Despite changes in federal government over the last twenty years, the expectations that families bear the ultimate responsibility for care has not altered (ibid., 6). The responsibility mix among states, markets, and families shifts with changes in political leadership and while families make their own decisions about care work and how to order their lives, these decisions are always mediated by “prevailing economic and social structures” that “regulate and mediate” relationships within and between families and between families and the state (ibid.). In Chapter 2 I discussed the profound

implications of neoliberalism to intimate life and the shaping of subjectivities. Increasing cutbacks to public services and privatization intensify the challenges that families – and women – face in meeting the needs of loved ones (Bezanson and Luxton 2006). Because women continue to perform the majority of carework and reproductive labour, changes to public services impact women more dramatically than men. Changes to labour market attachment, labour mobility, growth in “precarious employment”, rising costs of living, rising costs of post-secondary education, rising costs of childcare, and changes to family forms mean that many families are not able to meet their needs independently. Of course, the idea that families were once self-sufficient units is a myth, but social, political, and economic changes are increasingly challenging families in ways that may prevent them from providing the types of supports that they once could or wish they could (Luxton 2011, 23). The clawing back of public services and the social safety net produces challenges for every family but it produces very particular challenges for women who desire to parent without a co-parent.

While feminists have made enormous gains in creating new aspirations for women, the realities of our contemporary political moment demonstrate that women continue to experience constraints on their sexual and procreative autonomy. In fact, Boyd argues that the contemporary political landscape actually increases the difficulties of maternal autonomy because of the increase in “socio-legal norms...that prioritize the significant involvement of fathers in children’s lives” (2010, 139). While feminism has been chiefly concerned with creating spaces for women to choose how to shape their lives (Nedelsky 1989, 8-9), women remain bound by antiquated notions of sexuality and “essential motherhood”, which dictates that motherhood is a fundamentally female

experience, is natural and inevitable, requires women's exclusive and selfless devotion, and is the primary goal of women's sexuality (di Quinzio 1999, xiii and Meyers 2004). At the same time, women's movements have intensified, and continue to intensify, tensions surrounding mothering (ibid., vii). The seemingly increasing options for women as mothers has also increased the difficulty of women's decision-making and public debate about the value of women's varied options (ibid.), but despite women's changing political and economic locations, mothers who are single, lesbian, adolescent, or receiving social assistance face intense scrutiny and often negative public judgment (ibid.). Adding to the complexity of researching motherhood, feminist accounts of motherhood are as varied as women's experiences as mothers. Feminist analyses of mothering make different assumptions about what defines and constitutes motherhood, highlight different aspects of women's experiences, and draw different conclusions about the significance, meaning, challenges, and value of the "social reorganization of mothering" (ibid., 243). Motherhood, like all deeply personal topics, will remain a very contentious subject because it involves intersecting and interlocking concepts like gender, sex, desire, representation, equality, freedom, autonomy, power, nation, citizenship, race, and ability (to name but a few). Further, motherhood is a site at which these concepts are challenged, reworked, and redefined, and motherhood often becomes a "lightning rod" for other issues and disagreements in feminist theory – and in public debate more generally (ibid., xi).

Whether assumptions about motherhood, childcare, and family are communicated in implicit or explicit ways in provincial or federal political debates and social policy, the centrality of the nuclear family for the nation's social equilibrium has been a constant

fixture. Women who deviate from this arrangement risk social and material consequences that will shape their experiences of motherhood in complex ways. One of the biggest challenges in my research is that literature on autonomous motherhood is so hard to find. Almost exclusively, writings about lone-motherhood discusses single motherhood by circumstance and not choice. However, the experiences that single mothers by circumstance have with sexual stigma, political exclusion, economic hardship, and social invisibility are very similar to my own mother's experiences as an autonomous mother (Boyd et. al 2015). This points to the state's interest in governing the intimate lives of its citizens to produce particular types of citizens; control the production of narratives and national stories; and to produce citizen-*subjects* – citizens who are produced to reflect normative and hegemonic narratives *and* citizens who “desire the state's desire” (Brown 2006).

The state is particularly interested in the governance of our intimate lives because the scene of domesticity is key to the production and reproduction of particular ideological values. Providing status to the heteronormative, procreative family model allows for the state to reproduce heterosexuality as privileged and “normal”, reinforce economic units that support capitalist growth, and promote the neoliberalization of care and welfare services. The state actively participates in the production of discourses of normality and deviance to ensure that the heteronormative procreative family has status and remains desirable. Families that do not mirror this model must work to emulate it (Murphy 2013) or fall into precarity, insecurity, or non-acknowledgement. The inclusion and exclusion of different family forms in public policy mean that the state renders

certain intimate relations possible or improbable, valued or devalued – judgments that significantly impact the life prospects and wellbeing of citizens.

The mystification of the political and legal constitution of intimate lives hides carefully constructed membership rules for forming families and political communities, thereby enabling the state to intervene in intimate lives with relative ease (Stevens 1999). By playing on the “common sense” understanding that the public and private are indeed separate spheres, neoliberal, patriarchal, and capitalist state logics can intervene autonomously and freely in the “private” sphere. By being involved in the production of particular types of citizens and the discourses that govern those citizens, the state can produce citizen-*subjects* – individuals and families who desire the state’s desire, who seek recognition, and work to emulate valued/status identities. Producing and reproducing national, and provincial, discourses that govern families and intimate life is only part of the equation. States must also create hierarchies of included/excluded, valued/devalued, and normal/deviant that subject citizens to governance by these narratives *and* encourage citizens to participate in the reproduction of these narratives, because there is value, status, and security in mirroring the heteronormative procreative family model favoured by the state. On the surface, the state participates in the reproduction of liberal democratic ontology that dictates a clear public/private divide. However, peeling back the layers of legal, political, and social debates surrounding intimate lives and the family, it is clear that the state regards intimate lives as critical to the project of nation building. Intimate partnerships build families, which in turn build, and constitute, political communities. Moreover, despite the increased diversity of family forms, family function has remained stable. As Shanley articulates, part of the public

debate over marriage and family life is that family life went through “remarkable change” in the second-half of the twentieth century (2006, 188). These changes included birth control, women’s increased participation in the labour force, single motherhood, and non-marital cohabitation (ibid.). Curiously though, these changes have not dramatically shifted public discourse about what normal families are and these changes have not dramatically shifted the pressures that individuals and families face to mirror the heteronormative procreative family model. Underneath all family policies are “unavoidable values relating to the definition of family, value of domestic and paid work, role of government in regulating personal life and resolving work-family conflicts” (Baker 1995, 342). Thus, far from being neutral territory, family policies, like the CCTB, UCCB, and child care subsidies in Alberta privilege, and work to create, certain types of families upon which the state can expect to download responsibilities for child care.

What began as a challenge – a dearth of literature in political science about motherhood – turned out to be an adventure. I was exposed to a breadth and depth of writing in anthropology, women’s studies, sociology, political economy, fiction, legal theory, education, and early childhood education. Each discipline conceives of and defines motherhood differently and offers insights into how political science might engage more deeply with questions about motherhood and family. I am excited by the opportunity to reignite debates about childcare and motherhood and to make visible the political work that produces, and renders desirable, particular forms of intimate life. This project reaffirmed for me that the absence of the autonomous mother does minimize her radical, disruptive, and revolutionary potential. Indeed, her absence highlights the fear of

her radical potential to change the status quo and the prominence with which motherhood is haunted by collective understandings of the traditional family (Luxton 2011, 23).

In my first year Women's Studies class I learned the adage "the personal is political" but at the time I had not yet realized how truly revolutionary my mother's decision was to parent without a co-parent. I imagine I was still somewhat perturbed by not fitting in well with other family forms. I soon realized that our story was, and is, the most formative experience of my life and that my mother's choice to parent autonomously gave me rich and complex insights into intimate life, social regulation, and expectations of womanhood and femininity. Fineman asserts, "as a lived experience, Mother is shared virtually universally in our culture and, is therefore, more intimately and intensely personalized than many other symbols" (1995, 71). Mother, as a symbol and lived experience is also intensely politicized. Politicians invoked "the family in crisis" rhetoric, asserting that families are both the problem *and* solution and in doing so they allow (state and social) surveillance of, and intervention in, families and by reifying the complexities of social change, they are unwilling, unable, or both, to tackle real social problems (Jagger and Wright 1999, 23). The false promise that "getting the family right" will solve society's problems allows the state to back away from fiscal responsibilities that support families because "the family" can be called upon to solve its own problems (ibid., 22-23). The discourse surrounding lone/single mothers as social threats both reprimands women for their sexual/intimate lives and offers a "political programme of action: benefits for single-parents (mothers) need to be withdrawn or reduced" to stop encouraging women from having children outside of marriage (ibid.). My engagement with, and critique of, political speech surrounding the CCTB, UCCB, and Alberta child

care subsidies, and the very policies themselves is rooted in a deeply personal and political experience of the ways in which governments privilege the nuclear family form through family policy and how political privileging shapes the lived experiences of autonomous mothers and their families. The gender-neutral framing of these policies, which one might argue (albeit with great difficulty) is a progressive turn towards distributing the expectations of care work between women and men is actually “a change in orientation in which caretaking is devalued” (Fineman 1995, 70). So, a surface reading of these policies might present a rosy image of social policy in Canada, a closer reading demonstrates that while “mother is seen as a desirable status” (ibid., 72), the way in which women are encouraged to become mothers is a very narrow scope indeed.

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