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# "Provisioning": Conceptualizing the work of women for 21st century social policy

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#### **Synopsis**

Economic restructuring and dismantling of social welfare provisions have disparate effects across different segments of the population. Women are disproportionately affected because the multiple types of work they do inside and outside the formal economy restricts their capacity to sustain themselves today and develop options for the future. This article examines the utility of the concept of provisioning for exploring innovative strategies that groups of women are using to provide for themselves, and members of their households and neighbourhoods. An emphasis on provisioning breaks down distinctions between market, familial and social activities; it includes production and distribution activities needed for human beings to survive and flourish. Women carry particular obligations to do provisioning, and it is women who bear the heaviest consequences when these efforts fail. The article goes on to examine the implications of findings from research using interviews with women in four Canadian cities living on low incomes who are also part of what might be called *provisioning communities*. Provisioning communities are defined as groups of women who come together in local initiatives, such as a community resource centre or a women's employability program, to address fundamental sources of impoverishment as well as practical livelihood needs.

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#### Introduction: "we go marching, marching" but...

It is time to re-frame the "problem" facing women as they strive to acquire resources for meeting the responsibilities they carry for the well-being of themselves and others. Writers such as Lewis (2001) have highlighted how recent attempts to address their economic needs have tended to turn women into female equivalents of male breadwinners. Such models fail to incorporate the unpaid work done by women and under values caring labour whether

paid or not. The contradictions in women's lives remain hidden when theory, research and discourse reinforce the separation of the public world of employment from the private world of family responsibility. These dualisms, divisions and boundaries, are not drawn by women, nor do they account for the complexities that are the reality of women's lives. In this article the concept of provisioning, as developed by feminist economists, is explored for its capacity to capture the multiple dimensions of women's experiences (for a summary of work in the area

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see Power, 2004). In the following pages we investigate what happens, what different types of questions are posed, when women are positioned as citizens trying to marshal resources to meet obligations they carry for themselves and those who depend upon them. Our research is based on interviews with women in four Canadian cities.

Studies have tried to capture non-market work by documenting how an informal economy forms part of the strategies used by households to make ends meet (Elson, 1992; Feldman, 1992; Nelson, 1999). However, the gendered nature of this work, like that found in the formal economy, means that women do different types of work than men. In both economies, the caring responsibilities women carry affect their ability to acquire resources. Consequently, survival strategies used by women to meet daily needs can all too often result in few opportunities for pursuing long term strategic goals, while gendered patterns of inequities are reproduced and reinforced. Research informing policies for the 21st century needs to be directed at transforming these conditions, not diverted to examining coping strategies or focusing on employment, anti-poverty and educational programs that can play into political agendas of privatization and state withdrawal (Morgen & Maskovsky, 2003). It is the processes of negotiation over available social and technical resources, not individual or household behaviour choices, that shape options for low income women within and across households, whether these are in Canada, the UK, the US, or countries with quite different economic histories such as Latin America or China (Neysmith & Chen, 2002; Peredo, 2003).

Theories of work and employment practices are rooted in assumptions about how markets operate. Although debates about the validity of these assumptions are outside the parameters of this article, the point to be made here is that the centrality of the market in economic thinking throws into the shadows all other dimensions of citizens' lives, dimensions that affect their surface appearances as workers and the decisions they make about engaging or not in paid work. The transformation of economics into the study of markets, and the associated processes of supply and demand, producers and consumers, jobs and the skills needed to acquire them, highlights the complexity of economic processes while casting citizens as unidi-

mensional players in a drama about markets. For instance, explanations of unemployment that see the problem as arising from a person's lack of skills can be challenged on the basis that an insufficient supply of jobs is ignored while workers are blamed for not possessing adequate skills. Similarly, globalization studies of economic and political processes, or the role of technology, are critiqued for being genderless (see Adam, 2002, p. 6), but market work is still privileged. Likewise, social capital studies, even as they focus on women, tend to emphasize their capacity for developing social capital as an alternative route for acquiring economic capital (for assessments of this literature from somewhat different perspectives, see Rankin, 2002; Stolle & Lewis, 2002). No matter of the strengths of these arguments on other grounds, such perspectives reinforce a conceptual approach wherein citizens' relationship to the market economy is their defining feature.

Building on the work of feminist economists (Beneria, 1995; Day, 1995; Donath, 2000; Gardiner, 1997; MacDonald, 1995; Moser, 1989; Nelson, 1996, 1998, 1999; Power, 2004), we dim the spotlight on the market, and recall the fact that economic theory back in the days of Adam Smith was concerned with questions of provisioning (that is, the labour that funds the necessities and conveniences of life) facing individuals and communities (Heilbroner, 1986: 159). The term 'provisioning' directs attention to the purpose of economic activity. Passive images of workers and consumers are replaced with those of people facing challenges around how to meet their needs and obligations. This entails securing and providing resources of various types, including that of caring. It challenges assumptions that the primary work of governments, financial institutions and social organizations is development or increasing productivity. Such a position calls into question assertions that keeping the economy growing is a prerequisite for social progress; that issues like health care and environmental protection are to be addressed only after industry is developed and core economic issues are dealt with. Thus bailing out banks is defined as necessary economic activity; bailing out families is not (Nelson, 1999). Focusing on provisioning responsibilities disturbs notions of the primacy of both familial and employee relationships—and their gendered assumptions.

This article presents the steps in an analytical journey to the concept of provisioning. By provisioning we mean the work of securing resources and providing the necessities of life to those for whom one has relationships of responsibility. This definition speaks to a range of specific activities that are never finished, must be performed regularly, and require energy and attention. These activities cannot be isolated or separated from the context of social relationships because provisioning consists of those daily activities performed to ensure the survival and wellbeing of oneself and others. Both the activities and the relationships may be voluntary or prescribed. The point is that these activities are necessary; without them people would not survive. Articulating the policy implications of these has a particular urgency obvious to those who have witnessed the realities facing people who live the increasing poverty, instability, regulations, and penalties that accompanied decreases in public supports in Canada, specifically in Ontario and British Columbia, since their regime shifts in 1995 and 2001, respectively. There is a pressing need to examine the consequences of this "growing gap between institutionalized standards of normality and real living conditions" (Vobruba, 2000, p. 608).

The article has three sections. The first summarizes some of the difficulties arising from the female breadwinner approach to meeting needs. In this section, attempts to incorporate into policy unpaid work and caring labour, both paid and unpaid, are reviewed and found to be not only theoretically awkward but unsuccessful in changing the low incomes of many women. Frequently employment and dependent care policies have actually pitted differentially located groups of women against each other. The second section presents what happens analytically when the responsibilities carried by women, self defined as poor, are used as the starting point for understanding the what, why and how of options and strategies used for securing resources. The concept of provisioning is useful in laying out this dynamic. In the last section, we reflect on the capacity of the concept of provisioning for highlighting aspects of women's lives that remain hidden when research is based on concepts such as coping, empowerment, social capital, social exclusion or social cohesion. During initial discussions amongst researchers and participants such concepts seemed promising, but ultimately they could not capture the complicated lives that participants lived nor explicate how they, as individuals and members of groups, attempted to change and resist the oppressive conditions that limited their options. Participants saw these concepts as being about processes that were far removed from their daily experiences. As such, the concepts did not open up avenues for exploring who benefits from increasing poverty and why the capacities of households and communities to provide are being undermined so systematically. We found that the concept of provisioning struck a chord with many of the 60 low income participants interviewed in four Canadian cities, theoretically selected for their different social locations and household types. It facilitated an understanding of the strategies women and communities use for meeting immediate survival needs while planning strategically for the future. Whether provisioning is a better conceptual tool remains to be tested. What we do know is that it is a provocative and evocative concept, a productive concept that recognizes complexity and provokes debate about different types of validity (Lather, 1993, p. 684).

### The female breadwinner: "it is bread we fight for" but...

In the last decade as the gendered assumptions underlying theories of the welfare state were exposed, there emerged several carefully argued approaches for how to include women (Fraser, 1997; Lewis, 2001; Lister, 2001; O'Connor, Orloff, & Shaver, 1999). One of these, the female breadwinner model, incorporates women into the dominant way of understanding what people are supposed to do to create and distribute resources. The market and paid jobs take centre stage, with the state and family cast in supporting roles. In his analysis of social welfare regimes, for example, Esping-Andersen (1999) recognizes that families are important in considering social provisions, the organization of benefits and the regulation of services. When feminist scholars, however, examined the effects of inserting women and family into the state-market nexus (O'Connor et al., 1999), they demonstrated how a different set of questions emerge, questions that the female breadwinner approach needed to address if it were to reflect the realities of women's lives. For instance, the model needed to specify the social conditions that will allow women to establish independent households. Unfortunately, adding women into male centred models seldom decentres male privilege or includes what women value. The breadwinner was/is gendered in that the concept assumes the presence of someone available to provide caregiving. It cannot work without this. At the same time, a woman's caring responsibilities curtail her breadwinner capacities, making her appear as an inferior breadwinner (Neysmith, 2000).

Provisioning for themselves and for those dependent upon them remains difficult for women because this includes caring for others with the attendant financial and in-kind resources needed to do so. Making ends meet today frequently means taking a series of low paying, contract jobs which do not help build a secure tomorrow. As Lewis (2001) notes, the current buzz words of life long learning and higher education do not translate into women having access to better paying jobs. The tunnel vision version of training which moves women from welfare, to workfare, to available paid jobs, does not incorporate an understanding of the caring responsibilities women shoulder.<sup>3</sup> By negating these contributions that women make to the welfare of the nation, such policies undermine attempts to establish unpaid work as a legitimate basis for making citizenship claims.

Welfare state theorists have rightly pointed out that employment expansion in the service sector will lead to increasing inequality because these jobs are low paid (Mahon, 2001). There is less interrogation of why they are low paid while other types of work are not. When explanations are offered, the usual conclusion is that such jobs are a marketization of traditional domestic tasks. For us such conceptualizations are fundamentally flawed in two respects. First, the category of domestic labour all too frequently incorporates caring labour and thus dismisses the knowledge and skills of such work, seeing it as basic human maintenance work (for an economic distinction see Gardiner, 1997), traditionally done by women and servants which "naturally" draw a low wage when marketed. Secondly, entering women, family or household into the market model does not break up the two spheres problematic of private and public worlds. We therefore take issue with a policy discourse that privileges the working mother even

while recognizing it remains a strategic choice for particular debates. The unreal paid and unpaid work split remains, as does the inadequate attention paid to and accounting for how caring responsibilities affect both family and market work. The two sphere dualism that has proven so problematic to women does not disappear in the female breadwinner approach to providing for well-being.

Concluding that a modified breadwinner approach to work is a poor fit still begs the question of what must be included for a better fit. The crux of the problem was recognized by Nancy Fraser (1997:59) who proposed that a universal caregiver model is needed if women are expected to assume breadwinner responsibilities. Currently, the contradictions between the two sets of demands can be avoided by privileged groups of women who have resources to buy some assistance with their unpaid work load but their implication falls fully on the shoulders of poor women. To promote equity between men and women the separate sphere borders need to be transgressed in both directions. Men must assume their share of caregiving so that women as well as men can "fight for bread" as called for in the words of the song Bread and Roses that titles this section. However, as Olson (2002) cogently argues, even if a universal caregiving approach informs a policy, operationalizing such a model in a market economy where democracy is usually equated with the right to exercise choice, does not easily happen, even when active labour legislation is in place to encourage it. For example, until the mid-nineties Sweden's parental leave policy had put in place salary replacement rates of over 90% (Olson, 2002, p. 389). Examination of the Swedish experience confirms that such policies were not sufficient to attract men in equal numbers as women to take care leaves. The failure to do so exposed the fact that individuals incur other costs than lost wages when they interrupt their labour force careers.

Challenging prevailing norms and discourses, fundamental to social change, is conceptually and empirically demanding. In the case of welfare regime theory the major theoretical constructs are state, family and market. Formal and informal social provisions are seen as originating in one of these. When studies reveal other sources, such as voluntary groups, or

informal support networks of friends and neighbours, these are fitted into the dominant paradigm by positioning such sources as stand-ins for the three in situationally specific cases. The use of conceptual proxies does not challenge dominant understandings of how the separate spheres of market and family increases demands on women to be breadwinners while they are also expected to take up increasing amounts of caring labour as state services are cut and/or moved into the market sectors. A conceptual wedge is needed for opening up a space that gets out of the market/family dualism. Only then can new representations of the responsibilities and rights of women emerge (Adams & Padamsee, 2001, p. 18).

### More than the female breadwinner: "we fight for roses, too" but...

To summarize, the rise of the female breadwinner model and resultant policies directed at getting women into the paid economy can increase costs to women with very dubious payoffs in terms of the jobs women get (Himmelweit, 2002). Therefore feminist scholars from various disciplines argue: (1) that what is included in welfare needs to move beyond current models of welfare regimes (Brush, 2002); (2) that well-being encompasses more than sustainable material consumption and standards of health, environment and housing, it also includes opportunities for leisure, useful work, personal development, individual independence and access to the resources needed for giving and receiving care over the life time (Perrons, 2000); (3) that the state and civil society are potential spaces for transformative strategies, they have important roles to play in the provisioning of these aspects of well-being (Stolle with Langley & Mellor, 2002; Lewis, 2001). Social policy needs to consider all labour, not just that in the current delineated area of market work (Gardiner, 1997, p. 234). Turning household and community work into market categories cannot address questions such as how giving and receiving care is organized, received and valued. We are highlighting the form and distribution of nonmarket work because it keeps disappearing in discussions about what future post-welfare states might look like. This happens in analyses otherwise well

grounded in an appreciation of the social effects of globalization and information technologies on nation states and the future of social democracy, and on the role of NGOs and consumer groups as checks to international flows of capital (Carroll & Ratner, 2001; Castells, 1996; Giddens, 1998, 2001). Outside of the feminist literature (Beneria, Flora, Grown, & MacDonald, 2000; Brah, 2002), however, for the most part the discussion is ungendered. The informal and unpaid work of women is curiously absent—even when women are the workers, for example, in many micro-credit schemes (Rankin, 2002). Not surprisingly, time use studies continue to show that women have less leisure time than men. These social conditions get reproduced when the dimensions of work done by women escape scrutiny in analyses of how to modify/resist the effects of international flows of capital. Resulting social policies would continue to exacerbate the conditions under which women struggle to make ends meet while leaving market work central to future citizenship claims.

To include the vast amount of non-market work that sustain households, conceptually we need to move beyond the additive model which combines the public and private, the formal and informal economies, the paid and unpaid worlds. We need to understand how the spheres are kept separated, walled off from each other, how one sphere continues to be valued more than others. In our research we are documenting the array of responsibilities women carry and what social, emotional, physical and material resources they and their communities must put in place to try and meet these. In thinking through how to document this work, we position women as citizens who carry major responsibilities for provisioning for themselves and their dependents. Provisioning seems to be the kind of conceptual wedge needed to move us beyond images of bridging the divide between employment and caring work. The image of a bridge does not question the foundations that anchor either end of the structure. It is these foundations that need to be disrupted in order to understand why what Barrig (1994) calls the space "between bread and roses" continues to exist. Of importance is how women negotiate the competing demands made on them, demands that insist they perform as breadwinners or be sidelined as welfare losers.

## Participants' voices: "we will rise to create something stronger" but...

Are there ways that do not limit women to the traditional two spheres but potentially provide a space for re-thinking how women's provisioning responsibilities are socially constructed? The first step would seem to be a questioning of the double breadwinner/caregiver role that women are expected to assume. To facilitate the development of an alternative discourse, we propose two dimensions that we have found useful in our research—these are boundaries and time.

We are documenting the boundaries that women draw around who they are responsible for. Provisioning demands made on women are marked by these boundaries. The boundaries that women draw do not map neatly onto even an expanded definition of household. Boundaries may extend across several households and their shape changes over time. These relationships are also the basis for identity, participation, and citizenship, all of which are part of understanding people's sense of belonging. In addition, as Yuval-Davis (1999, p. 124) points out, they are the pathways along which situated knowledges are constructed but also where situated imaginations can grow. If we think about boundaries in a collective rather than individual way, then it facilitates imagining other possibilities on how to provision. If one accepts the growing evidence that nation-state citizenships are gendered, racialized, heterosexualized, as well as class differentiated, such differences will affect women's participation in all collectivities. That is to say, women's identity, participation, sense of belonging and capacity to provision will be influenced not only by their individual positionings but also by the positioning of the other collectivities in which they are members, whether these are other nation-states, local communities, or international networks. For example, religious codes can affect the lives of women just as much as, and often more than, state legislation. Likewise, soliciting the support of an international agency (NGO) can sometimes be the recourse of women who are disempowered within their local communities. Similarly, local groups can help women build identity capacity that the family and market spheres undermine.

Money and services do not exhaust policy goods; time is crucial (Daly, 2002: 268). The documenting of time use gets at not only the work done but the time

devoted to tasks and relationships and where these crossover, compete and/or complement other demands made on women. Time is a scarce and finite resource that gets used in different ways by those with different options (Perrons, 2000). In paid work time is money and thus labour's time units are valued. There is, however, much work that does not fit neatly into clock time. It is forced in if paid, for example the relational tasks of home care or the official meetings that are part of community projects. Yet this communication oil that allows the work to get done, is seldom included in official task charting schemas (Aronson & Neysmith, 1996). It remains invisible, not given a value, until the consequences of not doing this kind of work effects what is seen as the organization's core business. If time is money, then any use of the free time of women taken from household, care and community work adds to profit, even if it is detrimental to well-being. The market model of equating time with measurable task completion has resulted in a profound theoretical paucity for thinking about it as a precious scarce resource, limited by the finality of human life expectancy. Balancing time needed to work, care and act within individual and collective life spans deserves more thoughtful attention in social policy (Williams, 2001). Power differentials also flow along time-based relations. These relations, and the definition of valued time, render invisible and non-valuable the social contributions of the majority of the world's people while relying on that invisible work for the economic production of profit. To devalue and negate major dimensions of people work and its use of time is a political act of oppression. It can only be recognized as such, however, once the invisible begins to be explicated, once temporal relations are foregrounded and debated (Adams & Padamsee, 2001, pp. 22-23).

Following are some themes from an analysis of interviews about provisioning responsibilities, activities, and strategies used by women on low and precarious incomes. Participants were selected for their diverse household and employment situations, and all were connected to innovative community groups and organizations, such as a food coop or a neighbourhood house. To document boundaries, the women were asked to draw detailed maps of who they feel responsible for. The results included younger and older children, living full or part-time in the home, or in the care of someone else; themselves; their

parents, siblings, children; friends, peers at work or school, and adult neighbours; as well as groups and organizations of which they were a part.

In another section of the interview, participants were asked to discuss the strategies they used to meet immediate (survival) and longer term (planning) needs. Although the specifics differed, participants saw themselves neither as victims nor heroines, but as one of the various actors in their own lives who were facing more involuntary than voluntary choices in a complicated, moving web of claims, responsibilities, and few options. Although participants spoke of their efforts to create new identities, build relationships, and find more resources, responses were weighted down with commentary on the struggle to survive the negative changes of the past few years and the "crippling cuts" in funding and services. For instance, there was the swift descent from "sturdy home care worker" to vulnerable isolated person on short term contracts; the increase in labourious, repetitive work to find sufficient food and adequate shelter; the time-consuming negotiations of bartering exchanges to take care of daily and unexpected necessities. Participants also engaged in numbingly careful calculations to manage the increased scrutiny of their lives by officials through regulations, forms that had to be filled repeatedly, threats of penalties and denial of benefits. One participant summed up the situation and her problematic survival strategy in the following

"There are difficult choices that I have to make. The money is not there to make a choice so I just (pause).... so I keep remembering years ago when I had enough money to eat and I went on a fast, and it was healthy—a lot of water. I keep remembering that I did it then when I had the money for food. I drank water. So I do it now."

Minuscule choices and calculations over impossible choices consumed energy and time: whether to buy birth control or food; whether to pay that third and final notice on the electricity bill or the last two payments on the computer that was purchased to develop a home business and write creatively; whether to take time for sleep or to talk over coffee between split shifts with another homecare worker about the same person they cared for. Throughout the interviews clear notions emerged about the resources required to

provision, the few choices available and the contradictory situations participants found themselves in. Safety was seen as fundamental to being able to provision "If we are not safe, how can we keep others safe?" one woman asked. Another knew that "If I am supported, I can support others, but if I am not, how can I support others?" On one hand, participants spoke of isolation and fear of the future; on the other hand. there was a determined desire to remain "part of a community" and to find a space to be together. A sense of betrayal and fear pervaded answers to questions about provisioning strategies, as women wondered how their hard work taking courses, providing good home care, building a precious community space could be so thoroughly and quickly dismantled. Apathy was not prevalent, despite the worries. Rather, participants reported a strong sense of waiting, scheming and holding on. There was the cautious determination of "We will cut back, hold on, and survive."

### Future possibilities: "a sharing of life's glories" but...

The choice of words from the historical song of striking women, Bread and Roses to title sections of this article was made to bring forward the tenacity of important ideas. Social policy is about the struggle for not just paid work and basic necessities but also about ensuring that social conditions exist that give people power in making decisions that affect the quality of their lives, for exercising agency when assuming responsibilities. We ended the familiar phrases of the old song with the word 'but...' as it is time for another set of ideas and policy narratives that go beyond the gendered, military struggle for bread and roses. The song, written in 1912, captured the limits as well as the strategic necessity of market work for realizing life's glories. In this article we have argued that a modified model of work as embodied in the female breadwinner is just too thin, too limiting. It obscures too many dimensions of women's lives. As such it cannot even ensure the bread needed by women living in poverty, let alone the possibility of roses (Phipps & Burton, 1995). Over the years both authors have used the concepts of caring labour, paid and unpaid work, the informal economy to push the boundaries

or thicken up ideas of work (see Neysmith, 2000). However, such concepts ultimately could not cut their tethers to social economic theory that reproduces those conditions that will result in future cohorts of poor women living lives that will "be sweated from birth until life closes". Furthermore, as noted in the introduction, before concluding that provisioning was the best fit for this program of research, concepts such as social capital (see Lowndes, 2000; Rankin, 2002), empowerment (Adams, 2003), and social exclusion (Bryne, 1999; Levitas, 1996; Littlewood & Herkommer, 1999; Room, 1999) were considered. However, these tend to assume an outsider perspective, one of looking into and downward onto the lives of women, putting them into identities as entrepreneurs, consumers, victims, clients, or "other", who must be helped up, or must help themselves up, to be included. These concepts can recreate positions of marginality and reinforce states of privilege, missing and devaluing the dynamic, changing nature of the work women do to provision on behalf of those they care for today, and in the future.

Provisioning, operationalized as strategies used by women to secure resources to provide the necessities for those to whom one has responsibilities, is a conceptual attempt to develop a more robust understanding of the social conditions needed to support the obligations that women carry, both those assumed and also those thrust upon them by the state and the market under a discourse of restructuring to meet the demands of globalization and the 'new economy'. This research aims to understand the realities facing women in poor communities. How women, as individuals, but also as members of collectivities, actively develop strategies for survival, strategies that must take into account the responsibilities they carry not only for themselves but for others. In our research we are positioning the arguments about provisioning in a way suggested by Vobruba (2000), namely, focussing on decisive situations where women negotiate access to the resources they need for living. Participants' interpretations of their options and their resulting actions are the core of this empirical research. We anticipate that the strategies used by some participants for coming to terms with their reality will collide with official offers of inclusion, and thus

definitions of legality and legitimacy will differ. Participants acknowledged realities, loss, anger, in accounting for who benefits and who pays for the changes in provisioning that make life so much more difficult for those around them. But even stronger was a desire to imagine other ways, words, concepts, policies and practices. Policv-makers, researchers, and the women in our study speak of the need for "new words" to understand the realities and possibilities of action. However, they need to be created within a context of dialogue, discussion, and activities engaged in with others, that is in community. As one woman stated "I need to be part of a community, not just to survive today, but to live, and survive in the future". Provisioning of and by women cannot be understood or supported without understanding the communities in and through which women exercise agency as they strive to meet their provisioning responsibilities. This, rather than the traditional spheres of paid work and family, need to be centre stage in future research.

Policies in the 21st century have to ensure that women have the authority to draw where the boundaries of their responsibilities lie, when to set limits, and demarcate what is worthy of outrage. One participant aptly summarized this challenge as she struggled to define what she meant by provisioning, to legitimate for herself and others what the boundaries should be, and what she needed to help her:

"Providing is like making it day to day for myself and the kids. Making sure the rent is paid, and sweeping the house, that's providing too. Everyday I'm out there with my children, but it's like I end up being the baby sitter for the whole community as other kids don't have supervision. It's not cool. I'm going to school now too, [as well as] volunteering and looking for work. It's my right as a Canadian to these things, the social services that are out there. And I'm sorry that I'm whatever to society, a burden to society. It's not that I haven't tried. I've tried several...several times to do things with my life but unfortunately certain things have screwed me up. [I have been told that] I have to plan out my life or something. I think I'm going to go home and I'm going to write down everything that I do in a day, and I'm going to put the times, and then I'm

going to take it in [to the welfare office] and I'm going to give it to them and say: 'Okay, this is what I do in a day'. This is my plan."

Governments, voluntary organizations, coops and social networks can all provide resources but these patterns are strongly influenced by traditions and prevailing values or norms (Nelson, 1998). Feminist scholars have repeatedly called for specifying the relationships between the productive and reproductive economies but the role of relationships between people and between social institutions continues to be underplayed in traditional economic and social policy (Spike Peterson, 2002). Even when using the broader concept of provisioning, we can predict that the social location of different groups of women will determine what options are available to them. Furthermore, provisioning by women will continue to be more difficult than for many men because the work will call upon women's time and energy in ways that men escape. These patterns will continue as countries move from national to global economies and refocus labour policies to meet the knowledge needs of what is called the New Economy. It is also predictable that the new economy will valorize certain skills, such as emotion work (Bolton, 2000), that were traditionally seen as feminine, appropriating and renaming them in market language when opportune, while continuing to undervalue them under their old names in traditional female work sites.

Whether the concept of provisioning can create an alternative basis for legitimizing claims and entitlements people make on each other, and on the organizations and states they create on their behalf, awaits further analysis (Power, 2004). Future research and debate will determine if the concept will invite creative action towards new policies in what Beck imagines to be a "provident state" (Beck, 2000, p. 226). Such analyses must also construct what limits can legitimately be placed on persons and groups, and how and by whom. At present, a minority in Canada, as in other countries, are using resources needed by the majority to provision. In this paper we have proposed provisioning as an alternative conceptual tool for starting the process of "dismantling the master's house" (Lorde, 1984, p. 110).

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#### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Workfare is a term used widely to define welfare-to-work programs throughout Canada and the US. If a person on social assistance is considered "employable" then the person is required to look for work, participate in programs such as employment support and employment placement and/or do community service. These schemes have been widely critiqued on the basis that the jobs are low paid/short term and dead end; the community service aspect is coercive and divisive. See for example Quaid (2002).

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