YOUNG WOMEN'S PROVISIONING:
A STUDY OF THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Faculty of Social Work
University of Toronto

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ABSTRACT

This study uses institutional ethnography (IE) to address the question of how young women, considered to be “at risk” youth, make decisions about their working lives. Based on interviews with young women and program workers in housing, employment, young mothers’ and girls’ programs, field observations, and document analysis at Gen-Y (pseudonym for a women’s community-based social services agency), young women’s provisioning experiences are used to critique current program and policy models that feature notions of choice and risk. Provisioning is a concept that captures a wide range of work and work-related activities that young women perform for themselves and people they feel responsible for. IE is applied to understand how institutional processes and practices give rise to the conditions under which young women participants at Gen-Y make career and life decisions.

The findings are twofold. First, Gen-Y young women provision by making the kinds of career, educational and caregiving choices expected of them, but having few resources at hand to deal with the exigencies of everyday life, they often settled for short-term over long-term gains. The young women used these provisioning strategies even though they may be
putting their future economic security at risk. Once deemed "at risk," these young women participate in community programs. This precipitates the second finding: that the youth employment program complex is organized to influence young women’s career options through locally based funding arrangements and program evaluation practices. These institutional processes are embedded in social relations of gender and race that coordinate young women’s decision-making with program workers’ and administrators’ efforts to meet their professional obligations and organizational mandates. While Gen-Y programs were developed to help young women, it is argued that the funding pressures shape the organizational context in such a way that program workers’ and administrators’ applications of anti-discrimination and diversity, access and equity initiatives inadvertently reproduce the social inequalities they are meant to eliminate. The thesis ends with theoretical and practice implications for social work and social policy.
DEDICATION

In memory of my father, Kwok Hei Tam and grandmother, Chui Kwan Chu

for their care and provisioning.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It will soon be known that provisioning describes different work and work-related activities that people perform for others for whom they feel responsible. In these acknowledgements, I would like to thank people who provisioned for me in various ways so that I could think, theorize and write about the provisioning experiences of others.

First, in terms of professional provisioning, I owe a debt of gratitude to my thesis supervisor, Sheila Neysmith, for her unbridled enthusiasm for theoretical debate and analysis. During my doctoral studies, I felt that I was riding a roller coaster of conceptual clarity. On this ride, I would alternately climb to heavenly points of lucid reasoning and plummet into hellish points of muddy confusion. Particularly during the downturns, I appreciated Sheila’s remarkable intellectual acumen as well as her patience and frank recommendations on my work. I was also fortunate to have benefited from the thoughtful advice of a dedicated dissertation committee. Kiran Mirchandani, from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, gave me insightful comments that helped me sharpen my arguments. Usha George, Dean of the Faculty of Community Services at Ryerson University, from a practical, administrative perspective, urged me to concretize my policy recommendations. My external examiner, Marjorie DeVault, Professor of Sociology at Syracuse University, contributed her in-depth knowledge of institutional ethnography. Another examiner, Adrienne Chambon, Professor of Social Work at the University of Toronto, suggested early in my studies that I think creatively and consider using stories and images in my thesis work.

I am grateful to the WEDGE (Women at the EDGE of the new global economy) research team for including this study of young women as one of the WEDGE research sites.
I wish to thank the entire research team, but especially Marge Reistma-Street (University of Victoria), Elaine Porter (Laurentian University) and Stephanie Baker-Collins (York University). These experienced and skilled researchers encouraged my scholarly development by giving me the opportunity to observe the intricate, nitty-gritty operations of research and knowledge-building in collaborative team environments. In terms of financial provisions, I am grateful to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for funding the WEDGE project, and thus my dissertation research.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to the agency staff and the young women at Gen-Y for sharing their professional and provisioning experiences and their working lives with me. Without their stories and cooperation, this project would have taken some other form.

Secondly, in terms of provisioning as mentoring, my special thanks go to Sonja Greckol. Over many a coffee and lunch in Greektown on the Danforth, Sonja told me to breathe deeply: She normalized my anxieties around theoretical and methodological tensions and uncertainties which she appropriately addressed as part and parcel of the research process. My other mentors hail from the Women’s Studies department at the University of Toronto: Alison Keith, June Larkin and Kathryn Morgan. I thank these women for modelling ways of thinking, learning, teaching and “being academic,” which helped me to complete this project.

Thirdly, in terms of self-provisioning, I was able to maintain a rigorous exercise schedule throughout the thesis development and writing stages. My level of physical fitness was instrumental in my ability to undertake mentally strenuous and stimulating tasks. Toward this end, I would like to thank my friends from the Longboat Roadrunners club for
motivating me to stay active. My appreciation goes specifically to a few highly opinionated Baby Boomers with wide-ranging politics. By challenging my arguments, these men forced me to finesse my arguments and make them succinct and comprehensible within the span of a training run. From this group, I am most thankful to Bob Bubba, who came out of retirement voluntarily to edit this thesis.

Finally, in terms of provisioning essential things, I would like to acknowledge my family. Thank you to my mother, Helen Hoi Ling Tam, for giving me pocket money and taking me on vacation once in a while. Thank you to my sister, Cynthia Tam, for making me dinners, dropping off groceries and driving me to appointments.

Thank you most of all to Jason Boyd, my life partner, for doing the laundry, feeding the cats and providing never-ending emotional support.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Story of “At Risk” Young Women

“At risk” youth has been used generally as a catch-all phase that describes troubled young people. This thesis is about “at risk” young women in the area of employment and work (more on “young women” later in this section). The curious thing about this “at risk” youth phenomenon is that people, including the youth workers from this study, claim to know who are “at risk” youth but when I asked young women who obviously fits the description—Who are “at risk” youth?—they do not refer to themselves. In fact, the young women I have come across whom one might generally consider to be “at risk,” promptly and adamantly reject the label when questioned about “at risk” youth. Maybe it is just that people like to label others and not to be labelled themselves—perhaps. But, if that were the case, why use “at risk” youth and not some other term? This story of “at risk” young women begins with a question: What is it about the particular significance of the notion of “at-risk youth” and its contemporary usage and relation to young women’s work?

The “at risk” young women who are the subject of this study are not the young people whom North Americans assume will benefit greatly from the “new” knowledge-based economy. These other mainstream youth are featured in tales of optimism and opportunity. They are expected to be highly skilled, highly educated, and highly comfortable with all things wired and digital; they are expected to prosper in technological and knowledge-based jobs and careers that have replaced the ones lost to automation. At the beginning of the millennium, such optimism about mainstream youth was reflected in headlines like, “Young Entrepreneurs Strike it Rich On-line,” and anecdotes about millionaire teenage entrepreneurs who could afford expensive cars before they are old enough to drive (CBC News, November
10, 2000; Evans, April 6, 2000). On the contrary, the “at risk” young women’s (and young men’s) workforce success is far from guaranteed; they are “at risk” of long-term under-employment or unemployment; they are susceptible to part-time, contingent, and contractual work, which has been associated with a decline in job security and few employment benefits.

Being “at risk” for under-employment or unemployment has also been associated with other youth “problems” such as drug abuse, sex or violence. In these cases, youth commentators take a hardline, tough-love approach. These problems of “at risk” youth get framed as issues of criminal justice, whereby recommended solutions take the form of mandatory sentences or longer jail time. However, many people have also been amenable to providing support to “at risk” youth. This charitable outlook is premised on the understanding that the young person became “at risk” through no fault of his or her own. Being homeless or poor; having a disability or parents with low levels of education; being a racial minority, Aboriginal or a high school dropout; and coming from single-parent homes or poor neighbourhoods also put youth “at risk” according to the Canadian Forum of Labour Market Ministers (2000). Following a fatal Boxing Day shooting in the winter of 2005, Toronto’s focus on curbing gun-related youth violence prompted calls from youth activists and community representatives for more programs, including employment assistance for disadvantaged youth (Aly, December 28, 2005). Society takes a cautionary, helpful approach to “at risk” youth, based on the rationale that if we do not help them with their jobs and careers, they may end up living on the streets, joining gangs or shooting innocent bystanders.

In terms of solutions, employment is seen as a suitable way of dealing with “at risk” youth; that is, employment can turn “at risk” youth into productive citizens. Indeed, few people would argue against the idea that it is good for a young person to work. Certainly,
having a part-time or summer job gives a young person income, responsibility, experience and a chance to explore the world of work. In response to this perennial concern about youth employment in the general populace, federal, provincial and municipal governments alike have made, and continue to make, efforts to support youth by giving them opportunities to participate and advance in the labour market. Over the years, governments have implemented a host of programs and services intended to enable young people succeed in skills training, self-employment, school-to-work transitions, job searches, and post-secondary education.

The academic world has echoed this general concern over “at risk” youth and employment issues. Particularly from the late 1980s through the 1990s, during which time Canadian unemployment rates peaked at exceptionally high levels, researchers documented the trends and nature of youth employment and unemployment patterns. Some studies drew attention to how various characteristics, such as education levels, gender, visible minority traits, socio-economic status, and other demographic variables, impacted youth participation, employment, and unemployment rates. Other studies examined the nature of youth jobs in terms of wages, occupations and sectors/industries, timing and length of transitions from school to work, and opportunities for rural youth (Andres, 2002; Campolieti, Fang, & Gunderson, 2005; Forum of Labour Market Ministers, 2000; Kunz, 2003; Looker & Dwyer, 1998; Looker & Thiessen, 2004; Mortimer, 2003). International researchers and policymakers expressed alarm about the connections between youth unemployment and social exclusion. The following quote from a recent report by the International Labour Office in Geneva illustrates the concerns over youth employment:

The link between youth unemployment and social exclusion has been clearly established; an inability to find a job creates a sense of vulnerability, uselessness and
idleness among young people and can heighten the attraction of engaging in illegal activities. For many young people today, being without work means being without a chance to work themselves out of poverty. In addition, an individual’s previous unemployment experience has been proven to have implications for future employment chances. Yet open unemployment is only part of the challenge; even where young people are working, conditions of work may be poor. In both industrialized and developing economies, young people are more likely to have intermittent (temporary, part-time, casual) work and insecure arrangements, oftentimes in the informal economy with limited labour protection. (International Labour Office, August 2004, Forward)

Up to now, we have described “at risk” youth without specifically referring to young women or young men. Examining the current and changing representations of girlhood, Harris (2004) identified “can-do” girls, who are powerful, confident, resilient, and intensely career-driven with the “world at their feet.” These are the young women who have supposedly benefited from the women’s movement of decades past; they are the ones who cannot be held back by outdated gender stereotyping and expectations. With their education and career paths planned, people generally expect that these young women will be able to “have it all” and “do it all.” While these mainstream young women are not the focus of this study, Harris (2004) also highlighted the contrasting production of “at risk” girls, who may come from situations of poverty or violence but whose wrong life choices invite societal regulation and protection for their own good and for the good of society. It would appear then, that young women can also be “at risk.” But on what basis do young women become “at risk”? To uncover the story of “at risk” young women requires some consideration of gender.

One of the indicators that gender is organizing society’s understanding of “at risk” youth comes from the observation that the stories generated about troubled young women, and the research that supports these tales, tend to centre on reproductive issues. With some notable exceptions (Brah, 1996; Mirza, 1992), recent studies of young women have tended to
focus on teen pregnancy, body image, girl culture and identity, sexuality, girl gangs, and violence (Brown, 2003; Driscoll, 2002; Frost, 2001; Kaplan, 1997; Mazzarella & Pecora, 2000; White, 2002). Very rarely does work and employment take centre stage for young women in the way that it does for young men. A case in point is “Learning to Labour” by Paul Willis (1977). This study of how and why White working-class “lads” end up in working-class jobs has been widely cited as a historically seminal work of youth employment literature, even though feminist sociologists have pointed out the shortcomings of the analysis for understanding working-class young women’s education, work and career decisions (Griffin, 1985; McRobbie, 2000).

While researchers have tended to overlook young women as workers, many studies of adult women workers have been conducted (some recent Canadian contributions include Eyerman, 2000; Scott-Dixon, 2004). Statistically, studies have shown the persistence of gender inequities in the Canadian labour market, despite women’s advances in education and employment (Statistics Canada, 2003). Generally, Canadian women earn less in paid employment; they are more likely to be employed in low-paying, part-time, and otherwise insecure jobs; and they still do more unpaid care work than their male counterparts. In most cases, immigrant and racial minority women workers fair even worse than their White middle- and upper-class counterparts in terms of employment outcomes (Gunderson, 1998; Khosla, 2003). While young women are affected by issues documented in studies of women workers, this literature rarely attends to younger women’s specific concerns and their different employment patterns and histories.

If the current state of knowledge and the approach to studying marginalized young women and their work based on existing beliefs about youth employment, young women,
and women workers were to be characterized with one word, it would be “incomplete.” First, the research on youth employment tells us about young workers as workers but not as women; in this case, “young worker” implies “young man.” Secondly, research on young women tells us about young women as women but not about their working lives. Thirdly, studies of women workers tell us about adult women workers but not their younger counterparts. The problem resulting from this incomplete knowledge base is what this study aims to address; namely, the invisibility of young women workers. This invisibility constitutes a gap in knowledge that leads to the question: “Where are the young women?” This question of where and how young women are constructed within the theories and discourses of youth, women, and work, provides the impetus and basis from which this study developed.

This study is about how young women, considered “at risk” youth, make decisions about their working lives. I use the concept of provisioning to capture a wide range of work activities. Provisioning includes work and work-related activities not easily categorized as paid employment or unpaid work, productive labour or reproductive care work. The term comes from the feminist economic literature and is defined as the work of securing resources and providing the necessities of life to those for whom one has relationships of responsibility (Nelson, 1998; Neysmith, Reitsma-Street, Baker-Collins, & Porter, 2004; Power, 2004). Provisioning is used to examine how young women creatively survive by juggling the pressures and responsibilities of school, work and family, while planning careers in an uncertain labour market. Building on previous research, I attempt to develop a deeper understanding of young women’s work than research using traditional approaches to studying youth has provided.
The marginalized young women whose experiences this study seeks to understand are participants in community programs in a large, multi-service, urban-based women's organization. Focusing on so-called "at risk" young women and their construction through community programs provides an opportunity to investigate the operations and intersections of young women's social locations on their provisioning experiences. The young women are marginalized in the sense that they are relegated to low social status, either because of a lack of adequate material resources or through exclusionary processes that prevent them from exercising their rights, which results in an inability to maintain a decent quality of life. This study uses this multi-dimensional, dynamic understanding of marginalization.

The young women in the study are between the ages of 16 and 24. Youth scholars have suggested that "youth" and "young woman" refer to social, relational categories that derive meaning in specific social, historical contexts (Beauvais, 2001; Harris, 2004). Harris (2004) observed that young women currently encompass a more generous range of individuals than in the past, including "tweenies," who are entering puberty and expressing sexual identities at younger ages, and young women in their 30s who are still in school or on uncertain paths to careers and independence. Young women of varying races, ethnicities, classes, sexualities, abilities and Aboriginal statuses fitting within this contemporary moment constitute the subject of this inquiry. Operationally, this study defines youth as being between 16 and 24 years old to correspond to the chronological age range used by municipal and provincial governments to determine eligibility for youth programs.

This research makes several original contributions to understanding young women and their working lives. First, focusing on young women workers gives young women visibility where they have previously been conceptualized as ungendered or deviant youth.
In addition, examining the provisioning experiences of young women considered “at risk” youth from their own perspectives at the site of community programs will challenge current understandings of what constitutes work.

Another unique aspect of this study is that it positions young women as actors with multi-dimensional responsibilities, some of which are acknowledged in the social construction and planning of programs and services while others are not. Methodologically, the theoretical positioning of young women as actors in the research requires a specific type of inquiry that attends to problems in the everyday world. Institutional ethnography (IE), a research strategy developed from the theoretical work of Dorothy Smith (1987; 1990a; 1999) is appropriate in this circumstance. This IE inquiry begins with provisioning experiences of young women considered “at risk” youth as the entry point into the underlying social relations that organize and coordinate young women’s activities from outside their explicit awareness, but with their active involvement. Examining the young “at risk” women’s experiences make it possible to establish the impact of community-based programs in youth employment on program participants’ lives. The methodology attempts to keep young women at the centre of the analysis without submerging their actual practices and experiential knowledge under established theories and abstract concepts that say more about what ought to be than what really is.

Finally, this study will have practical significance for practitioners of social welfare policy. Stories about “at risk” youth and young women workers are situated within the current context of welfare state restructuring. Understanding how young women’s experiences of provisioning are structured and influenced by institutional processes and practices has the potential to guide social policy approaches that do not rely on individualistic
assumptions about behaviours, intentions or motivations. Building social policies based on new understandings of what young women actually do in their working lives and how they cope with uncertainty and marginalization should result in more effective youth programs that can generate social and economic equality for all young women.

The story of “at risk” young women that this thesis tells is the story of what happens between the origins of the “at risk” youth concept and its form and practice in relation to young women in community programs. It is also a story about young women’s work. This is work that goes into and surrounds the production of the “at risk” youth concept. It is work that produces and reproduces the “at risk” youth term and its significance in and through youth workers’ activities in youth and women’s community programs. It is work that weaves together the new and historical forms of gender, race and class as social relations of power. It is the work that the “at risk” youth concept performs in the service of ruling.

Organization of the Thesis

In Chapter 2, I review the literature on women, work, youth and the welfare state to present an overview of the assumptions and consequences of neo-liberal global restructuring on women’s working lives. The feminist literature on gendering welfare states demonstrates that women’s responsibilities are increasing in both public and private spheres under neo-liberal approaches to social services provision. From the youth employment literature, I draw attention to the shortcomings of the notion of youth transitions and risk for understanding young women’s diverse experiences of work, school and family. I argue that these traditional approaches contain individualistic assumptions about young women’s career and life choices without considering how structural inequities of gender, race and class
continue to shape choices. Instead, I propose a new conceptual framework that adopts the concept of provisioning and an intersectional analysis of gender, race and class for making visible young women’s work as it occurs within broader socio-economic structures and processes of global restructuring and the local regulation of labour markets and welfare states. In Chapter 3, I outline the methodological considerations in selecting institutional ethnography (IE) as the appropriate research strategy for this study of young women. In Chapter 4, I provide a historical overview of the youth employment programs complex. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 present the findings based on interviews, document analysis and field observations. In Chapter 5, I describe and analyze the provisioning experiences of young women. In Chapter 6, I examine “at risk” youth as an ideological category that is produced administratively as youth workers struggle to balance their professional and organization commitments. In Chapter 7, I discuss gender and race as social ruling relations organizing the decision-making practices of young women, and the work processes of program workers and administrators in youth employment and women’s community-based programs. I conclude in the last chapter with implications for theory, practice and knowledge production in social work.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I review literature and theoretical approaches on women, youth, work, social policy and the welfare state. In the first half, I present the gendered consequences and assumptions of neo-liberal global restructuring on women’s lives by discussing the shifting role of the Canadian welfare state and social policy. Then I discuss feminist critiques of welfare state theory to show how women’s increased work responsibilities in both public and private spheres results from social policies which reinforce a worker/caregiver dichotomy. The feminist analyses show how the neo-liberal form of welfare restructuring depends on gender relations to organize paid and unpaid work in the public and private spheres respectively.

In the second half, I turn my focus to literature about youth and work. This review reveals that the established framework of youth transitions and its associated notion of youth “at risk” proves inadequate for studying young women. Young women manage various, sometimes contradictory, expectations in decision-making about their working lives in the current contemporary context as workers, mothers/caregivers, volunteers and citizens that the framework does not account for. I argue that the experiences of young women who are positioned across a range of social locations constitute a strategic analytic site for examining local responses and social, political, economic and cultural processes of welfare state restructuring. Drawing upon conceptual links between critical feminist welfare state perspectives and youth theories, I conclude this chapter with the proposed framework for the study, analysis and understanding of young women workers in the present context of welfare state restructuring.
Impacts of Neo-liberal Welfare Restructuring on Women’s Lives: Processes and Outcomes

The substantial changes that have occurred in the nature and approaches to Canadian social policy since the 1970s have been well documented. In these accounts, welfare state scholars confirmed that the key changes Canadian governments made in the restructuring of the welfare state were, and continue to be, inspired by a neo-liberal agenda (Burke, Moores, & Shields, 2000; McBride, 2005). Originating from classical economic theory, neo-liberalism favours minimal state interference in the lives of individuals, and free-market principles and mechanisms. Following the neo-liberal logic, Brodie (2005) described the Canadian state’s new governing philosophy as “performativity”:

This term points to the increasing tendency for the state to fashion itself as a market player rather than as the embodiment of the public sphere, the source of public goods, the greater equalizer of structural inequalities, and the expression of democratic consensus. . . . The idea of performativity marks the ascendancy of the market over the state and inside the state. This embrace of the logic of the market atrophies the public, closes political spaces and further marginalizes the economically and socially marginalized who depend on the state to redress the most adverse consequences of the capitalist economy (p. 90-91).

Practically, the Canadian state’s performativity approach to welfare state restructuring has been carried out through social policies that promote privatization, deregulation, decentralization and individualization (Brodie, 2005). Welfare state restructuring in Canada has been characterized by a series of cutbacks to social services and programs. Governments have also implemented major changes to the remaining social services and programs. In these cases, policy-makers have favoured market principles and mechanisms, and the use of private providers over public ones, to deliver, regulate and evaluate social programs. Structurally, governments have undergone decentralization whereby states transfer their power, responsibility and accountability from larger to smaller, dispersed units. Government
downsizing is considered consistent with the neo-liberal goal to minimize state influence in economic and social life.

A shift in language and discourse has accompanied the changes in the welfare state. Market-oriented language and notions of efficiency, productivity and competition have been circulating and gaining prominence and legitimacy in the public mindset. Lately, market-based ideals have been favoured in public and policy discussions even though critics questioned the relevance and application of these concepts and approaches for evaluating the delivery and quality of public goods and social services, such as education and health care (Stein, 2002). In the 1950s and 1960s, Canadians, who had experienced the Great Depression and the Second World War, supported notions of collectivity, solidarity and community. This sentiment made it possible to build a strong social safety net that provided welfare provisions to all those in need. But by the 1970s, notions of the “common good” and support for state-based social provisions fell out of favour.

In place of a “common good,” the public and government policy-makers embraced a new social norm: individualism. Critics of neo-liberal welfare restructuring directly linked the rise of individualism to social policies. For example, individualism shored the new “adult worker citizen” ideal. This citizenship model emphasizes paid employment as the primary means by which individual men and women meet their social needs. With cuts to social programs and services, and private benefits tied to waged labour, individuals were being pressured to make their own arrangements for health care, elder care, child care and education; social policies were effectively favouring “consumers with choice” over “citizens with rights.” A good number of Canadian income security programs, such as Employment Insurance and pensions, have always been linked to jobs and wages. However, in the context
of the new economy with fewer “good jobs,” and more temporary and contingent work (Vosko, 2006), a policy of “workism” (Morgen & Maskovsky, 2003) is problematic especially for groups like women and racial minorities who become further disfranchised because they have always worked but have been marginalized in the labour market. While poverty scholars and activists do not dismiss the importance of work, they argue that workism “cannot be understood outside of a broader perspective on social reproduction and the global political-economic processes that produce poverty, racial and gender inequality and the massive income polarization that has intensified in the past two decades” (Morgen and Maskovsky, 2003, p. 332). The point being made here is that the individualistic notion of workism both arises from and is supported by social policies that valorize “adult worker citizens.”

North American governments refer to the broader context of globalization to provide a rationale for workism and other neo-liberal policies; governments often claimed that the state’s performativity was the only feasible response to global political-economic processes. Globalization has generally been associated with large sums of transnational capital, the internationalization of nation states, and innovations in information, technology and communications. Locally based initiatives that deregulate local labour and financial markets, privatize social services, and downsize workforces and governments are considered necessary for promoting conditions for free-flowing global capital. Globalization is often presented by policy-makers as wide-ranging, all-encompassing and a fait accompli. This perspective effectively closes off discussion and negotiation of the terms and forms globalization can take at local levels: “. . . both globalization and restructuring are terms which imply a kind of inevitability to the policy changes which are occurring. . . . In this
sense restructuring appears apolitical and outside the purview of social analysis dealing with gender, class and racial issues” (Cohen quoted in Gabriel, 1999, p. 129).

Upon closer scrutiny, it appears that North American governments’ rationale for neo-liberal policy approaches is based on a particular view of globalization, which is contestable. With a focus on global markets and capital, neo-liberal globalization privileges economic discourses for policy development. Within this framework, policy-makers promise individuals that personal wealth will follow from economic growth. Proponents of economic growth have critics who doubt whether a neo-liberal version of growth, which does not develop human potential, meet real needs, promote democratic processes or revere natural resources and environments, could ever be sustainable, or could even produce any real, “qualitative” wealth for people (Dierckxsens, 2000; Milani, 2000).¹

Globalization theorists from a variety of disciplines contend that globalization involves more than economic processes and that globalization outcomes are far from inevitable. These scholars view globalization as a highly complex, multi-faceted phenomenon encompassing not only economic, but also social, political and cultural processes (Appadurai, 1996; Giddens, 2000; Harvey, 1989; Teeple, 2000). Globalization has also been used to refer to multiple and contradictory discourses, as well as actual historical contemporary processes that take distinctive forms across geographies and have differential impacts for different groups of people (Brah, 2002). Pointing out the gendered aspects of global/local restructuring, Marchand and Runyan (2000) prefer the term “global restructuring” over globalization to emphasize the active processes of “breaking down an older order and constructing a new one,” and the multidimensional, multi-speed and disjunctive nature of the processes (p. 7).
Collectively, critics of neo-liberal globalization suggest that local and national governments still retain choices about how to respond to global pressures, and that the production of inequities between and among different groups within and across nations is by no means inevitable. Furthermore, while economics are an integral component of globalization, globalization is not reducible to economic terms. Social policies and welfare state restructuring at local levels play a substantial role in mediating the impacts of globalization by shaping local conditions that help determine the nature of the relationship between social and economic goals in Canada.

During the 1990s in Canada, the local impacts of globalization mediated through welfare restructuring manifested in patterns of increased marginalization and poverty (Frenette, Green, & Picot, 2004). Provincial governments have histories of setting social assistance benefit rates well below poverty levels, making it difficult, if not impossible, for social assistance recipients to have a decent standard of living (National Council of Welfare, 2006). Recent reforms to social assistance in Ontario have resulted in reduced benefit rates, tighter eligibility criteria and workfare requirements (Herd, 2002). Researchers have documented the failure of the new service delivery model to actually provide financial and employment assistance to people in need; instead, they argued that the new system aims to decrease caseloads while providing a surveillance and deterrence function (Herd, Mitchell, & Lightman, 2005). The number of working poor has been increasing. Workers face increasing economic vulnerability in unstable, insecure, non-standard employment situations (Chaykowski, March 2005), which include new forms of paternalistic labour systems such as sweatshops and home working. Home work is considered potentially exploitative to large
numbers of mainly immigrant women who work under isolated conditions within patriarchal relations in the family home (Ng, 1998).

As a group, women are especially disadvantaged by trends in welfare restructuring. Despite gains in workplaces and professional fields, women in Canada continue to experience gender wage gaps and occupational segregation in female-dominated professions (Statistics Canada, 2005). Low-wage working women in particular are adversely affected by “workism” and privatization of social services, because they cannot afford to purchase quality care for their children and dependants in the marketplace, and with service cutbacks, there is a shortage of publicly funded, accessible care options available. Even though women are expected nowadays to work outside the home, unpaid care work remains largely their responsibility. Racial minority women are generally worse off in terms of inequitable labour market outcomes compared to other groups of workers (Khosla, 2003), making their care responsibilities even more onerous (George, 1998).

Women are also impacted by privatization as employees (nurses, teachers, child care and social workers) in state-organized caring institutions. One of the changes in social work resulting from programs and services pressured to produce market-oriented “efficiencies” has been the technocratization of work processes and “Taylorization” of complex counselling functions (Dominelli, 1999). This deskilling, together with the loss of public-sector jobs, has negative impacts specifically for women, not only because the state traditionally employs a large share of women workers, but also because public-sector jobs tend to be better paid and are more likely to come with benefits and union protection than private-sector ones (Fuller, 2005).
To summarize, the story of neo-liberal welfare state restructuring has been about the strength of economics and markets, and the weakness of the welfare state to provide and deliver social programs and services within a globalized context. Gender and racial inequalities, if acknowledged at all, are portrayed as unfortunate consequences of global forces acting beyond anyone's local control. The next section draws on feminist analyses of welfare states to explain how social policies are arranged in such a way that women end up with increased workloads and responsibilities as a result of restructuring.

**Critical Feminist Perspectives on Women, Work and Welfare States**

It should be clear from the outset that there is no singular feminist theory; there are potentially as many feminist theories of welfare states as there are theories of the state. However, for the purpose of this discussion, I focus on themes and concepts that most frequently animate feminist debates on welfare state trends and restructuring. Having said that, much of the literature reviewed in this section comes from a tradition of critical feminism. At the heart of all feminisms is the assumption that gender is an organizing principle in society. The critical tradition is concerned with the construction of social realities and inequities. This perspective directs me to ask: first, how do social structures and processes of neo-liberal restructuring create and support normative views that result in global and social inequities, and secondly, how does gender inform these debates?

**Intersectionality of Gender, Race and Class**

Feminists' main contribution to theoretical debates about work and welfare states has been to insist on gender as the key factor for analyzing social phenomena. Feminists conceptualize gender as a system of shared cultural and historical meanings about the behaviours, attitudes
and feelings associated with characteristics of maleness and femaleness; as such, gender is a social category that is neither biologically based nor essentialist in form. Although gender is socially constructed, it is also a social relation of power that positions women subordinate to men in patriarchal societies with social structures, practices and processes that value and reward characteristics attributed to men (e.g. aggressiveness, rationality, independence) more highly than those attributed to women (e.g. passivity, emotionality, nurturance) (Connell, 1987; Kimmel, 2000).

Earlier studies on women and work addressed the impact of patriarchal norms on women’s work by focusing on inequalities between men and women in the labour market in terms of access to paid work, gender wage gap, occupational segregation in “pink” or “blue” collar work, access to unions, experiences of sexual harassment and the effects of pay and employment equity (Cohen, 1995). More recently, researchers have examined gender differences in new, non-standard employment trends including self-employment (K. Hughes, 2005), temporary/contingent work (Vosko, 2006) and work/life balance (Duxbury, Higgins, & Coghill, 2003). The results of studies such as these supported feminist claims of sexism in workplaces. Other studies examined women’s work within new, emerging occupational sectors facilitated by technology (Mirchandani, 2004; Scott-Dixon, 2004).

As they were examining gender differences in the labour market, feminists engaged in theorizing women’s work. When gender was not featured centrally in theories of work, women’s work experiences appeared distorted, or else the interpretation of the experience was somehow inaccurate. Feminists found that this occurred because women and women’s experiences were being compared to male standards. To address the failure of male-centred theories to explain women’s experiences, feminist scholars attempted to understand women’s
work from women’s perspectives (Pat Armstrong & Armstrong, 1990; Hochschild, 2003; Luxton, 2001). Some of these analyses began to recognize the importance of women’s unpaid work. Baines, Evans and Neysmith (1998) edited an influential collection of articles which analyzed gendered assumptions of women’s care work, defined as “the mental, emotional, and physical effort involved in looking after, responding to, and supporting others” (p. 11), and its impact on women and their relationship to the welfare state.

While mainstream feminists rallied against ungendered theories of work, women of colour scholars and activists began to question feminist analyses that privileged patriarchy as the primary source of oppression for women workers. These anti-racist feminists observed that Third World/women of colour experienced a qualitatively different and specific kind of oppression from their position as racial minority women workers that cannot be adequately accounted for by patriarchy. Theories that universalized women’s White, middle-class experiences were problematic, because they did not account for race or racism, and thus did not adequately explain racial minority women’s experiences. Anti-racist feminists pointed to historical examples, when during slavery, Black women toiled alongside Black men doing hard, physical chores. Black women were never protected from work by ideals of domestic White femininity which encouraged White, middle-class women to stay home and care for their babies (Fox-Genovese, 1988). Demonstrating Black women’s consistent participation in paid employment since slavery in the United States, Jones (1985) refuted the “reserve army of labour” theory to explain women’s sporadic work patterns. Instead, she and others, like Glenn (2002), pointed out how the American capitalist economy historically depended on Black and racial minority women as a reliable and cheap source of labour.
The assumption in the 1970s of second-wave middle-class White feminists' that women’s access to paid employment was key to the liberation of women, proved highly problematic for working-class, poor and racial minority women. These groups of women had always worked outside the home, and for them, liberation meant having the means that would enable them to stop working because the low-skilled, low-paid, back-breaking work they did was anything but liberating (Collins, 2000). Contemporary research on racial minority women’s lived experiences of work demonstrates various and specific manifestations of racist sexism (or sexist racism) across occupations, places and time (Calliste, 1993; Das Gupta, 1996; Essed, 1990; Hossfeld, 1993; Mirchandani, 2003; Weber & Higginbotham, 1997).

The “intersectionality” or “interlocking systems of oppression” framework (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1998; Dua, 1999; Glenn, 2002) developed to incorporate both gender and race as socially constructed, interconnected relational concepts into the same analytic framework. A relational approach means that gender cannot be understood separately from other social dimensions such as race, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality and age. The main point of intersectionality is that scholars who theorize women’s work should examine patterns of privilege and oppression, and the systematic connections that produce similarities and differences across and within gender and racial groups. For feminist welfare state scholars, intersectionality meant that they should examine the processes of gendered racialization (or racialized gendering) that have occurred, and are occurring, within welfare restructuring discourses and debates. In other words, the analyses should incorporate both gendered outcomes based on social location of women resulting from social policy changes, and gender relations that produce those outcomes.
Gendering the Welfare State: Production of Worker/Caregiver Dichotomy

The major concern of feminist welfare state theorists is how gender shapes welfare states and also how welfare states support or challenge established gender hierarchies through social policies (Daly, 2003; O'Connor, et al. 1999; Orloff, 1996; Pascall, 1997; Williams, 1989). The “welfare state” is typically and ideally conceptualized as a set of structures, programs, practices and relations having some role in modifying social or market forces, which it does by redistributing income and providing programs and services. In their critiques of traditional welfare state theories, feminists object to the ways in which concepts such as the public and the private spheres, work and dependency masquerade as ungendered notions in welfare restructuring debates. Instead, feminists propose frameworks and concepts that can account for the gendered ways that social policies structure women’s work experiences within and across the sites of state, market and family. In their attempts to make women and gender visible in relation to welfare states, feminists effectively offer an alternative perspective about the nature, role and functioning of the welfare state in restructuring processes.

Feminist theorists generally oppose a traditional liberal political view of the state as a static, neutral structure that is without any agenda on gender. These scholars take issue with the assumption that all citizens, as individuals with formal citizenship status, have equal opportunity to fully access their social, political and civic rights and exercise certain freedoms (e.g. religion) by law. Feminists pointed out that historically, during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in North America, women had few claims to citizenship under patriarchal social arrangements (Kessler-Harris, 2001). Women lacked access to education, property rights, voting and paid employment. Their lives and activities
were restricted to the private sphere of the home, where they were economically dependent on their spouses. Women were disfranchised by a social system that reserved rights of citizenship for individuals (usually males) who were deemed “independent” and who were considered actors in the public realm. Poor or racial minority men and women were not considered independent—however, they worked outside the home—therefore, they were prevented from exercising their full citizenship rights in other ways. For these groups, exclusionary mechanisms such as coercive and discriminatory labour practices were used to control their actions and movements (Glenn, 2002).

Recent transitional feminist scholars of citizenship theory attempted to redefine the basis and sites (local, national, state or supra state) from which women are able to negotiate their access and rights to citizenship in the current globalized context (Lister, 1997; Stasiulis & Bakan, 2005; Yuval-Davis, 1999). This transnational feminist literature has examined the interconnected issues of immigration, labour, gender and globalization. These intellectual projects seem all the more urgent as North Americans witness the influx of migrant racial minority women workers from poor countries (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2003) whose legal status as citizens in their home country provides them with few guarantees to rights and protections as workers in the host (wealthy) country. As part of this phenomenon, Third World women also find themselves vulnerable to sex trafficking in “survival circuits,” which Sassen (2000) understands as “counter-geographies of globalization” imbricated with global markets and transnational networks. Feminist analyses of the gendered aspects of citizenship have shown that the state produces exclusionary effects through its construction of citizens and non-citizens. They argue that because the state has mediated, and continues to mediate, gendered and racialized migration patterns linked to global imbalances through labour and immigration
policies, it remains a relevant site from which to analyze its restructuring efforts which are
tied to global contexts, and the worldwide need for cheap labour.

_Women's Work is Done Everywhere_

Examining social policies provides one way of assessing how gender shapes welfare states.
In her review of international feminist analyses of social policies, Orloff (1996) separated the
literature on gender and social policy into two camps: the first supports the claim that the
welfare state actively reproduces gender hierarchy using three main mechanisms—gender
division of labour, family wage/male breadwinner model and traditional marriage—all of
which assume a male primary breadwinner and a female dependent domestic caregiver; and
the second suggests that the welfare state can ameliorate social inequalities mainly by
protecting women from poverty. Having established these main approaches, Orloff went on
to explain that neither fully captures the full complexity of policy variation: she explained:

. . . the first assumes uniformity, while the second attends only to one, linear
dimension of variation (generosity of benefits or levels of social spending). Moreover,
their analytic focus makes it difficult to identify women’s activity in policymaking.
More recently, two new strands of research have emerged from theoretically informed
comparative and/or historical analyses of gender and social policies, emphasizing the
variation in the effects of social policies on gender: Male dominance is not
necessarily reproduced; indeed, it is often transformed. Some amelioration is possible,
although it is sometimes coupled with greater regulation by the state (Orloff, 1996, p.
56).

Several Canadian examples substantiate the observation that social policies have
positive intentions and positive effects for gender equality. For example, the intent of labour
policies that address “work/life balance” such as maternal/paternal benefits, caregiver leave,
child care programs and flexible work arrangements is to facilitate women’s participation in
paid employment; the intent of pay equity is to equalize gender wage differentials; the intent
of employment equity is to improve the status of women and other disadvantaged groups in
the workplace (see Human Resources Development Canada, 2002, for review and details of policies addressing gender equality in the labour market). These policies have had some success in raising awareness of gender issues in workplaces, and do provide limited supports for working women. Yet they generally do not go far enough to achieve gender equality.

Policy analysts have suggested a number of reasons why current employment-related policies have been ineffective at achieving gender equality. In their assessment of Canadian employment equity and pay equity policies, England & Gad (2002) argued that if these policies were to be truly effective, they must be part of an integrated training and family policy approach: Without a comprehensive range of programs to address women’s training, opportunities for skill development, job assignments and masculinized workplace cultures, and without commitment to policy compliance and enforcement, equitable outcomes will be unattainable. Based on her ethnographic study, Grahame (2003) argued that work/life balance policies, albeit from the United States, do not meet their intended goal because they rely on the “Standard North American Family” with its White, middle-class norm. Even when maternal/paternal caregiving or medical leave policies are made available to workers, they are not accessible to families that cannot survive on a single income or that have only one income earner, which is the case for poor immigrant and lone mother headed families. While examining tax policy as a mechanism to address child care issues, Freiler, Kitchen, Stair & Cerny (2001) found that as it stands now, the Canada Child Tax Benefit, which is supposed to help low-income families, is being clawed back from families on social assistance, and the Child Care Tax Deduction, which is available only to employed parents as compensation for costs of earning incomes, does not enable parents to claim expenses for unpaid child care (usually done by women). Neither provision directly addresses child care,
since there is no national program of universally accessible and affordable child care. The authors argued that a future policy agenda must support women as earners and carers in a way that links tax fairness and gender equality with a broader set of social justice and policy objectives.

While specific issues of policy scope, implementation, access and uneven outcomes challenge the achievement of gender equality, these technical details are symptomatic of a larger problematic assumption of policy arrangements and program structures; namely, the assumption of gender-neutral workers. This assumption prevents social policies from adequately addressing women’s caregiving. Yet women’s caregiving role and responsibilities are known to have significant impacts on women’s work lives (Pat Armstrong & Armstrong, 2005). Although women’s caregiving is no longer associated with women’s assumed biological, natural affiliation toward this type of work, and while gender norms have changed, they have not shifted to the extent that care work has ceased to be defined in feminine terms. The gender division of labour where women are primarily responsible for care work is reinforced through employment policies that are ineffective at promoting an equitable distribution of care work. In addition, global trade, development and structural adjustment policies are reproducing gendered and racialized divisions of labour that leave poor and Third World women at the bottom of hierarchies of reproductive work worldwide (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001; Parreñas, 2005).

Policies that reinforce gender inequality via a gender division of labour depend on the construction of the public and private spheres as distinct and separate. Work is conceptualized as either productive, paid labour or reproductive, usually unpaid, care work; the former occurs in the public sphere, the latter in the private one. Feminist theorists have
remarked that the socially constructed, gendered nature of the public/private dichotomy has served to discount and devalue activities conducted, usually by women, in the family or domestic sphere as private matters, and thus not appropriate for public debate or state intervention (Okin, 1998). Some feminists have argued that understanding how welfare restructuring policies define the public/private boundary is key to recognizing how women, whose caregiving duties and work lives straddle both public and private spheres, get saddled with increased workloads as care labour is shifted from the public to the private realm (Pat Armstrong, 2005; Aronson, 2004). The public/private split has been especially problematic for Black and racial minority women, because the denial of their family life and responsibilities as socially relevant and important justified their exploitation in the labour force (Collins, 2000; Glenn, 2002; Jones, 1985).

Conceptually, associating work with either the public or private sphere provides a limited understanding of work since it excludes certain types of work, like volunteering, and it becomes impossible to analyze the interconnections and interdependencies between the two spheres and the work that gets done within them (R. F. Taylor, 2004). Thus, if social policies are going to contribute toward gender equality, they must cease to support the existing gender division of labour, and at the same time, re-conceptualize work that better reflects the realities of women’s work as a wide range of activities performed in and across the public and private spheres (Neysmith & Reitsma-Street, 2005).

*Moving Work Around and Regulating Private Lives*

Esping-Andersen’s seminal work on the “three worlds” typology of welfare regimes was a widely used comparative approach that responded to the question of how gender shapes welfare states (Esping-Andersen, 1999). States were grouped based on similar criteria:
degree of social rights, stratification, and relations between state, market and family. Initially, feminists found the typology useful for recognizing that the different welfare regime types—liberal, corporatist and social democratic—were not equally “women friendly” (Hernes, 1988). Feminists have also used a policy regime approach for conducting gender analyses of the relationships between states and societies. Considering how welfare production is allocated between state, market and households provided feminists with insights about the role of private income sources and services in producing patterns of dependencies and power within states in similar or different welfare regime types (Sainsbury, 1999). Although the comparative approach stimulated a fair amount of discussion and research, the applicability of the framework has been challenged based on its inability to account for the centrality of gender relations (O’Connor, Orloff, & Shaver, 1999), the impacts of global economies on local governance and the trend toward reassessing the validity and significance of the nation-state (Walby, 2003).

The concepts that appeared in Esping-Andersen-inspired analyses still remain relevant, although slightly evolved for the current context. Esping-Andersen was mainly concerned with how social welfare policies such as pensions, social insurance, social assistance and employment standards affected class relations by granting workers social rights that enable “de-commodification” or lessened dependence on markets. His later focus on women’s employment led him to ponder how welfare regimes’ “commodification” of services through the market and state helps women to reconcile caregiving responsibilities with workforce participation (Esping-Andersen, 1999).

Feminists maintained that the processes and concepts of de-commodification/ commodification and independence/dependence are not neutral but rather gendered notions
complicated by the unequal division of unpaid work (Ostner, 1994). On the one hand, women perform the bulk of caregiving not only in families but also as paid care workers in state- and market-based care institutions like hospitals, schools and social services; shifting and privatizing the responsibility for care impacts all groups of women. On the other hand, women have access to different family and private resources depending on their social location; this shift in work will adversely impact some women more than others (Aronson, 2004).

In her critique of how economic institutions organize and reward care labour, Folbre (2001) questioned whether it is even possible to view care as a commodity, because the (relational) nature of care work, which is intensive, and cannot (or perhaps should not) be standardized or depersonalized, means that people cannot rely on market forces to purchase care as they would, say, to buy a car or computer technology. When competition is introduced into care industries, decreasing cost is not a reasonable response, since this would directly impact the quality of care, but current measures of economic success do not accurately account for quality of care nor does it fully gauge beneficial effects of care labour on society. What is really at issue is not the commodification of care, but the devaluation of care. Currently, policy arrangements devalue care work by failing to support women for the unpaid care work they do in the private sphere, and poorly compensating paid care work done in the public sphere. Women are penalized further when they are obliged to take employment under the adult worker citizen model in order to gain access to social services and provisions, or are forced to do so under workfare requirements.

Currently, feminist research has continued to elaborate how women’s dependent status has been constructed and reinforced by states in various ways through policies that
intrude into women's private lives. For example, Mink (2003) documented how welfare policies in the United States promoted marriage to poor, dependent single mothers on welfare. The solution of marriage (besides regulating women's sexuality) linked women's poverty to poor choices that they made in their private lives, and not to the limitations posed by financial insecurity and the lack of support for raising children. Furthermore, Mink observed that the disproportionate number of women of colour who are poor meant that welfare marriage proposals, in effect, re-establish racial hierarchies by withdrawing rights and enforcing and privatizing the poverty of unwed racial minority women. From the area of child welfare, Swift (1995) documented how the category of neglect allowed the state to apprehend children of poor, dependent mothers whose conditions of deprivation, which included not having enough food, living in substandard shelter, not having access to adequate child care, or clothing allowances and generally living in impoverished environments, were imposed by the state. These conditions made parenting extremely challenging and set these mothers up as failed caregivers. The late Native legal scholar Kline observed how the child welfare system naturalized the removal of Native children from families and communities primarily through the assessment and construction of native women as "bad mothers" based on the dominant ideology of motherhood as a natural, individual, independent responsibility of women in heterosexual nuclear families. At the same time that policies govern women's intimate choices, in some cases making her vulnerable to violent and abusive domestic situations, "workfare" requirements call for women's mandatory participation in employment with few, if any, resources for caregiving, as a criterion for state support (Orloff, 2002)

Studies that examined links between mothering, reproductive practices and welfare policies have shown that women's dependency on the state has led to regulation,
moralization and stigmatization of poor women (Bashevkin, 2002; Little, 1998), yet women’s dependency on men (husbands) in private spaces of families and households remains socially acceptable (Misra, Moller, & Karides, 2003). By focusing on alleviating women’s dependency on the state, policy-makers have overlooked the assumption underlying independence as the ideal and normative basis for making citizenship claims to rights and social services. Young (1997) pointed out that state policy regimes fail to specify whether independence means being autonomous, having the ability to make choices, or self-sufficiency, not needing help from others. She argued that the former should be the right of all citizens, whereas the latter would likely disadvantage women who experience gender inequities in labour market and extra work burdens under the gender division of labour.

When one sense of the term stands for the other, women are either unduly punished for their caregiving responsibilities, or their choices about intimate relations and decisions about home life are severely regulated. Feminists have recognized that for women to experience autonomy in both the public and private spheres, they would require material and social supports for their caregiving responsibilities:

A society that recognizes all its members as equal citizens and expects them all to make meaningful contribution must recognize and support the contribution of dependency work and publicly support many other opportunities for making social contributions (Young, 1997, p. 133).

**Toward Gender Equality: Provisioning across Public and Private Spheres**

Feminist theorists have highlighted the critical importance of reassessing foundational concepts hitherto thought to accurately reflect and explain standard practices and social phenomena. The reviewed literature and debates about gender and welfare states point to tensions in social policies that produce a worker/caregiver dichotomy which reinforces
women’s “double day” under restructuring. Historically, women’s caring role had been assumed in social policies and programs. The difficulties women have recently encountered as they become breadwinners and workers have resulted from the shift in social policy from “male breadwinner” to “gender neutral worker” without subsequent “defamilization” of social welfare policies, which would lessen the caring burden of women in families (Hobson, Lewis, & Siim, 2003). As it stands now, policy arrangements address one or the other side of the breadwinner/caregiver dichotomy (albeit not to a full extent) but not both. Fraser (1997) suggested that even their idealized form, neither the women’s breadwinning (Universal Breadwinner) nor caregiving (Caregiver Parity) policy model, performed optimally against a multi-dimensional understanding of gender equity. Instead, she proposed a Universal Caregiver model that begins with the assumption that all workers—men and women—have responsibilities and need support for caregiving activities. Fraser’s model promotes gender equity by dismantling the breadwinner/caregiver dichotomy; it imagines a social world that integrates and recognizes a full range of activities and participation in work, family and community.

Feminist economists have proposed a way of rethinking work as provisioning, which this study beings to explore for its potential to support an integrated approach to women’s work and responsibilities. Provisioning is defined as the work of securing resources and providing the necessities of life to those for whom one has relationships of responsibility (Barker, 2005; Nelson, 1998; Neysmith et al., 2004; Power, 2004). It views work as a range of activities that neither links care labour specifically to reproduction nor assumes caring is without material consequences. Provisioning provides the potential for breaking down the division of economic and familial/social activities, located respectively in public and private
spheres. As such, it has the capacity to capture the wide range of work that women do in homes, communities and workplaces to survive and strive in the current economy.

Perhaps most importantly, provisioning activities have a purposeful orientation. Provisioning activities are meaningful activities performed for ourselves and others in the context of relationships. The relational aspect of provisioning is particularly useful when applied to the analysis of care work. For example, Aronson and Neysmith (1996) documented negative consequences to patients in the Ontario home care system when policy-makers implemented cost-cutting measures that restricted and compartmentalized duties and tasks performed by paid home care workers in such a way that they were no longer had time to build trusting relationships with their clients, which directly impacted on the quality of care work provided. Instead of focusing exclusively on the end product and/or profit of work, provisioning enables a focus on the relational aspects in which work is performed in different contexts.

Feminist theorists have offered other frameworks that may be of value for understanding connections between women’s work processes and practices, on one hand, and welfare states and social policy on the other. Glucksmann (2000) proposed an “economy of time” for considering temporal dimensions of women’s work within a framework based on the “total social organization of labour.” Glazer’s (1993) “work transfer” model explained the impact of shifting work tasks from paid workers to unpaid family members (usually women as wives/mothers/daughters/daughters-in-law) on women in two female-dominated service industries of health and retail as a response to the economic crisis brought on by the limits of capitalism. Other frameworks centralize deskilling, Taylorization, flexible employment or capabilities approaches (Lewis & Giullari, 2005). The selection and
privileging of provisioning as the methodological starting point for this study—as Power (2004) says, “starting places matters” (p. 4)—by no means excludes the usefulness or validity of these and other models. Indeed, it is expected that they share areas of commonality that will likely constitute points of intersection from which theorists can begin to develop a comprehensive set of principles for creative, innovative analysis of women’s work, gender, social policy and welfare states.

Youth Literatures

Generally, feminist critiques of welfare state theories reviewed above were developed based on studies of situations pertaining to mature or adult women workers. If young women were included in studies of women workers, they were not positioned theoretically at the forefront of the analyses. My goal in this section is to locate young women workers in the current state of knowledge as it is informed by studies of young workers and young women.

Studies of Young Workers and Young Women: Transitions and Risk

Often studies of young women begin with some discussion of who exactly is a “young woman” (Harris, 2004). Generally, people think of youth as a biologically based, chronological, developmental life cycle stage that people go through somewhere between the mid-teens and the mid-twenties. The problem with this age-specific understanding of youth is that the age boundaries are often fluid. Before the “discovery” of adolescence (often credited to Stanley Hall (1925) at the turn of the century), there were no youth at all, just children and adults. Nowadays, “youth” can apply to a person from the early “tweenies” up to the 30s. In a recent collection on girlhood issues, Jiwani et al. (2006) pointed to the different uses, overlapping definitions and contradictory meanings of “girl”, which they took
to signify the complexity of girlhood as a concept and identity. In a collection about young women’s feminism, Mitchell et al. (2001) wanted to call attention to the significance of youth terminology but also to acknowledge the concerns and difficulty of accurately describing women’s identities and relationships based on specific definitions of young and old. They said:

“Young” and “old” are ambiguous terms that we use tentatively because of often negative connotations associated with them. We simply want to point to the generational differences between feminist women while avoiding the characterization of young women as inexperienced and older women as experts, or young women as necessarily innovative and older women as “has-beens” (p. 17).

Although social scientists may never know a “typical girl”, because there is no such person (Griffin, 1985), Harris (2004) insists that researchers can still make general statements about young women as a group within historically specific locations: “This is not because they share enduring, inherent characteristics, but because we continue to make meaning, and symbolic and material use, of girls as a category” (p. 192). Girlhood scholars remain committed toward understanding the social factors, structures and relations that shape and define the social category of young women and understanding what these processes reveal about how society has developed and is developing to maintain existing inequities in the current globalized world.

While girlhood studies is a relatively recent academic speciality, youth have been studied by scholars in disciplines such as psychology, anthropology, sociology, criminology, and education for quite some time (some recent reviews and collections of youth research include Bennet, Cieslik, & Miles, 2003; Bucholtz, 2002; Cieslik & Pollock, 2002; Gauthier & Pacom, 2001; Wyn & Harris, 2004). Youth scholars have used various approaches to study their subject; for example, they study youth as a developmental life stage, youth
cultures and identities, youth transitions, and youth deviances. More recently, studies have focused on issues of youth engagement/empowerment and youth citizenship (Beauvais, 2001; Hall & Coffey, 2007; Helve, 2001).

Despite differences in frameworks and thematic foci, studies of youth have a common tendency to fit youth into one of two polar opposite categories: problem or potential. On one hand, youth have been viewed as deviants who cause social problems related to sex, drugs and violence; youth cultures have been viewed as a threat against traditional social and moral values (Danesi, 2003; Males, 2001). Debates ensued over the legitimacy of various models which that been proposed to explain problems of youth, growing up and deviant behaviour as a hormonally, culturally, or societally induced time of stress. On the other hand, youth have often been portrayed in a positive light, especially in studies that focus on the potential of youth as well-educated global citizens and workers of tomorrow. The affirmation of youth may not be surprising, considering that this body of youth research has been conducted within the context of an ageist North American culture and society that glorifies youthfulness in many ways.

The theme of youth as being a problem or having potential arises in studies of youth and work. The research and theoretical literature about youth and work is heavily influenced by the psychosocial, developmental-based youth transitions approach. This framework emphasizes the completion of a sequence of tasks at particular stages in life. Ordinarily, young people progress through what are considered normal and natural transitions of finishing school, getting a job, moving out and starting a family. According to this model, all youth navigate transition pathways and trajectories in a linear, orderly and predictable process of “growing up.” Youth problems occur when young people experience difficulties
moving through transitions. Research in the area of youth transitions generally focuses on understanding youth transitions as a way of helping young people overcome problems so that they can reach their potential as productive workers with successful careers.

Starting in the late 1980s through to the 1990s, researchers documented trends in youth transitions that revolved around issues of schooling, education and employment patterns (Crysdale, King, & Mandell, 1999; Krahn, 1996; Thiessen, 2001). Some studies drew attention to how characteristics such as education levels, gender, visible minority traits, socio-economic status and other demographic variables impacted youth participation, employment and unemployment rates; others examined the nature of youth jobs in terms of wages, occupations and sectors/industries, timing and length of transitions from school to work, barriers for young women and opportunities for rural youth (Andres, 2002; Campolieti et al., 2005; Forum of Labour Market Ministers, 2000; Kunz, 2003; Looker & Thiessen, 2004; Mortimer, 2003)

Youth scholars also debated the nature and relevancy of youth transitions in the context of risk society (Dwyer & Wyn, 2001; Furlong & Cartmel, 1997), the political economy (Cote & Allahar, 1994; Marquardt, 1998), the influence of diversity among youth and socio-economic factors on youth transitions (Lowe & Krahn, 1999; Skelton, 2002), the impacts of social exclusion on the dynamics of youth unemployment as a transition phrase (Kieselbach, 2003; Weil et al., 2005), and the function and role of youth transition in comparative youth study (Bynner, 2001). Notwithstanding this debate and critique, the youth transitions framework maintains a prominent position in terms of its ability to inform youth employment programs, policy and research in the North American and international context (Elder & Schmidt, 2004; Gauthier & Pacom, 2001; Roberts, 2003).
Young people who experience problems with their transitions from school to work, referred to as youth “at risk,” are often the subject of research. Youth “at risk” is a catch-all phrase used to describe a wide range of young people and the problems they might face. Youth have been thought of as being “at risk” of committing crime or becoming homeless, drug-addicted, underemployed or unemployed (especially for long periods of time). In terms of young workers, early school-leavers (i.e. high school dropouts) are often deemed “at risk” since skills and formal education are considered the keys to success in securing jobs. The Forum of Labour Market Ministers (2000) also considered youth who are poor, live with single parents or no parents, or parents with low levels of education in poor neighbourhoods as being “at risk.” In addition, youth who are Aboriginal, visible minority, recent immigrants or who have disabilities are considered “at risk.” The intention of research on youth “at risk” in the area of school-to-work transitions and employment has been to define relevant risk factors and assess the extent to which they predict who will likely experience difficulty finding and securing long-term employment.

The impetus for using an “at risk” framework may be due to its perceived usefulness in describing who among young people are more likely to become “at risk” so that preventive measures and targeted interventions can applied. However, in reality, the risk factors predict neither who within a group will actually experience difficult school-to-work transitions nor why. This is partly because youth “at risk” is a term that has encompassed a range of structural factors and individual characteristics too wide to be of much analytic use. The vagueness of the concept prevents theorists from locating young women’s work or making sense of their experiences in the context of contemporary life.
Despite its limited potential for predicting youth outcomes, youth “at risk” remains a concept that warrants interrogation, not so much for how it is defined but rather for how research and policy debates use the notion to attribute certain assumptions about youth, young women and youth problems.Commenting on risk-based research, youth sociologists argued that the division of a minority “at risk” group against the majority “mainstream” effectively “ignore[s] uncertainties and risk which all teenagers have in common due to the far-reaching social and economic changes affecting their lives” (Dwyer & Wyn, 2001, p. 56). Bessant et al. (2003) suggested that policy-makers have become preoccupied with vulnerable populations who are targets of this research: “Risk based research is part of a disciplinary practice that involves marking out those viewed as posing an actual or potential threat to social order and applying regulatory strategies to them” (p. 122). Using Foucault’s concept of governmentality, Kelly (2001) argued that the youth at risk discourse represents attempts by welfare state governments to make individual young people, families and communities responsible for managing a diverse range of institutionally generated risks. Pointing out the problematic assumptions of studying youth at risk to understand youth problems, Kelly (2001) has recommended that instead, these issues be framed as a “politics of risk.” It is imagined that gender and racial relations and dimension permeate these politics.

Shortcomings of Youth Transitions for Studying Young Women

Young women have been the topic of a substantial body of literature, especially from the sociological and psychological traditions (for example, McRobbie, 2000; Pipher, 1994; J. M. Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1997). Although some authors acknowledge the rise of ‘can-do’ girls (Harris, 2004), studies have tended to stress young women’s vulnerability, thus they
are mostly situated in the problem camp of the youth-problem or youth-potential dichotomy. Studies of young women’s problems have focused mostly on girl-specific issues of teen pregnancy, body image, girl culture and identity, sexuality, girl gangs, and girl-on-girl violence (Brown, 2003; Driscoll, 2002; Frost, 2001; Kaplan, 1997; Mazzarella & Pecora, 2000; White, 2002). Critical ethnographers (Bettie, 2003; Mirza, 1992) investigated young women’s educational high school experiences, and Fenwick (2004), an education scholar, examined the links between young women’s learning (mainly vocational education) and work in the new economy. But few have focused centrally on young women’s work experiences.3

Two main shortcomings of the youth literature for studying young people’s experiences under welfare state restructuring have specific ramifications for young women workers. First, the popular youth transitions framework fails to account for social contextual and structural factors that impact young women’s behaviours, experiences and choices in the current labour market. Secondly, youth transitions do not adequately account for how gender and race relations shape young women’s changing experiences of work, school and family life in contemporary times. Youth sociologists have argued that since the 1970s, significant social and economic changes have affected young people’s relationships to the labour market, the education system, the family and the welfare state (Cieslik & Pollock, 2002; Dwyer & Wyn, 2001; Furlong & Cartmel, 1997). Nowadays, young people face increasing social and economic instability and employment barriers from restructured youth labour markets, insecure jobs and high levels of unemployment, increased education and training credential requirements, and changing family formations. As well, young people no longer display a single pattern of labour-force entry. Many combine school and work, staying in school and

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living at home longer. Some young adults, known as boomerang kids may go out to work but experience occasional or repeated spells of living at home with their parents (Mitchell & Gee, 1996; Statistics Canada, 2002). As a result, it is taking longer for young people to proceed from school to full-time, stable employment. They experience more problems, or at least, they experience problems different from those of previous generations. By examining the features and experiences of young men in apprenticeship programs in the UK, Vickerstaff’s study challenged the notion that transitions from school to work were smooth, one-step and unproblematic in the past “golden age” (mid-1940s to mid-1970s). Writing a historical account of “coming of age” trends for Canadian youth from the mid-nineteenth to the late-twentieth centuries, Marquardt (1998) challenged the assumption that “growing up” was ever a straightforward, problem-free process but rather one that has involved the push-and-pull factors of different social institutions, practices, and gender and class-based beliefs about family, work and education at the time.

Within the current historical and social context of restructured labour markets of North America, theorists need to reconsider an overly optimistic, uncritical assessment of the “feminization of work,” which supposedly marks young women’s successful transition and their advancements in education and employment. However, this increase in women’s labour market participation and the movement of women into management is taking place at a time of shifting occupational hierarchies. Now, men who used to be managers occupy even higher-ranking positions in the elite executive class in “global cities” (Sassen, 1998), where centralized management and control processes created a few highly skilled technical positions and an enormous number of specialized service jobs, which are often taken up by Third World women and youth workers. This means that at the lower end of the hierarchy,
the “feminization of the labour market” may actually reflect a decline in men’s labour market positions. It may not be the case that women are getting better jobs, but that there is more lowly paid, women’s work (characterized as part-time, casual, low-end, low-paid and unskilled) for men (Armstrong, 1996).

Theorizing youth transitions as increasingly diverse and complex in the “post-industrial,” “late- or post-modern” or “risk” society fails to account for how and why persistent structural inequities are being reproduced in new ways. Structural factors of gender, race and class still influence young women’s education and employment choices. Walkerdine et al. (2001) noticed that the degree to which young women are able to seize the opportunities of the new economy and make “good” choices still depends on their socio-economic class. Upper- and middle-class young women with family connections can tap into established networks of elite education and employment opportunities; working-class and new immigrant families have fewer social networks to help their children make appropriate education and career choices. In her school-based ethnography, Mirza (1992) explained various factors that shaped the schooling experiences and career aspirations of young Black women. Black girls attempted to achieve some upward social and occupational mobility by entering traditional female occupations as a strategic and rational choice based on their ability and job opportunities within the context of institutional limits and under severe economic constraints of a racially and sexually segregated labour market. Youth transition in all of its diverse forms cannot explain why some choices and outcomes are more available and likely for some groups of young women than for others depending on their social location.
The lack of attention to the continuing influence of structural factors of inequity allows individualism to shape research and policy perspectives. Researchers have translated such a perspective into questions about the subjective constitution of youth identities; about who constitutes the new youth subject and how young people “reinvent” themselves through various individualization processes. Researchers have examined processes where young people are seen to produce “choice” or “do-it-yourself” biographies (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997). Cast within a risk framework, youth are expected to be in charge of shaping their destiny. As a result of the focus away from the social and systemic nature of youth underemployment and unemployment, and an emphasis on “choice,” youth have been constructed as “consumer citizens” whose market consumption patterns garner at least as much, if not more, attention than their experiences and struggles with work. It seems worth mentioning that the aforementioned “adult worker” citizen model is not a comfortable fit for young workers whose working conditions, details and experiences in “stopgap” jobs in service industries (Tannock, 2001) tend to be devalued and overlooked as acceptable “choices.”

Young women’s individualized negotiations of their pathways and lives are further complicated by changing gender expectations, roles and norms. Hughes (2002) described five common discourses, which have come to be known as “truths,” influencing women’s experiences in the areas of employment, education and family in the contemporary context: “Women have made it,” “The best of both worlds,” “Women are caring,” “Having it all” and “Doing it all.” Young women are understood to occupy multiple and contradictory subject positions within these intersecting discourses. Even though these discourses generally target all women, the material conditions that prevent young, marginalized women from “having it
all," for example, suggests that their literal uptake of these does not reliably guarantee their future success. In this case, one might be inclined to discover empirically how young women in different material circumstances attend to, name and interpret their own and others' activities and experiences in relation to these and more youth-specific discourses.

New Directions for Studying Young Women

In this chapter, I reviewed the ideas and debates presented in youth research and theoretical frameworks for understanding young people in general, and young women in particular. The trends I found in the literature were: First, studies focusing on youth as the source of societal problems feature youth “at risk” as objects of study, but their perspectives are not central to the analysis. Secondly, studies focusing on youth as society’s future potential workers and citizens feature youth in an idealized manner. Their subjectivities and identities as consumer citizens have been examined without attention to shifting social contexts, and structural factors and inequities that shape their needs.

These two distinct constructions of youth underlying the works reviewed render young women’s actual experiences and lives invisible. In the first case, young women are either positioned as ungendered “youth” or gender-specific youth who become “at risk” due to reproductive issues. In the second, young women’s behaviours are interpreted as either confirming or rejecting new citizenship models in a way that does not attend to their actual experiences of citizenship or identity formation processes (Hall & Coffey, 2007). In either case, young women are not fully present as subjects whose perspectives, experiences and voices centrally inform a comprehensive and integrated theory of their working lives. This study aims to fill this theoretical gap by positioning young women as active, knowledgeable
subjects in a framework that analyzes their experiences of social programs and policies as they are impacted by structural factors and processes that govern the local conditions in which they live their lives.

Studying young women from their own perspective will involve attending to their experiences, as they tell them in their own words. In her analysis of diary entries of a young Latina woman in Oakland, California, Stack (2001) argued that very little is known about how poor teenagers survive poverty. In this and other studies that aim for a contextualized understanding of young women’s motivations, and decision-making processes about their future life choices, has featured the concept of time (Brannen & Nilsen, 2002). It is likely that when researchers attend to young women within the context of their own lives, concepts other than those already assumed (i.e. transitions and risk) emerge, leaving theorists with a better understanding of the variable exigencies that impact a young woman’s work in a specific time, from a specific place.

*Framework for Studying Globalized Young Women Workers*

Welfare state restructuring and globalization processes have often been presented in macro-economic terms, without reference to people. In its neo-liberal form, welfare state restructuring has produced greater and wider inequities and new forms of exclusions through policies that encourage privatization, decentralization, individualization and deregulation of local labour markets and social services systems. Feminist theorists of welfare states have insisted that these wide-ranging changes could not have occurred without women carrying the extra burden of work and caregiving in and across public and private spaces at local and global levels. From a feminist intersectionality perspective, women can be expected to
experience differential effects of restructuring according to their social location. Thus to fully understand how gender and racial inequities are produced and maintained under restructuring, and the role that women’s work and women as workers play, requires an examination of state social policies, specifically in the way they respond to global pressures that construct the terms upon which the nation engages with others at the global level, as well as how these policies influence and produce the local social conditions under which women work and live their lives. However, studying social policies and policy arrangements for gender impacts of the welfare states and gendering of welfare state processes, requires attention to specific concepts and spaces that make women and gender visible.

This review of youth literatures finds that the theoretical framework of youth transitions and the related notion of youth “at risk” construct young people as either being problems or as having potential, but the actual impacts of globalization and local welfare restructuring on young people’s lives appear contradictory at best with some groups of youth seizing new opportunities and others becoming seriously disadvantaged. Very little is known about how young women come to understand the skills, experience and knowledge they need to prepare for the world of work, or how they decide about their future working lives while balancing their current school, work, family and community obligations. Their invisibility has been the result of frameworks that organize research such that young women are hidden under the ungendered category of youth workers or the deviant category of young women or the adult/mature category of women workers.

Based on this analysis, I am arguing for the development of a theoretical framework that incorporates and centralizes young women workers’ experiences to understand the links between youth, gender, social policy and globalized welfare states. This framework
necessarily requires linking structural (institutions) and relational (processes, practices and procedures) analyses of social welfare policies, and sites or spaces in and between the family, market and state with power relations constructed in and through intersections of gender, race, class and age. This study contributes to developing this framework by explaining how a particular group of young women are experiencing policy, using the lens of provisioning. This study provides the empirical basis for theorizing provisioning as a concept that engenders and contextualizes young women’s experiences, making them available as the basis for re-visioning social policy.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND PROJECT BACKGROUND

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to understand how young women who are considered “at risk” youth make decisions about their working lives. The study uses the concept of provisioning to capture a wide range of work activities. Building on previous research, I attempt to develop a deeper understanding of young women’s work than research using traditional approaches to studying youth has provided.

Research Questions

The three research questions are:

1. What are provisioning experiences of young women considered “at risk” youth; how do they make decisions about their working lives while balancing their current school, work, family and community obligations?

2. How does the notion of “at risk” youth influence young women’s decisions about their working lives and youth workers’ professional practices in community-based programs?

3. How do community-based program development and evaluation processes and practices produce the gendered and racialized social conditions under which young women who are considered “at risk” youth provision?

Institutional Ethnography: Theoretical and Methodological Considerations

The rest of this chapter outlines the theoretical and methodological considerations involved in selecting institutional ethnography (IE) (Smith, 1989; 1990) as the appropriate approach.

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for addressing the research goal and questions, and for guiding the study design. IE provides an approach to understanding problems in everyday life. Situated within qualitative and feminist research traditions, which themselves are wide-ranging in terms of their epistemological and ontological underpinnings, IE stands upon and engages with many of the debates that evolve the ground upon which these frameworks settle, yet IE is also distinct in its particular features. Feminist and qualitative researchers have written about the importance of understanding theoretical assumptions behind methodological approaches (Fonow & Cook, 1991; Gubrium & Holstein, 1997; Naples, 2003). Given that methodology, the study of research techniques and practices, is grounded in epistemology, the theory of knowledge, researchers should at some point engage in epistemological questions about the nature of knowledge such as “What can be known?” “Who is the knower?” and “How are knowledge claims assessed?” In what follows, I draw attention to the connections between the epistemological and theoretical underpinnings of IE to provide a rationale for its use in this study of young women’s working lives. I end this chapter by describing the IE-guided methods I used for the data collection and analysis.

What can be known? Social Organization and Social Relations of Youth Employment

IE seeks to understand individual experiences by embedding them within broader social relations. Developed from the theoretical work of Dorothy Smith (1987, 1990a, 1990b, 1999, 2005), IE refers to an “empirical investigation of linkages among local settings of everyday life, organizations and translocal processes of administration and governance” (DeVault & McCoy, 2001, p.751). According to Campbell & Gregor (2002) p. 89, “Institutional ethnographers... are interested in the particular conditions under which experiences arise
and are lived *by someone*. [sic] And although this person is not actually studied, the specialized investigation does keep the subject at the center.”

Originally, Smith framed IE as “a sociology for women” (1987) based on her critique of established sociology. Since then, IE has been applied to the study of social processes across a variety of disciplines (Smith, 2005). In her initial critique, Smith questioned the basis of sociological knowledge claims, which she argued were developed from a male perspective and through knowledge production processes that excluded women. She was critical of traditional methods of sociology that objectified and eliminated subjects from their own lives. Smith claimed that conceptual practices, processes of abstraction, and professional discourses obscured people’s actual, lived experiences. My literature review of youth theories and studies exemplified this effect: Young women’s experiences could not be accounted for within the academic and professional discourses of youth employment. Furthermore, as subjects and actors, young women disappeared from these theoretical frameworks emphasizing transitions, risk and choice.

Instead of starting an inquiry with theory, IE offers a world view that finds theory “in” everyday life (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). IE sees social life as organized through social relations; social relations become evident through people’s activities and practices. This materialist orientation positions people as the driving force of theory, ideas and discourse, all of which are seen to arise from people’s interaction with material reality. This means that IE studies of social life start with people’s actual experiences and activities. Furthermore, as an institutional ethnographer, my goal is to capture and understand young women’s experiences without abstracting those experiences from the material conditions from which they arise and derive their meaning.
To the extent that the social is constituted through people’s activities in the everyday world, IE studies examine how social relations coordinate, shape and connect people’s experiences across multiple sites. “Relations of ruling” is a particular type of social relation that concerns Smith and the institutional ethnographer. Ruling relations are socially organized exercises of power: “They are those forms that we know as bureaucracy, administration, management, professional organization, and the media. They include also the complex of discourses, scientific, technical, and cultural, that intersect, interpenetrate, and coordinate the multiple sites of ruling” (Smith 1990, p. 6).

Ruling is not an accidental phenomenon; it occurs in a coordinated fashion. People carry out and accomplish the organizational and control functions of ruling relations through their actions and activities, including their engagement and activation of texts. Essentially, texts are “material in a form that enables replication (paper, print, film, electronic, and so on) of what is written, drawn, or otherwise reproduced. . . . [Texts] produce the stability and replicability of organization or institution” (Smith, 2005, p. 228). Texts take on various forms, including text-mediated processes and discourses, textual practices and text-based knowledge forms, all of which are implicated in ruling. In a social service agency, various forms, files, memos and records routinely turn people’s experience into cases (Smith, 1999). For example, Smith has shown that textual realities have the capacity to organize experiences administratively. This occurs when the documentation of case histories and the associated text-mediated decision-making processes of social workers reflect organizational interests, which are ruling interests, over the needs and priorities of clients (Smith, 1990, p. 89). IE studies analyze how texts are handled and processed by people who might not know each other, yet who are connected through their coordinated activation of a variety of texts. In this
study, it is likely that youth employment administrative processes and practices have become standardized across various sites as program workers and administrators enact gate-keeping roles and activities which are coordinated by and described in policy documents, procedural manuals and agency forms.

In IE, "institution" does not refer to any particular organization or structure in the common sense definition of the term. Instead, Smith uses "the terms 'institutional' and 'institution' to identify a complex of relations forming part of the ruling apparatus, organized around a distinctive function—education, health care, law and the like" (Smith, 1987, p. 160). Institutions cannot be studied in totality; "rather, the aim of the IE researcher is to explore particular corners or strands within a specific institutional complex, in ways that make visible their points of connection with other sites and courses of action" (DeVault & McCoy, 2001, p. 753). The ethnography aspect of IE commits the researcher to explore, describe and analyze the complex of relations. The IE researcher's goal is to understand how things happen as they do (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 47).

I refer to the "youth employment programs complex" as the institution I aimed to investigate. This social institution consists of various players, including young people, parents, employers, educators, community and youth workers, and other professionals, positioned across diverse sites including schools, homes, workplaces, and state and community agencies. This IE study examined the youth employment programs complex from the specific local setting of a women's social service agency (specific details and context for selecting the study site are outlined later in this section). From this site, I will be able to connect my analysis to other sites in the institutional complex (which I may want to investigate in the future) because these other sites are linked via generalized social ruling
relations. In particular, this IE study aimed at understanding the social organization of youth employment by examining why youth services and programs occur in the form that they do at the site of a woman's community-based organization. What is actually happening in the contemporary local context?

Instead of examining established, abstracting, objectifying theory, an IE inquiry starts from everyday lives, activities and practices. IE examines the complex of relations from the entry point of people whose everyday experiences and activities are impacted by ruling (Smith, 1987, p. 160). In this case, the actual provisioning experiences of young women considered “at risk” youth served as the entry point into underlying social relations and organization. Starting with everyday experiences, I aimed to understand how social relations shape young “at risk” women’s experiences and activities without their explicit awareness but with their active involvement. As with all IE inquiries, this study also goes beyond simply documenting young women’s provisioning experiences; it also accounted for the social conditions under which young women made and are making decisions. In terms of analysis, this meant that I proceeded from young women’s experiential accounts to map out the broader social relations that produce particular arrangements of youth, labour and welfare policies and programs through which young women’s experiences arise.

Who is the knower? Researcher and Researched as Located Knowers in Everyday World

Methodologists from qualitative research traditions often note that the researcher is part of the research. Based on this revelation, researchers have raised questions about the positioning of the researcher and the impacts of the relationship between the researcher and
researched on research processes and outcomes (McCorkel & Myers, 2003). IE requires the researcher to “see herself as a knower located in the everyday world” and to “find meaning there” (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 11). From the outset, the researcher’s “locatedness” makes it possible for her to identify a “problematic” that helps her situate the research, and her relation to the inquiry within the social relations organizing the research setting. Smith coined the phrase “the everyday world as problematic,” whereby the problematic is a technical term used “to direct attention to a possible set of questions that may not have been posed or a set of puzzles that do not yet exist in the form of puzzles but are ‘latent’ in actualities of the experienced world” (Smith, 1987, p. 91).

Smith (2005, p. 40) distinguishes between problems and the problematic. For example, the problem that motivated this study was my concern about the invisibility of young women’s experiences in youth employment debates. However, the problematic emerges from the institutional processes that underlie and become actualized through people’s actions and responses to the problem of young, unemployed, homeless, poor or lone mothers. In this study, the problematic involves the processes and practices that define these groups of young women as being “at risk.” Through the process of discovering and exploring the problematic, the IE researcher, who is a located knower in the everyday world, proceeds with a step-wise but indeterminate course of action that shapes the study and its trajectory.

Locating the researcher in relation to her inquiry, however, does not necessarily address how relationships between the researcher and the researched are practically negotiated. As a researcher, I benefited from having been an ex-employee at my research site and having demonstrated to key organization personnel a personal commitment to
women, youth and employment services. However, even though my history of work in
community programs facilitated my entrance and access to young women program
participants and staff members, I was returning to the organization as a PhD candidate
working on her dissertation, as opposed to a colleague or employee. Neither an outsider nor
an insider, I experienced what Naples (2003) observed as the myth of a rigid construction of
the researcher as either an insider or outsider. Naples claims that within the shifting nature
of research relationships, the insider status is always a conditional, negotiated position that
may depend as well on gender, race and class identity. These dimensions of my own social
location have to be considered in terms of how they impacted research relations.

During the research, I was mindful of various points at which research relationships
were negotiated. Overall, I vigilantly documented in field notes my interactions with
different people in the setting because I assumed various roles to accommodate program
situations to carry out my data collection. For example, in the interviews with young women
(and the staff members), it made sense to assume a more “traditional” researcher persona due
to the general acceptance and expectation that interviews are part of “proper” research
conducted by a “real” researcher. As well, the interviews I conducted had a formal feel to
them in that they were scheduled meetings where I asked questions, participants gave
responses, and in the case of young women, I gave them an honourium for their participation.
This rather formal arrangement worked well, because it allowed me to make reasonable and
respectful demands of study participants with whom I did not have ongoing, long-term
relationships, yet from whom I sought the widest breadth and depth of experiences within
restricted timeframes. In another situation, a more casual approach to interviews might have
been more appropriate. At other times in the research, it was strategic for me to take on an
active volunteer role to observe the programs where young women participated. I also experienced being introduced as a student researcher by program staff. In these situations, I observed the setting with less active involvement. Occasionally, I encountered individuals, mostly managers, who expressed concern or uncertainty about the impact of my project on the organization. In some cases, program staff did not allow me to observe their groups, because they were concerned about maintaining client confidentiality.

These examples point to instances in the research when I made decisions about research strategies, practices and processes as a result of shifts in the relationship between the researcher and the researched. This negotiation process affected whom I got access to as study participants, how I got access to informants and how I proceeded through the research. It is clear that positioning the researcher as a located knower does not guarantee a problem-free research trajectory; research relationships have to be negotiated along the way as issues arise (Reid & Vianna, 2001). However, paying attention to the social relations that locate the researcher in relation to her project research does alert the researcher to the times and places she might need to initiate negotiations.

In IE studies, not only is the researcher positioned as a located knower; research participants are also considered knowledgeable subjects. In this study, I started with the experiences of knowable young women to ensure that the research takes up the inquiry from a standpoint in the everyday world. While IE studies often start with experiences, IE does not privilege a young woman’s experiences as an ultimate account of her subjective state of being. Instead, IE embeds individual experiences in a complex of social relations. This methodology views research participants as “experts” in the sense that they are
knowledgeable about their everyday world; they know what to do and how to do whatever it takes to successfully negotiate from their standpoint within the everyday world.

My rationale to launch this IE study from the standpoint of young women was informed by the relational and structural positioning of young women that establishes this group as a strategically important analytic site for examining local responses to global processes. Currently, young women occupy a range of social locations in a restructured global economy. In their multiple roles as worker, mother/caregiver, volunteer and citizen, young women engage in a number of activities to balance their work, school, family and social responsibilities. At the same time, young women are subject to multiple and changing expectations by both adults and peers in terms of career and life choices at this historical moment. These expectations and young women’s reactions to them reveal social, political, economic and cultural processes which this IE study aimed to document and understand. By examining young women’s experiences of these activities and the local regulation of these practices, I aimed to provide insight into how new and existing power relations of gender, race and class are being created and maintained. Studying young women’s experiences in an IE framework means understanding what those experiences and actions reveal about the social relations in which they are embedded. As such, I did not emphasize young women’s experience as evidence of subjective states; instead, I considered how young women’s experiences locate and connect them with other individuals across the multiple sites of the youth employment programs complex.
How are Knowledge Claims assessed in IE?

Like other qualitative researchers, the IE researcher also grapples with questions about how to evaluate the strength of knowledge claims from research findings and interpretations. However, IE’s theoretical and epistemological commitments have implications for what kinds of truth claims can be credibly made by researchers and the basis upon which they can be made. Because of IE’s orientation toward understanding the social as organized by social relations constituted in and through people’s activities, and the locatedness of knowers, traditional concerns about trustworthiness of research findings appear somewhat differently than they do in other types of ethnographies or qualitative studies. As a result, the strategies and tests of truth IE researchers use to ensure the credibility and authenticity of research results and analyses also appear slightly different.

In many respects IE is subject to the tensions arising in the field of qualitative research. Many of these tensions, such as the earlier influence of post-positivists’ goal of capturing reality and proving theories, and subsequent challenges from post-structuralist and post-modernist concerns over representation, multiple truths and situated knowledge, continued to shape qualitative methods and criteria for the assessment of truth claims in relation to quantitative ones. As well, developments and trends within the qualitative research traditions bear upon how we understand the kinds of knowledge claims that IE research can legitimately make. (Denzin & Lincoln (2003) provide a thorough overview of the “Landscape of Qualitative Research.”) One example of IE’s similarity and distinctiveness from other qualitative research is the characterization of IE-based knowledge claims as partial and particular. As is the case in other qualitative methodologies where researchers are not seeking “absolute truths,” the partial and particular knowledge of located
knowers in IE is not considered a limitation of the research but an essential dimension of the inquiry. As such, researcher bias is not something to control or eliminate, and claims of objectivity are not particularly meaningful. Instead, an IE researcher strives to examine how her own knowing is organized by offering her own background, thoughts, attitudes and emotions as data with empirical and analytic value (see section on “Constructing ‘at risk’ Youth through the Research Process” in Chapter 6). In this sense, IE truths claims gain their “truth value” to the extent that the researcher accurately reflects upon how her actions and her work in the research process situated within institutional regulations brought about the social relations she endeavours to explicate.

Smith (1987) asserts that analyzing how work processes are attuned to particular social relations is difficult because the coordination of institutional processes is mediated ideologically (p. 161). Discovering how things happen as they do in youth employment is hindered by “ideological accounts,” which provide categories and concepts that deem specific activities of workers as accountable. As a result, “official” institutional procedures and practices make some phenomena visible and not others. Professional language and concepts obscure the actual work processes of individuals, so that, for example, categories like “at risk” youth may have little to do with young women’s actual experiences in youth employment programs. Official accounts produce an objectified version of youth employment, which reflect professional and bureaucratic discourse as opposed to people’s experiences of them. The goal of this IE study was to determine, based on talk and texts, what purpose this disjunction serves (Smith, 1990, p. 11).

Consistency of findings is not a concern for an IE inquiry as it is in other types of qualitative studies. Consequently, triangulation, a commonly prescribed strategy that uses
different methods or sources of data to find convergence, corroboration or correspondence across different people and sites, is not used in IE in the same way as in other qualitative studies. IE researchers do collect data from multiple sources, but instead of seeking consistency, the researcher demonstrates in the analysis how different practices and processes in a variety of sites fit together in relation to ruling. I would not expect the young women I interviewed to have similar experiences of working, schooling, caregiving or motherhood. While they all have knowledge of working and schooling as young women, they are positioned and embedded within different social relations of the youth employment programs complex. Furthermore, there is also no attempt to show that the programs in which these young women participate operate with the same assumptions about young women. Sampling from different sites within the youth employment programs complex, this IE study did not aim for the absolute “truth” of youth employment programming and a singular impact on young women; rather, it examined multiple sites to identify the social processes that align a particular local setting within the larger social organization and institutional complex.

The limited applicability or generalizability of research findings beyond the individual study is often cited as a major shortcoming of qualitative research. The issue of generalizability presents itself differently in IE studies where the main goal is to “explicate” ruling relations. Smith makes a distinction between “explanation” and “explication.” The former aims at understanding the setting by generalizing some absolute truth across cases or drawing cases into an established theoretical framework, whereas the latter focuses on the discovery of actual connections in the setting (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 89). This focus on explication is a testament to IE’s materialist grounding, whereby theory is “in” the everyday world. Essentially in IE methodology, generalizability refers to the generalizing
nature of social relations which come into being through the activities and actions of people in local settings. By studying institutions as forms of social organization that generalize across settings, the generalized and generalizing character of the local setting appears in the investigation regardless of the particularities of the site or participant sample size (Smith, 2005, p. 42). Smith (1987) explains:

Beginning with everyday world as problematic bypasses this issue [of generalizability]. The relation of the local and particular to generalized social relations is not a conceptual or methodological issue, it is a property of social organization. The particular “case” is not particular in the aspects that are of concern to the inquirer. Indeed it is not a “case” for it presents itself to us rather as a point of entry, the locus of an experiencing subject or subjects, into a larger social and economic process (p. 157).

Based on this generalizing character of social relations, the issue of subject or response bias, which happens when study participants fabricate responses, is treated differently in IE studies compared to other qualitative research approaches, where fabrications have the potential to wreak havoc on study results and interpretation. The difference in IE studies is that the IE researcher does not aim to generalize themes or to build theory from participants’ subjective understandings of their experiences, nor does IE aim at unfolding deeper meaning in the responses. Any suspicion of subject or response bias becomes part of the analysis. As the researcher, I would consider what factors and conditions enabled the study participant to tell the story that she does. I would elaborate on what the significance of the fabricated response had in the particular context in which it arouse.

What I actually did in the analysis was to attend to young women’s responses to determine how they, as knowledgeable subjects, made sense of their specific contexts and negotiated their position in the everyday world. When I talked to the youth workers, I paid
particular attention to how they talked about their work with young women and the reasoning they used to make sense of what they do to help program participants. Workers also spoke about their work processes from specific locations that revealed how ruling relations support specific institutional arrangements. I aimed in my analysis of the young women and workers interviews to reveal the social relations that organize accounts of experiences and work processes.

Even though this IE study did not seek to generalize about young women’s provisioning experiences or youth employment, as an IE researcher, I still have to confirm that I am presenting an accurate and truthful representation of how the institution of youth employment programs actually works. The most useful strategy that addressed whether youth employment process and practices at the study site indeed “work in that way” involved my previous experience in the youth employment field and my personal relationship with the site. The cooperation and support of agency staff facilitated my access and recruitment of participants, and ensured accuracy and usefulness of data and analysis. I developed an ongoing relationship with the agency as a volunteer. Thus my prolonged engagement at the site enabled me to maintain contact and seek feedback about preliminary results and analysis with key informants knowledgeable about young women and employment programs.

Finally, an IE researcher can feel confident about the “truth value” of her findings by locating herself in relation to the project. It was essential that I documented and analyzed my relationship to the research and to research participants throughout this study, because this information revealed whose interests were served in the research. Making my social location explicit validates that knowledge claims are being made within the context in which the inquiry was carried out because I have accounted for both the location and context from
which knowledge was produced. As a methodology centrally concerned about understanding how power and ruling works, IE research must provide insights into how the research and researcher are implicated in social processes organizing the setting: “To explore how knowing is related to power, institutional ethnographers study how one’s knowing is organized—by whom and by what” (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 15).

The usefulness of reflexive methods in qualitative and feminist research to recognize and analyze power relations impacting the research processes has been well documented (Krieger, 1985; McCorkel & Myers, 2003; McMahon, 1996). A proposed strategy involving reflexive methods for accomplishing an IE analysis is to consider what the different pieces of data tell the researcher about what is happening at the site. “Writing the social” involves drawing on what the researcher determines to be “analytically interesting points” which lead to other points and different sources of data to understand the problematic and to show how the story of the site developed as it did (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 95). Later in this chapter, I provide details about my background, social location, interests and site selection process. During the research, I tried to be attentive to how my personal feelings and “gut” instincts guided and informed my analysis. I also attempted to track the ways in which my assumptions and feelings about “at risk” youth, young women and my research informed the knowledge claims I would eventually make.

To summarize, this IE study aims to understand the social organization of youth employment by attending to people’s actual experiences, activities and work processes at a local setting. This study examines how young women’s actual experiences are shaped by social relations, which not only enter, operate and coordinate work processes at the local setting but also express social processes that extend beyond the local setting. Starting from
young women’s experiences, and positioning them as knowable subjects, the knowledge that this IE study produces should help young women understand their social world from the standpoint of their own lives.

**Study Design**

Adhering to an IE methodology, this study has three components:

1. I began the study by *discovering the everyday provisioning experiences of young women from their perspectives*. At this point of entry, I interviewed young women who were program participants in housing, employment, young mothers’ and girls’ programs at the study site.

2. Next, I shifted the investigation toward examining *how work and institutional processes and practices of a local women’s social service agency shaped young women’s experiences*. This stage involved discovering how the internal working and workplace culture of the study site supported and reflected ruling relations. At this point, I used field observation and document analysis to capture the workers’ activities and the methods they used to prioritize their tasks and interactions with young women. I also interviewed staff and managers about what they do in their work with young women considered “at risk” youth.

3. This final stage of the study involved the *explication of ruling relations*. This is the analysis of the relationship between work processes of youth employment and social economic processes of the welfare state and labour market and their impacts on young women’s provisioning experiences. This final stage involves the task of “writing the social.” This account focused on uncovering young women’s experiences as workers or
future workers at the junction between the local labour markets and the social organization of youth employment as it occurs at the site of a women’s social service agency. In this context, relations of class and race were not external to young women’s experiences of provisioning; instead, these social relations played a fundamental role for understanding the conditions and constraints that shape young women’s career choices.

Background of the Study

In the next section, I briefly review the background of a three-year research project entitled “Provisioning Women and Community,” conducted by the WEDGE (Women at the EDGE of the new global economy) research team, because my study of young women was part of this larger project (see Appendix A). In addition, I describe my interests and the experiences I brought to this study. In particular, I outline how I selected the study site. I document this background because IE methodology requires that I attend to how my relationships in the study setting shaped the research.

WEDGE Research on “Provisioning Women and Community”

“Provisioning Women and Community” emerged from a concern that neo-liberal economic restructuring and cuts in public services compromised women’s capacity to provide life’s necessities for themselves, their families and their communities. The main research question of this collaborative research was: What supports and what limits the provisioning work of women who are members of poor households and marginalized communities? The objectives of the study were to:
1. understand the dimensions of provisioning by describing how women manage to do vast amounts of work in order to ensure that they meet the needs of the people who depend on them;

2. identify and understand the role of community agencies and/or programs, and their relationship to women’s provisioning; and

3. account for the conditions that affect the relationship between women and their communities while they engage in provisioning activities.

For the purpose of developing the concept of provisioning, the WEDGE researchers felt that it was important to discover the similar, as well as the specific and local provisioning experiences of young women in comparison to the local experiences of other groups of women in the study who were public housing tenants, survivors of abuse, food co-op members and poor or older women.

While the WEDGE project benefited from having a site focused on young women, my IE study of young women benefited as well from an association with WEDGE. As a student researcher, I received individual and collective feedback and support from a team of experienced academics during the project. Being present at WEDGE meetings and teleconferences to observe and absorb how research, analysis and theorizing are actually done by skilled researchers, helped me to solidify my own research questions. The comparisons and discussions that occurred about the other sites helped and also challenged me to develop and strengthen my own analysis. Being an independent site within a larger cross-national project also gave this local study a higher profile. In practical terms, being funded as a WEDGE site meant that I was able to attend and present my preliminary findings at more conferences than I would have been able to otherwise. The WEDGE funding also
enabled me to pay the study participants an honorarium, which I considered an appropriate exchange for the time and patience that the young women gave to the interview process.

It is most important, and perhaps most obvious, to note that my research goal corresponded with WEDGE objectives; I was concerned about discovering the important work that women do and understanding how groups of marginalized women were surviving in the new, global economy. As WEDGE researchers, we all expected that we would produce new knowledge which would make it easier for women to provide for themselves and others in their communities without sacrificing their own well-being. By achieving these objectives, we hoped that this research would inform the development of social programs, policies and practices.

To explore the relationship of women’s provisioning and community, WEDGE researchers were interested in examining “intentional local innovations” (Raddon, 2003) using global ethnography (Burawoy, 2000). WEDGE researchers wanted to investigate the innovative ways community organizations and programs developed in response to the demands of global restructuring and the reduction of public services while also advocating for the elimination of poverty and gender subordination. Methodologically, this meant that I had to select a strategically appropriate site from which to view what was happening to young women’s provisioning experiences as their work and responsibilities shifted in ways that reflected the changing social, economic and political landscape. There were plenty of innovative organizations and programs for young women from which to choose, and therefore, I will explain my selection of Gen-Y as the research site in the next section. Gen-Y is the pseudonym for a large, well-established, multi-service women’s organization with a focus on young women.
Researcher’s Background

I came to the research topic long before starting this dissertation research. In the mid-1990s, I was working at a Gen-Y employment program as a front-line employment counsellor. I provided career assessment and job search information to unemployed men and women, most of whom had more work experience than I did as a recent graduate. While I did my best to be cheerful, helpful and encouraging, I could not help feeling hypocritical and ineffectual encouraging people to take part-time, casual or temporary, non-unionized, poor paying jobs with no benefits “for the (Canadian) experience” or “to get your foot in the door,” knowing that there was no way that people could support their families with these jobs (Tam, 2001). As a social worker, I was supposed to help people realize their potential and to promote social justice and equality for all. Helping to build a low-wage, docile labour force was definitely not part of the contract.

Being disillusioned with front-line work, I moved on to a community researcher position in the area of youth employment in the last years of the 1990s. The research that I conducted supported community agencies that provided youth employment services. Generally, I found that governments, the public and young participants supported and praised youth employment programs and services. Some youth participants definitely benefited from the programs, but it was never quite clear to me whether they benefited more from the skills training or from having somewhere to go where some adult role model helped them believe in themselves. Most program evaluations indicated rather modest employment outcomes for youth program participants (Human Resources Development Canada, 1997). Linking the programs’ successes to youth’s increased social engagement and sense of belonging would
have been difficult to assess, and frankly, the funding agencies were not interested. Funding agencies were basically focused on how many youth participants got a job or went back to school as a direct result of the program.

One area where the youth employment programs had some difficulty demonstrating their effectiveness was around serving severely disadvantaged youth. These were considered young people with multiple employment barriers. Homeless youth, or “squeeegee kids,” were a particularly visible target in the late 1990s. Initially, soon after I was hired, I recall trying to figure out who exactly were these “at risk” youth. With rather vague guidelines and catch-all kinds of definitions circulating in the field, I could not shake the uncomfortable feeling that one had to label certain groups of young people “at risk” in order to ensure that they got access to supports and programs. Yet, with the current restructured labour market and fewer “good jobs,” most young people would face some risk of underemployment or unemployment at some point in their career paths.

My quandary over the term was also impacted by my personal history as a relatively young (I was in my mid-20s), first generation Chinese-Canadian woman. But I wasn’t exactly “at risk,” because I held a graduate degree, I was employed, I had a home; I wasn’t rich, but I wasn’t poor either. However, I knew that women and racial minorities still experienced discrimination, so maybe I was in some respects “at risk.”

Young women and gender never figured prominently in the community research I did. In the field, workers did not talk about young women and young men. They talked about helping all youth regardless of gender; they did not want to discriminate based on gender. When gender differences did appear, like in trade apprenticeship programs where men still
dominate, workers explained that “that’s just the way it is,” that their job was to support their clients’ career choices, not to challenge traditional gender occupational stereotypes.

At this point, I returned to academe to complete a PhD with these curious contradictions that I could not explain from my counselling or research in the field. Not until I began to delve into critiques of the theoretical and research literature on youth employment did I realize the critical question was not just *who* was a youth “at risk” but also *how* did they become “at risk” in the first place, and what gender and race have to do with this process.

As a radicalized woman graduate student positioned as an outsider/within the academy (Collins, 1991), I considered how my gender, race and class background informed the research projects I chose to pursue. I suppose that there was something autobiographical about my study of young women; I wanted in some way to understand my own career trajectory. I was not doing self-therapy or off on an ego trip; however, the insight I gained into how young women’s lives are organized, juxtaposed with my own background, provided me with a better understanding of the tenuous hold I currently have on authority as an aspiring scholar in the academy with the skin that I am in. Yet, as a responsible researcher with connections and allegiances with communities outside the academy, I also needed to conduct research that would allow me to explore how I am implicated in power relations through my involvement as a knowledge producer. It is only with this knowledge that I could have any hope of being able to develop transformative strategies that does not perpetuate such power relations.
How was the Research Site Selected?

I selected Gen-Y for this research based on my prior knowledge and experience in the youth employment field and my previous relationship with the organization. Even before I was an employee at Gen-Y, I was a Master of Social Work placement student at the organization in one of their women’s employment programs. I felt a sense of connection with this organization and its staff. I wanted to give something back to Gen-Y and its community because I had many positive work and learning experiences there. I made many contacts during my time at Gen-Y and maintain many of these relationships to this day. Most of the staff and managers were incredibly supportive when I approached them about doing my dissertation research with young women at the agency. With my history at Gen-Y, I achieved the first step towards building a research relationship based on mutual respect, collaboration and communication (Reid & Vianna, 2001).

I had also considered youth employment programs as a site for the research. However, Gen-Y had a commitment, history and expertise with young women and gender issues that the youth employment services network did not. In addition, Gen-Y housed many programs for women. The wide range of program participants meant that I gained access to a range of young women who were negotiating their future work lives from different social locations in the everyday world. My history with Gen-Y and its involvement and leadership on young women’s issues made this a logical study site.
Who were the Study Participants?

Purposive sampling was used to select participants for face-to-face interviews from two groups: young women program participants and key informants. Purposive sampling ensures maximum variation within the participant group to provide a broad range of experiences based on relevance (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). While this study understands that “young woman” is a social category that derives meaning in specific social historical contexts, operationally, the young women in this study were between the ages of 16 and 24. This age range reflects the definition of youth for current youth programs across Ontario.

I interviewed a total of 15 young women who were program participants at Gen-Y. Study participants were recruited from housing, employment, young mothers’ and girls’ programs with the assistance of front-line staff, who introduced the participants to the project in their regular meetings. Descriptions of the young women interviewed are provided in Appendix B.

In addition to young women, I also interviewed a total of 10 key informants (five individual interviews and one group interview) from the agency. This group included front-line staff and a few administrative and management staff from the programs identified above. Key informants had some knowledge of young women’s employment issues and some history of working in social services programs that support young women considered “at risk” youth. They were invited to participate based on their interest in the research. In the text, I refer to the workers interchangeably as youth workers, counsellors, program workers or staff, and to administrators or managers without necessarily referring to their specific
programs. This was done to ensure the confidentiality of their responses since programs often had only one or two identifiable personnel.

I should note that for IE methodology, it was not necessary for the sample to be representative or of a particular size, because the generalizable character of social relations emerges in the data regardless of whether one person or a hundred people are interviewed. The total number of interviews conducted was based on what would be reasonable, given the dissertation time frame and how many interviews would generate enough data to support an in-depth analysis of young women's provisioning experiences. I did attempt to maximize diversity among the young women and key informants to capture the experiences of people at different social locations across the youth employment programs complex (refer to interviewee descriptions in Appendix B).

Research Processes

Data Collection

Data collection processes in IE studies are geared toward studying social settings and interactions in everyday life. The methods for data collection were unstructured and semi-structured interviews, field observation and document review. These three qualitative research methods are considered appropriate for IE (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). I conducted the majority of the interviews during the summer and fall of 2005. I did field observation and collected documents during this period as well. From the fall of 2005 to the spring of 2006, I took on a volunteer position for a few hours a week with the housing program for additional and ongoing field observation. It is common, and often even desirable, for IE researchers to assess and reassess the type and quality of data she requires as the project
proceeds. Because of the iterative nature of IE, and of qualitative methodologies in general, what the research data consists of in terms of who is interviewed, what questions are asked or what documents are assessed, was not absolutely predictable until the project is under way (DeVault & McCoy, 2001, p. 755).

**Interviews**

The individual face-to-face interviews with young women and key informants at Gen-Y lasted approximately one hour each. They were conducted at the program site for the convenience of study participants. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed with the permission of the interviewees. A standard research consent form was signed. In the interviews, I asked young women about their provisioning experiences in relation to the areas of family, employment, school and volunteering or community programs. Even though some of the young women were hesitant while others provided more in-depth examples, in most cases, they answered the interview questions in a straightforward manner. Given my outside status and their youth, I considered this range of reactions reasonable and acceptable.

I asked key informants to describe their daily work with young women. I asked them to explain participant recruitment and assessment processes, program activities and follow-up procedures. Their insights revealed how ideas about youth employment and labour markets shaped their actual work activities. Many found it challenging to articulate specifically what was different about younger women compared to other client groups, i.e., adult women. (The interview guides are included in Appendix C.)

**Field Observation**

I observed the housing, employment, young mothers’ and girls’ programs in unobtrusive ways. These programs were selected because young women were the majority of the
participants. At the housing program, I was a volunteer in the resource centre, where I assisted women of all ages on the computers; in the employment and young mothers’ program, I was a participant/observer. I also attended meeting and public events organized by the organization and other youth service agencies. Through my observation, I aimed to understand institutional features, culture and processes. Throughout this period, I wrote descriptive and reflexive notes detailing activities, events, schedules, logistics, insights and reasons for methodological decisions (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 143).

*Document Review*

To the extent that the social world is mediated by texts, and texts are implicated in ruling relations (Smith, 1990b), I analyzed documents to understand how text coordinates work activities of various workers across the sites in the youth employment programs complex. I collected and analyzed the agency’s public documents, which included annual reports, media communications, and advocacy, policy and program statements.

Once I made it clear that I was conducting the research as part of my PhD thesis, and that I was not in any way evaluating their work or the programs, staff members were generally attentive and helpful. I was not able to observe the young mothers’ and girls’ programs for extended periods, because the counsellors were concerned about protecting their clients’ confidentiality, especially around the sensitive issues that often occurred in group discussions. Even though I was committed to maintaining study participants’ confidentiality, and in fact was required to do so under standard university ethical protocols, I recognized that my presence would alter the group dynamics. Therefore, I did not push the issue, but respected the counsellors’ requests and only did as much observation as I was permitted so as not to jeopardize the research relationship.
Data Analysis

How the researcher makes sense of data from an IE study is guided by the methodology’s theoretical commitment to discovering the social organization centred on an explication of ruling practices and their associated text-based discourses and objectified forms of knowledge. Analysis of IE data amounts to determining, “What does it [the data] tell me about how this setting or event happens as it does?” The goal is figuring out the social relations of the setting (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 93). Analysis and interpretation involves “finding conceptual linkages that are lived, brought into existence in time and space by actual people doing actual things” (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 98). Even with these general concerns, there is no singular approach to data analysis for IE studies, just as there is not only one way to conduct an IE inquiry. However, IE researchers have provided some models and advice toward explicating ruling relations, which I incorporated into this study.

First, I approached the analysis by describing the everyday provisioning experiences of young women from the interview data. I used NVivo, a computerized qualitative data management system, to prepare the interview transcripts for descriptive analysis. Campbell and Gregor (2002) explain descriptions in IE as “telling a story from the data.” The story I told was about how young women managed their lives. I detailed what exactly they were doing to provision for themselves and their families. I noted where, when, how and why they were doing what they were doing in terms of family, schooling, jobs and community involvement. I also documented what young women believed made it easier or harder to provision for themselves and others.
Once I documented the provisioning experiences, I proceeded to examine young women’s “talk” by asking the question: “How is it that young women say what they say?” (DeVault & McCoy, 2001, p. 769). I looked for disjuncture, discrepancies and contradictions between what the young women were saying and what others were saying about them. I used my experience and knowledge about how young people and young women were portrayed by academic discourses and by youth workers in the field to ask critical questions. Listening for how young women put their stories together in the interviews, I dug deeper when I found moments of rationalizing, hesitation, discomfort or reluctance. I interrogated points that seemed normal and natural; I asked myself what made them seem that way? These techniques relate to what IE researchers describe as back and forth movements between the “talk” and the context in which it was produced (DeVault & McCoy, 2001, p. 769).

This analysis of IE data also involved revisiting the problematic. In this sense, I viewed the data from different angles to determine how the processes and practices of youth employment produced the young women in the study as being “at risk.” This analytic point led me to consider the racial dimensions of “at risk” youth once I noticed that most of the young women interviewed were racial minorities. As a racial minority myself, who has “requisite interpretative competences to hear and understand meanings in everyday social contexts where race and ethnicity (like gender) virtually always matter” (DeVault, 1995, p. 613), I used my knowledge of race relations to explore the racial subtext in the data. Focusing on how young women became “at risk” also involved examining the connection between what front-line workers did and the work processes that governed their actions.
A final aspect of data analysis involved investigating how workers use professional language, concepts and categories, such as “at risk” youth or “young mothers” and how these terms functioned ideologically for workers so that they were able to make sense of their work with young women. In terms of presentation, the written analysis centres on processes and coordination in IE studies. “Writing the social” described how the youth employment programs complex works. Even though young women were the analytic focus of the research, the analysis was not about them. The final account is about how the social world is organized from their standpoint.

In summary, this IE inquiry discovered how young women’s provisioning experiences are socially organized without their explicit awareness but with their active involvement. People’s activities were socially organized, coordinated, ruled and put together as part of social relations of a particular setting—in this case, a community-based organization serving women. Data analysis aimed at understanding how various actors in the local setting took part in social relations that express social processes which enter into but originate beyond the local site of the youth employment programs complex.
CHAPTER 4: OVERVIEW OF YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS

The goal of this chapter is to situate youth employment programs and services within social policy changes since the 1990s in Canada. My aim is not to describe a comprehensive history of events. Instead, I identify significant trends during this time that reflect the changing focus of youth employment programs. Revealing how state policies mediate the shifting relationship between youth and labour market is important to understanding how social processes shape the everyday lived experiences of young women who participate in the youth employment programs complex.

Focus on Youth Unemployment the 1990s

Following a recession in the early 1990s, youth employment became a major concern for Canadians. Indeed, there were worrisome trends highlighted in profiles of youth in the labour market (Beaudry, Lemieux, & Parent, 2000; Forum of Labour Market Ministers, 2000; Gunderson, Sharpe, & Wald, 2000; Thiessen, 2001). Employment and participation rates for youth hit a 21-year low in 1997 (Usalcas, 2005). Young people also struggled with underemployment; that is, they were being employed in jobs with fewer hours than they desired or in positions not commensurate with their educational qualifications. Youth were generally over-represented in part-time, low-wage, insecure “McJobs.” Increases in tuition fees made it difficult for many to afford post-secondary education, which is key to escaping low-paying, low-status jobs. Different groups of youth, especially young women who were sole-support mothers of young families, poor, Aboriginal or homeless, faced even more acute barriers and difficult life situations (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2006; Novac, Serge, Eberle, & Brown, 2002).
In the 1996 report “Take on the Future: Canadian Youth in the World of Work,” a federal task force confirmed the government’s commitment to creating opportunities for youth (Human Resources Development Canada, 1996). In 1998, the Forum of Labour Market Ministers—officials from federal, provincial and territorial governments—formulated a youth employment policy in four points:

1. Create opportunities for all youth to develop the skills and knowledge needed for work
2. Increase work opportunities for youth
3. Help youth respond to the changing nature of work
4. Address the cultural and social barriers that may prevent youth from working (Forum of Labour Market Ministers, 2000, p. 11)

Besides governments, other groups, including policy-makers, parents, representatives from business, industry, labour, social services, education, research and policy think tanks, international organizations, and youth themselves, also resolved to address the youth unemployment crisis and other issues youth faced in their transition from school to work (Konrad, 1995; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 1999). These activities raised awareness and resulted in a focus on youth employment programs. For the most part, the rationale for assisting youth was based on the belief that employment prospects of youth were key to Canada’s economic prosperity in the context of globalization (Human Resources Development Canada, 1996).

Around the same period, government and academic researchers and community advocates developed literature and resources on best practices for youth employment and women’s training programs in North America (Human Resources Development Canada, 1997; James, 1997; James & Jurich, 1999; PEPNet, 2002; Starr, 2000). These evaluations were cautiously optimistic about the effectiveness of youth employment programs and instead drew attention to external conditions and the interplay of the labour market, education
and social welfare system. Other reports pointed out that hard-to-serve youth populations needed to be well supported during the program and afterwards (Cave, Bos, Doolittle, & Toussaint, 1993; Currie, Foley, Schwartz, & Taylor-Lewis, 2001). Although program evaluations generally dealt with women and youth separately, those that included gender aspects suggested that young women have specific needs for employment services and training, which reflect unique challenges and systemic barriers to their participation in the paid workforce (Human Resources Development Canada, 2002).

Overall, it seems that there have been good intentions on the part of governments to help young people find jobs. As well, there is accumulated knowledge about the necessary elements of effective programs. However, the overall impact of youth employment programs has been uneven. We are left to puzzle over how this could happen. But before I respond using the empirical evidence from my investigations, the rest of this chapter will examine the contested nature of youth employment programs intended to serve both the needs of high-needs and marginalized youth and the economic imperatives of a global, neo-liberal agenda.

**About Youth Employment Programs and Services in Canada**

The basic framework of youth employment programs in Canada is vast and complex. The responsibility for the administration and coordination of youth employment programs spans a number of federal and provincial/territorial government ministries. Generally, the responsibility for youth who are “in school” fall on the provinces/territories because of their jurisdiction over education, while the responsibility for youth who are “out of school” is shared by both provincial/territorial and federal governments. While historically the federal government has responsibility for employment training, movement had been under way since
1996 to transfer that power to provinces under Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDA). The federal government still retains control of the legislative framework, while provinces assume responsibility for Employment Benefits and Support Measures in Part 2 of the Employment Insurance Act, 1996. (I will discuss the impacts of the LMDA on women and youth training in the next section.)

In 1997, the Canadian government created the Youth Employment Strategy (YES). Renewed and revamped in 2003, YES helps young Canadians (aged 15 to 30) obtain career information, develop skills, find good jobs and stay employed. With an annual budget of $155 million, the federal Ministry of Human Resources and Skills Development coordinates 13 Government of Canada departments and agencies to work with other governments, businesses and community partners to deliver a broad range of initiatives under three program streams:

1. **Skills Link** helps young people who face more barriers to employment than others. They could be high school dropouts, single parents, Aboriginal youth, young persons with disabilities, youth in rural areas or recent immigrants.
2. **Summer Work Experience** helps secondary and post-secondary students find summer jobs.
3. **Career Focus** helps post-secondary graduates develop advanced skills and find careers in their fields. (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, February 5, 2004; Service Canada, 2007)

The youth employment programs falling under YES, and the equivalents of YES at the provincial and local levels (Youth Opportunities Ontario and Toronto Youth Employment Partnerships, respectively) can be divided into those targeting youth who are in school and those targeting youth who are out of school. For in-school youth, school-to-work transition programs, which include mentoring, tutoring, summer jobs, co-op education or school-based apprenticeships, have been offered. In recent years, there has been increased interest and
programming in the area of youth voluntarism as a means of facilitating school-to-work transition. In Ontario, youth voluntarism gained attention since 1999 revisions to the high school curriculum that required students to complete a minimum of 40 hours' "community involvement activities" for graduation (Ministry of Education and Training, 1996).

Out-of-school youth programs generally take a multi-faceted approach. In the past, training or skills enhancement has been funded federally and/or in partnership with other levels of government and delivered by community agencies. These programs are hard to track, because they were often one-time pilot projects and usually short-term (i.e. less than one year) and intensive (i.e. full-time). In addition to teaching job-specific skills, these programs often have a life skills component and/or a job placement; they can offer modest stipends to cover a youth's living costs while in training as well as public transit and child care costs. Examples of programs include multimedia training, Web design courses, and training in food and hospitality services or construction trades. Other programs offer job search assistance or career information and referral services (these are usually housed in self-serve resource centres that offer workshops and are equipped with a resource library, computers, phones and fax machines), individual employment counselling and assessment with counselling staff, and job trials or job placements (with or without wage subsidies). As well, self-employment and entrepreneurship training have been offered as work options for youth in the new economy.

Traditionally, youth employment programs have been delivered through an established network of youth employment centres at the community level. There are approximately 70 youth employment delivery agencies in Ontario, according to the Ontario Association of Youth Employment Centres. The agencies vary in size; some large, well-
known ones like the YMCA offer a range of programs and services, while others do not. Some have youth employment departments within a larger agency, while others specialize in youth employment services. These centres are located in urban and rural communities. There are a few small agencies in northern Ontario on reserves that serve mainly Aboriginal youth. In multicultural urban centres, client populations may vary and reflect the ethnic concentrations of the neighbourhood.

Generally, for out-of-school programs, youth who are between the ages of 15 and 24, and sometimes up to 30 (federal programs have an older cut-off age, which may even be higher for youth with disabilities), who are out of work and out of school are eligible to participate. The eligibility criteria for training programs may vary, with some requiring a minimum grade or functional literacy level or a specification for “job readiness.” Informational referral services are open to everyone. Students are eligible for summer job programs and internships. A client’s outcome in out-of-school program is considered successful if she/he gets a job or returns to school.

In addition, youth who have a previous attachment to the labour market can qualify for and access labour market training geared toward unemployed individuals with low levels of education and lack of marketable skills. The number of youth participating in non-youth-specific programs is not tracked but could include women-only training and services, even though there are very few of them. Indeed, most programs for unemployed women tend to be geared toward mature women and focus on career change or academic and skills upgrading. It is not that young women do not need these types of services, but anecdotal evidence suggests that they are not the main targets of women’s employment training where
the “feel” and “culture” of the program is not necessarily appealing to young women at the beginning of their career paths (Field notes, October 17, 2005).

Besides youth employment programs housed in youth employment centres, young people can also access employment services offered by other types of youth agencies or programs. For example, youth shelters may have employment counselling services or an “employment specialist” among their counsellors. Agencies whose focus is not primarily youth may also house youth-specific programs. For example, immigrant settlement services may have programs for immigrant youth. Aboriginal youth and youth with disabilities may also find specialized programs. Finally, a youth employment component may also appear in parenting skills programs for young women.

From this overview, the current Canadian youth employment programs structure appears to offer options for a wide range of youth clients. There are services for youth in school and out of school, and with or without labour market attachment, as well as some options for ethno-racial, and gender-specific groups. Notwithstanding individual program success, the rest of this chapter reveals how historic and ongoing tensions and omissions at the policy and program levels have shaped the current organization of youth programs in a way that undermines the system’s intended goal of helping young, marginalized women and men achieve success in the new economy.

*Trends and Tensions in Youth Employment Programs*

*Downloading Training to Provinces: No National Standards for Access and Equity*

Starting in 1996, the federal government signed Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDAs) with individual provinces to transfer the responsibility for training to the
provincial level. This move is congruent with the neo-liberal agenda of downsizing, decentralizing state functions, and moving responsibility and accountability from larger to smaller, dispersed units. Referring to Ontario’s agreement, signed in 2005, the policy intended to create efficient and effective training strategies to match a skilled workforce with employer needs, reduce duplication of labour market programs and services, and coordinate the delivery of government services to meet local and regional labour market needs (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, November 5, 2005, p. 3).

In relation to youth employment programs, these goals have been anticipated and welcomed by community advocates, many of whom have called for the need to clarify roles and responsibilities, and reduce overlaps and duplication in services (Ontario Association of Youth Employment Centres, June 2006). The withdrawal of the federal government from labour market training did not seem to threaten youth employment programs because of the political motivation to retain youth employment as an ongoing national priority. The federal government actually retained responsibility for youth programming as a pan-Canadian activity. In Ontario, the federal government was expected to continue its support by building on regional and local school-to-work initiatives already in place.

While the shift in jurisdictional responsibilities for employment training under LMDAs might not have substantially affected youth employment programs, it does impact young women’s access to training through women’s employment programs. The critique of training policy in terms of lack of access to employment training for women is not new. In the 1980s, advocates for women’s education and training observed women’s under-representation in training programs relative to their participation in the workforce and their share of the unemployed under the National Training Act, 1982. Under the Canadian Jobs
Strategy (CJS), 1985, some improvements were made to access through bridging programs that targeted people who experienced long-term unemployment and who were employment disadvantaged because of low education, or immigrant status in some program streams (Wismer, 1988, p. 35). However, the CJS goal to promote employer involvement in training indicated a significant initial movement toward privatization of training, which led to other challenges.

The current critique of jurisdictional debates ignited by LMDAs has renewed women’s groups’ demands to incorporate equity and access goals for women. ACTEW (A Commitment to Training and Employment for Women) states in its information on LMDAs potential impacts:

The Ontario government has not yet been clear on how existing federally funded contracts for women-focused programs will be transferred over to provincial jurisdiction. Furthermore, the province currently has no stated priority on the need for women-only programming, nor does it have a stated commitment to using gender-based analysis in program and policy initiatives (Yerichuk, n.d., p. 2).

In youth employment programs, there does not appear to be any specific commitment to young women or to gender equity goals. According to the guidelines for application of YES programs, organizations seeking funding need to indicate the potential number of each equity group served, but the two main YES performance measures used to identify, track and report results are the number of youth employed and number of youth returned to school identified by region, type of intervention and monetary investment (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, January 5, 2007). These are supplemented with the number of youth clients served and “at risk” youth clients served. (Internal Audit and Risk Management Services, May 2004). The absence of specific guidelines around measuring the outcomes for marginalized young women suggests that in the process of shifting jurisdictional
responsibilities and downloading and streamlining training programs under LMDAs, the goal of gender equality became no one's responsibility.

**Privatization of Service and Delivery in Employment Training**

Another trend in keeping with neo-liberal form of governance has been the involvement of private sector partnerships in youth employment programs and training. The trend to privatize training, starting with the Canada Jobs Strategy (CJS) continues to have specific impacts for youth employment programs. Forming partnerships is one of the guiding principles of YES: "... to support collaboration and strengthen partnerships among federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments and businesses, employers, not-for-profit and voluntary organizations, Aboriginal groups, other youth-serving agencies and community-based organizations." (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, January 5, 2007, p. 21). The task force on youth employment, mentioned earlier, called for a "Team Canada" approach that specifically cast the private sector in a leadership role and as a key player in solving the youth unemployment problem (Human Resources Development Canada, 1996).

The trend of involving employers extends to education-based school-to-work transition programs like the Ontario’s Passport to Prosperity. The goal of the program is as follows:

*It is a Ministry of Education campaign to increase employer involvement in experiential learning programs for secondary and post-secondary students across the province. Experiential learning involves activities that encourage students to learn new skills, knowledge and behaviours through experience or learning by doing (Ontario Business Education Partnership, 2006).*
The Ontario Business Education Partnership, previously the Ontario Learning Partnership Group, (note the new name’s emphasis on business), is a province-wide network of 26 business-education councils and local training boards that receives funding from the Ontario Ministry of Education and the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to promote and facilitate alliances between education, business, community organizations and government that enhance education and employment opportunities for the students.

Proponents of business partnerships in school-to-work initiatives give two main points of rationale: They claim that the private sector provides a model of efficiency in the delivery of skills training; and, the private sector is better positioned to respond to changing skill sets required in rapidly changing global labour markets. While Canada’s Council of Ministers of Education in its youth transitions report to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) acknowledges a potential conflict between the goal of equity and access and the goal of meeting immediate labour market needs, they nevertheless support the private sector’s role in service provision:

Combining flexibility and responsiveness in education with a guarantee of high and uniform quality of provision and opportunity for work-based training across the entire administrative area is a difficult and—some would say—impossible task. A high degree of responsiveness to markets can have the tendency to lead to an unequal distribution of opportunities. Rapid changes in course content and teaching personnel make guaranteeing the quality of courses and teaching standards more difficult. However, while ensuring quality may slow down or inhibit responsiveness, it may be in the longer-term interests of the student. Educational institutions must ensure that courses offered are of good quality as well as being relevant to employment needs of the locality. A healthy private training sector working alongside the public sector can meet the demand from individuals and organisations for the more specialised, tailor-made training programmes that public institutions may not be well suited to provide (Council of Ministers of Education (Canada), November 1999, p. 30).

There was a series of research reports released in mid-late 1990s by Canadian business communities documenting best practices, their contributions to youth employment
and recommendations to examine their own practices, and to coordinate strategies (Calamai, 1997; Canadian Youth Foundation, 1997a, 1997b). However, most recommendations for action were contingent upon strong economic growth, which employers saw as the pre-requisite for generating youth employment opportunities. The employers were not necessarily invested in young people’s futures so much as they were invested in young workers as a business opportunity.

Seeing youth as workers who have the potential to meet the needs of employers has had an impact on the orientation, content and the types of training offered in youth employment programs. The vocabulary of youth “job readiness” and “employability skills” begins to creep into the language of youth employment. Even though YES’s Skills Link program says it “. . . offers a range of activities that can be tailored to meet individual needs and provide more intensive assistance over longer periods of time,” the length of programs funded generally does not exceed 12 months—the First Nations and Inuit Youth Work Experience Program guidelines specify that program last no longer than 11 months (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, December 7, 2005). In reality, programs in the community tend to run six months or even shorter. This short time frame for training impacts the types of jobs young people can train for. A preliminary Web survey of youth training funded under YES’s Skills Link showed that programs tended to cluster around traditional youth occupations and industries like hospitality (for example, Barista training in British Columbia), tourism, retail, some trades, technology and arts (graphic design, multi-media production) (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, January 6, 2005).

Neither is gender equity a priority goal for employers’ involvement in training. Advocates of women’s education and training found that under the CJS, women had less
access to training when it was employer sponsored because they were not in positions to take the training. In addition, women’s training tended to lead to traditional female occupations in clerical and entry-level service jobs (Dance & Witter, 1988). More recently, critics of privatized training have argued that while young people may experience short-term benefits from working in youth service jobs, over the longer term, employers’ involvement and its impacts on program structure and options can potentially compromise young women’s access to programs geared toward reinforcing rather than challenging inequities of labour markets (Wong & McBride 2003). Furthermore, expanding a privatized model of service delivery where unemployed individuals “shop for training” potentially hastens the demise of an established network of women’s programs (Lior & Wismer, 2003), which can also impact young women as they require employment services later on in their lives.

**Closing the Skills Gap: Education as the Pathway to Jobs**

Youth employment programs in the 1990s started to focus almost exclusively on the “supply side” of the labour market supply-demand equation. In 1980s into early 1990s, studies showed early high school leavers experienced significant disadvantages in the labour market (Gilbert, 1993). In addition, predictions were being made that a high percentage of the jobs in future would require higher and more specialized skills than those attained through high school education (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 1994). As people became convinced that future jobs would require high-level and technological skills, the more they became invested in a human capital perspective. Popularized in 1950s, human capital theory hypothesized that people’s place in the labour market was a function of their skills and education. Since then, the notion of human capital has been elaborated on to
include different sorts of social capital and networks based in relationships and communities (Herbert, Sun, & Kowch, 2004; "Social Capital," Spring 2001). Youth employment programs began to direct youth toward participation in formal education and opportunities for developing skills seen to be useful in a knowledge-based economy; the role of youth employment programs was to close skills gaps using education/training and to match young people’s skills to high-tech, highly skilled positions. Employment programs shifted from creating jobs to producing workers for the new global economy through training programs.

Although supply-side programming became the standard for all employment programming, the focus on formal education, training and skills development was particularly targeted at young people. Policy-makers were persuasive in their rationale. It made intuitive sense that younger people, rather than older more mature workers, should pursue education to make up for their lack of experience. (Incidentally, older or mature unemployed individuals were also subject to educational advice but in the language of “lifelong learning.”) To their credit, young Canadians have been motivated to increase their human capital through education. Young women’s education levels and enrolment in post-secondary education have increased steadily over the last quarter century (Lindsay & Almey, December 2004). While encouraging young people to strategically build their social capital and networks through education and training is generally good, sound advice, studies of racial minority groups’ experience of systemic disadvantage and discrimination in employment have shown that building individual capacities, skills and knowledge may be a necessary strategy but not necessarily one that will on its own guarantee racial minority youth high wages or low unemployment rates reflective their education levels (Kunz, 2003)
Not only do critics of the supply-side solution to youth unemployment challenge human capital enthusiasts to account for racial and gender discrimination; they also question the reality of high-skilled job growth. At least one scholar wondered if people’s perception of the growth of the knowledge-based economy more accurately reflected the existence of a knowledge-based society (Milani, 2000), whereby the latter is not characterized by growth of high-skilled but rather low-skill, low-end service jobs. Much has been written about how the labour market is becoming increasingly polarized and resulting in growing income gaps between the rich and poor (Curry-Stevens, 2001; Yalnizyan, 2000). One economist who has observed the labour market reality of deskilled and low-skilled jobs stated his observations in concrete terms:

A substantial majority of jobs in our economy still do not actually require all this higher education. For every computer technician in Canada, there are 15 retail clerks. There are 12 restaurant workers for every financial professional. There are 6 truck drivers for every specialist in pharmaceuticals and biotechnology (Stanford, July/August 2001).

The underlying assumption of strategies aimed to solve youth unemployment by prescribing education and training to narrow the skills gap is that there is a sufficient number of job opportunities available for those with the right set of skills and educational qualifications. This assumption appears problematic in the reality of the current labour market, where first, even if a young person upgrades him/herself through formal education or youth employment programs, there might not be enough good, high-skilled jobs to go around. Secondly, it is questionable whether these low-end “McJobs” ever lead to better careers in the traditional sense, given that new work arrangements expand the boundaries of work and what constitutes work (Pettinger, 2005). Given these trends, the problem of youth unemployment
may be attributed to the lack of demand. If such is the case, solutions would focus less on individual youth. Armstrong articulated this view as follows:

The growth of the global economy means that decisions affecting employment can be made anywhere. The solution to unemployment is not more training but a stronger government at the federal and provincial levels which can act as a buffer between workers and international capital. The Canadian government must form an economic policy that is directed at changing jobs rather than people (Pat Armstrong, 1993, p. 49).

While prescribing education and training as a solution to youth unemployment was not necessarily an immediate or effective strategy for helping individual youth find good jobs, it did raise questions about education-occupational linkages. In some ways, the debates drew support for closer school/labour market integration through the development and implementation of educational-based school-to-work policy models and practices that have for the most part benefited employers (Taylor, 2005).

**Focusing on “At Risk” Youth: Realizing Potential or Social Control**

A final trend in youth employment programs in the 1990s was an increased focus on serving “at risk” youth. The previous chapter outlined the multiple meanings and assumptions of “at risk” youth and how the concept frames youth research. The literature review also described how young people could be considered “at risk” of underemployment or unemployment due to a combination of characteristics related to low levels of formal education, poverty, disability, geographic/rural location, family background, or racial/ethnic minority, new immigrant or Aboriginal status. Here, the historic significance of the “at risk” youth category is traced in relation to youth employment programs.

The youth targeted by youth employment programs has changed over the years. In the 1930s, during the Great Depression, the Canadian government created relief camps that
targeted homeless, unemployed, working-class men (Interim Report on Relief Camps in Canada: Recommendations of Special Committee Appointed to Investigate Conditions, n.d.). During this period, lower class young women often performed domestic duties in their own or other people’s homes under private arrangements. In any case, they were not counted as unemployed. In the early youth training schemes, occupational training was seen to benefit young unemployed men and women, many of whom were on relief (Dominion-Provincial Youth Training In 1937, n.d.). When single young women moved into urban settings in search of employment, this group was considered a “problem” by legal, medical and political authorities, who saw young working women’s presence in cities as a threat to the established social order, and as a result, sought to control their lives outside of work through various campaigns aimed at regulating their sexuality (Strange, 1995). In these early examples, lower- and working-class youth were the original “at risk” youth.

In the last few decades, “at risk” youth have become more closely associated with racial minority youth. High school dropouts and pregnant teens have a history of being targeted by reformists from across the political spectrum; however, recent social, labour and education policies have had specific racializing impacts. In the 1980s, in the United States, young, poor Black single mothers were stigmatized as undeserving “welfare mothers” by then President Ronald Reagan. While the term was not as widely used in Canada to stigmatize women on welfare as it was in the US, its enduring iconic racial imagery was well-known. In the mid-1990s, curriculum changes and zero tolerance policies such as the Safe Schools Act in Ontario’s education system were found to have disproportionately negative impacts on Black and racial minority youth (Bhattacharjee, July 8, 2003). In the late 1990s, new youth employment programs emerged as neighbourhood safety and anti-
violence initiatives. For example, the Toronto Board of Trade’s Youth One program description begins with a statement about youth crime and community safety concerns (Toronto Board of Trade, 2004). Particularly after September 11, 2001, headlines about anti-terrorism, racial profiling and youth gun violence effectively promoted a racial subtext linking Black and Muslim young men with trouble (Tator & Henry, 2006; Watt, February 6, 2006).

Historically, youth employment programs have been known to uphold the dual role of providing education and training, and social control over idle, possibly troublesome youth. Wong and McBride (2003) observed how current youth training programs in British Columbia negotiate this tension by creating two complementary approaches to training where “lower risk” youth can access education and training for highly skilled, “high-road” or “good” jobs, whereas “higher risk” youth get funneled into programs that tend to lead to the “low-road” or “bad” jobs (p. 233). This bifurcated approach guarantees that all “at risk” youth have some access to programs but obscures the fact that not all training will lead to equally successful outcomes. At the same time that the dual high- and low-road approach reinforces, rather than challenges inequities arising from restructured and polarized neoliberal labour markets, this program structure also achieves and maintains a political focus on helping and keeping “at risk” youth out of trouble. The point is that “at risk” youth have been constructed as being “at risk” in particular ways within youth employment programs, the form of which develops in relation to the organization of local labour markets and the state.

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Conclusion

This chapter described the basic framework of youth employment and training programs and services. I depicted how current trends in youth employment programs reflect previous and ongoing struggles over program goals in the context of competing social, economic and political agendas. In summary, Canadian governments have recognized the problem of youth unemployment and have shown willingness to help by offering a range of youth employment programs and services. However, the state had tended to waffle on its commitment to gender equity and access to programs as it aligns itself with business partners and employers who also want to help young people but face pressures to acquire cheap labourers to meet the needs of polarized local labour markets which demand flexible workers. As a compromise, the state focuses on serving “at risk” youth but the programs funnel participants into low-end youth jobs, which seems like a partially acceptable solution since some of the youth do get jobs, even though they might be “McJobs.” With its focus on “at risk” youth, the state can claim that it is assisting young people, and even giving opportunities to the most disadvantaged of them, while providing businesses with labourers and maintaining social control over potentially unruly, racial minority youth.

What remains unknown from this description of the structure of youth employment and services and its overlaps with women’s programs, is how aspects of this youth employment programs complex are actually implemented. What remains unknown is how the programs shape young women’s everyday working lives. How do young women who are considered “at risk” youth practically experience these tensions and contradictions as participants in youth and women’s programs? How do youth employment programs impact
these young women’s everyday provisioning experiences? These questions are matters of empirical investigation to which I turn in the next three chapters.
CHAPTER 5: YOUNG WOMEN'S PROVISIONING EXPERIENCE:
CHALLENGING YOUTH TRANSITIONS

In this chapter, I present the actual provisioning experiences of young women. Taking the
standpoint of young women participants in Gen-Y community programs that are part of the
youth employment complex provides me with the point of entry into the investigation of the
institutional arrangements that influence the decisions they make about their working lives.
By asking broad questions about their experiences, I did not make assumptions about what
constituted young women’s provisioning, nor did I begin the study with any preconceived
notions about the nature of links between family, school, work and community spheres in
young women’s lives. Instead, I examined young women’s accounts of their experiences for
how they managed their responsibilities and made decisions about their working lives. I
discovered that young women’s provisioning experiences are not accounted for within the
purview of the youth transitions framework.

Provisioning Relationships

I began the interviews by asking Gen-Y young women who they felt responsible for.
(Descriptions of the young women interviewed are provided in Appendix B.) The young
mothers in the group identified their children as their main responsibility. Others mentioned
being responsible for relatives (aging parents, siblings, nieces and nephews); one young
woman mentioned providing for her boyfriend by giving him emotional support. While these
young women were responsible at most for themselves and a few immediate or extended
relatives, these “relationships of responsibilities” (Neysmith, Reitsma-Street, Baker-Collins,
Porter, & Tam, 2007) were part of the context from which they made their decisions about
school and work.
Some of the young women in the shelter said that they provided for relatives who were obviously not living with them at the time of the interview. Maintaining relationships and responsibilities for people who, in some cases lived in other areas of the city, required the young women to organize their schedules and transportation options and costs. At times this meant that they would telephone instead of visit, or that they cut down on the frequency of visits. However, even though they may have had fewer chances for direct contact than they would have liked, the young women still felt a responsibility to check in, or call their relatives on a fairly regular basis.

Channel, an articulate young bi-racial woman, talked about how she sees her father twice a week to make sure he “has healthy food” and has “cut down on red meat.” In addition, she said:

“A 20-minute phone call here and there—even just thinking about them—is a lot. People don’t think that’s time putting into someone, but it is because you’re planning, assessing. I think all those things are part of taking care of someone.”

Channel’s care strategy has changed since she has limited contact with her father; she claimed that she is more directive, in her words, “commanding him” about his diet, as opposed to setting a good example and being a good influence.

Except for the mothers with dependent children, the young women’s provisioning relationships were not dependent in a traditional sense. Only some were supportive in a financial way. Nevertheless, the young women clearly expressed their feelings of responsibility. Elizabeth, who is from the West Indies, talked about caring for her parents:

“Yeah, if they [my parents] were to be ill at some point, I feel like, since I’m the oldest of my siblings, I would be the one responsible for making sure they’re okay, that they’re getting the proper care that they need, depending on their situation.”

“What would that involve?” I asked.
"Anything, whatever, to make them happy," replied Elizabeth. "You know, they're your parents, no matter what. They took care of you. I don't have to take care of them, but I want to take care of them."

Channel talked about caring for her father, nephew and boyfriend:

"I dunno if it's because I'm a female or because I'm just a really nice person, but I think it's a priority for me to be able to have good relationships. So yeah, I make sure it's done. Because if it's not done, I don't know how good I can be doing something else."

Most of the young women said they were providing for themselves. Eve, a young Jamaican-Canadian woman, said, "I have family here, but I'm solely providing for myself. I plan to go to school in September." Elizabeth said, "Well, actually the shelter is a place for self-development—self-improvement, I would say." While many were trying to care for themselves, Kelly, a young lone mother, pointed out a paradoxical situation: needing to care for others—in her case, her children—while she herself is still young. Eve, an 18-year-old who was living in the shelter, also made comments along the same lines while referring to her living situation:

"Will you be living on your own?" I asked.

"Yup," Eve answered.

"How do you feel about that?" I asked.

"I'm kind of scared, because I'm so young and I think, most people my age are with their parents and still in school. I think right now I'm living like the 25-year-old on my own."

To a lesser extent, some of the young women felt a responsibility to contribute to their broader communities. Nadine, who is 25 years old, talked about her work with the Boys and Girls Club as giving back to the community. She also seemed to identify with women of colour and the struggles they face in making career decisions. Eve and others talked about their church community.
Although youth are too often negatively stereotyped as carefree and irresponsible, these descriptions illustrate that Gen-Y young women are substantially committed to others. The activities they perform to uphold their responsibilities are the subject of the next section.

_Provisioning Activities_

Having established who they felt responsible for, I asked the young women how they provided for the people they mentioned. While I organized the interview questions around family, school, work and community life, the stories young women told about their provisioning experiences were both contained within and ran across these domains.

_Paid Employment_

Many of the young women talked about employment as a way they provided for themselves and their families. As a group they talked about working in food services, telemarketing/telephone surveys, child care/babysitting, general labour and retail/customer services. While some spoke about being uncomfortable selling products over the phone, having to serve cranky customers and enduring poor working conditions in call centres, most spoke positively about how the jobs were “good” or “fun,” and how they enjoyed learning new skills, helping customers, taking initiative and developing friendships with co-workers.

Some of the young women who were unemployed at the time of the interview talked about their job search and career plans. Elizabeth shared her frustrations with her job search:

“Right now, mostly I’m getting so depressed because I can’t seem to get the job thing going. So that’s depressing me, being here [the shelter]—the fact that I have to be out by 10. It’s not like I’m out and working; you just have to be out. I’m trying to get jobs. You know what? Today I’m not going. I send two résumés a day or whatever...I’ve gone to a couple of interviews and whatever... I’ve been sick for the longest time. I guess it’s the environment. ... The first few weeks I’ve been
really really sick with hives and allergies and stuff. So the fact that the working thing is not working out right now—I think it was because I was so sick to start with. . . . I’m sniffly. I’m going into the interview and sneezing. I think they’re not going to hire me. They’ll look at me and say ‘she’s sick.’”

Two of the young mothers were looking for jobs with better pay (one was a part-time telephone survey researcher and the other, a cashier). Annie, on the other hand, is a full-time student looking for her first job.

“How come you’re looking for [cashier] work?” I asked.

“Just a simple job—it doesn’t really matter. I could start up anywhere. Like, even if I have to work in the back cleaning up at Tim Horton’s or McDonald’s—any of those jobs, that type of thing, it doesn’t matter; just to get me started,” Annie responded.

“What’s your main reason for looking for a job?”

“The experience. You have to start somewhere. I think, in a way you don’t really learn how to manage money or maintain money or know how hard it is to get money until you start working for it yourself.”

From the interviews, the young women suggested that their participation in paid employment was a basic aspect of their provisioning. For most of them, working was important, but not only for making money, because I suspect their wages would be low.

The young women’s reasons for looking for work vary as do the factors shaping young women’s decisions to take certain jobs. I got the overall sense that while working in paid employment is an essential provisioning activity, at the same time, working is not necessarily the be all and end all to provisioning. The young women’s descriptions of their other provisioning activities validate this initial interpretation about their relationship to paid employment.

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Getting an Education

Without exception, every young woman talked about going to school as a way of
provisioning for themselves and their families. Just about all of the young women, regardless
of whether they were high school students or university graduates, mentioned that they
wanted to pursue some sort of post-secondary education, upgrading or training. They were
thinking about, making plans for and imagining better futures with more formal education.
Annie, a high school student, was preparing for university. Melissa, a university graduate,
was applying for graduate studies. Alice wanted to finish her college diploma, but in the
meantime had taken an office management course. Keesha was thinking about obtaining her
high school equivalency diploma through a General Educational Development (GED)
certificate program. Kelly was waiting to attend academic upgrading. Many of the young
mothers talked about going to community college. Linda, who completed some college
courses, talked about the importance of “that little piece of paper,” that diploma, degree or
certificate, for getting good jobs in the future.

Almost all of the Gen-Y young women believed that education was important. When
I probed them in the interview to explain how they would pay for their schooling or support
themselves while they attended school, they suggested a wide range of steps and directions
they would take. Some of these responses sounded self-assured and neatly planned out, with
specific timelines and alternatives; others had few details spelled out. Later on, I will
examine their decisions and strategies around pursuing education, and view these strategies
in relation to how they manage their various provisioning experiences, which should provide
insight into what it actually takes for these young women to attend college or university.
However, for the Gen-Y young women, the problem was not a lack of desire for post-secondary education.

Before leaving this section on education, I want to point out some of the variations in the young women’s understanding of the importance of education responses. Even though they all appeared to have taken to heart the message that education is the pathway to good jobs in the new economy, upon closer inspection, their stories revealed how their social location and access to resources complicated their perspectives on the role of education in relation to careers/employment. At one end of the option spectrum, both Channel and Natasha, who respectively had negative experiences in university and high school, expressed some reservations about the “education systems.” Channel was somewhat disillusioned in university. She explained her expectations:

“I also think that what I expected at university was something like, you are becoming a free thinker, you are going to come up with theories on your own, maybe you’re going to analyze or support other theories. But no it’s more like a conformist, brainwashing type of institution, and it sucks. It’s just a big, bourgeois party.”

Natasha rejected high school’s emphasis on university preparation:

“My school’s really university-oriented. I was finding that there was nothing offered for me that I wanted to get into university, and I felt that it was somehow my fault that I wasn’t interested in being an engineer or a psychologist or a sociologist or whatnot, and there was something wrong with me.”

Nevertheless, both Channel and Natasha were making plans to do upgrading and college.

Annie, a South Asian student who lives at home and has the support of her family, talked about education as a pathway to jobs in ways that the other young women with fewer resources and more difficult life situations did not. Annie said that she wanted to get into law and not a general Bachelor of Arts program in university, because she felt that a B.A. was “not really useful” and it would be “hard to get a job.” Annie was getting advice from her
guidance counsellor about scholarships. At times in the interview she sounded uncertain of her academic abilities (her mark in math was lower than she wanted it to be). Annie also talked about meeting different people and socializing at university with other students in school clubs. In particular, seeing university and student life as a social space was not something that other young women who had fewer resources and supports mentioned.

Samantha, a lone mother of Black heritage emphasized different aspects of her educational plans. She was not as specific about the choices she had to finance her education, and did not seem as concerned about comparing different types of degrees or diplomas, or getting into the “right” program in the way Annie was. The guidance counsellors did not seem as helpful to the young mothers. Samantha was more interested in learning practical life skills as opposed to French or philosophy:

“They make it so you learn all these things you don’t need in life. You go to school, and you have to get 31 credits. Some of the things you don’t care about, you don’t need to know, you never want to know. I don’t understand why we do it. If you don’t want to be bilingual in French why do you need to learn French, you know? You don’t need to know philosophy. . . . In life, you just need to know basic stuff. . . . Teachers try to say that it does help with problem-solving and stuff like that, but I don’t see it.

From these examples, Gen-Y young women were seen to have markedly different ideas about education that reflect their different social locations. Even though they all accept that education is key to better futures, they appeared to understand their educational choices in ways that relate to their life circumstances and the resources they have access to, like sympathetic counsellors. Yet, when they talked about making educational choices, their rationale was internally focused on what they need to do to make their educational plan happen (for example, work hard, study hard, be determined). It is difficult to detect from the content of their talk the practicalities and conditions surrounding the educational choices that
they see themselves making to support themselves and their families. (In later chapters, I explore how their choices are actually structured and impacted by community programs.)

**Taking Care of Family**

Many of the young women talked about taking care of their children and relatives. As primary caregivers, the young mothers spent significant amounts of time caring for their children. The young mothers took care of their children by bathing, feeding and dressing them. Other activities associated with child rearing included taking children to day care or to school, playing with them, going to the park and visiting with relatives. They also described familiar domestic chores like laundry, planning meals, cooking, cleaning and grocery shopping. The quotes from Kelly and Alice show how their days centred on their children.

Kelly said:

“My daughter just started [day care] so she’s still getting adjusted to it. It’s hard for her. Sometimes I’ll pick her up and she’s very miserable. Sometimes my day is like, not going so well, [but] I kinda leave it aside and try to focus on her.”

In my interview with Alice, I asked, “Do you have time for everything?”

“Yeah, I usually get everything in. It all depends on her—how her day is going—and how my day is going. If we’ve had a good night’s sleep and things like that, the day runs much more smoothly than if she’s been up all night. She might, you know, sleep in, in the morning and not go to the drop-in centre. So I have to change our plans a little bit, based on what’s happened in the night and stuff like that,” Alice replied.

In the above examples, the young women described dimensions of caregiving which contributed to building and sustaining nurturing relationships. These ongoing and mentally consuming tasks often had no name or label. The young women with children described tasks such as playing with children, “just being there,” paying attention, being present and
involved, taking time to be emotionally available, attentive and accommodating to children’s needs and moods.

Young women who did not have children provided care for family members in different ways. Channel saw herself doing “cheerleading stuff” to cheer up her father; she called herself an “emotional backbone” for him and her boyfriend. Melissa, a recent university graduate who was living at home with her parents and two brothers, performed a large share of health care work (going to medical appointments, monitoring special diets, and administering needles and topical creams) for her father and one of her brothers, and a visiting grandmother, all of whom have major health problems. Melissa talked about driving her brother to his factory job and sometimes to the mall. While she is “on-call” for her father’s medical needs, she also works in the family bakery. Even though she is paid for baking, it is just enough for her room and board. She did not even consider “working” in the family business as having a job. Rather, she saw herself as “helping out.” Melissa described her responsibilities to her family:

“I think usually the message is that, if you can, there’s nothing to stop you. You can work if you want to work, and a lot of times that’s not how things work, right? Because you have other obligations in your life that maybe prohibit you from working full-time, like how you’re expected to, right? … [My] relatives usually think, ‘Why don’t you have a job?’ It’s not hard. Go out and find employment. But when you think about it, can I just stop and leave everything behind, stop going to the family business, not look after my Dad? There are a lot of things that I have no choice, right? I feel as if I’m obligated, as if I have to do it, and I’ve been raised that way. It’s hard for me to leave everything behind and say, ‘You know what? I’m going to have these [career] ambitions. I’m going to follow them. I’m going to find employment and the career of my choice.’ That would be selfish.”

Nadine was providing for her mother, who has been diagnosed with a terminal illness.

“What do you do to provide for her, to care for her?” I asked.

“Um, with all that’s happened, I was at university but I had to take the time off. I had two jobs. Her expenses were really, really high, and it was really difficult working
and taking care of her. Private nursing wasn’t an option. The hospice was the best option—around-the-clock care, 24 hours—so that’s where she’s been,” Nadine responded.

“And you were paying for [the care]?” I asked.

“Pretty much her rent, her medicine, rehabilitation, legal fees because she doesn’t have power of attorney and she doesn’t have an updated will. Those are the things we had to rectify. Paying for those things—it amasses to a great amount of money, and my brother doesn’t have steady employment. I don’t either. So that’s pretty much how I ended up here [the shelter]. It was just physically draining and we didn’t have the money. It was difficult paying for her rent as well as my own.”

“What other things do you do to provide for her?”

“Monetarily we provide her rent and rehab and so forth. I’m just there for her as a daughter.”

Nadine said she was advised by the doctor not to tell her mother about her homeless status so as not to worry her. Prior to coming to the shelter, Nadine was living with a relative so that she could save on rent and thus put more money away for her mother’s care, but it turned out that living arrangement “just wasn’t a safe environment.” When Nadine moved out, she lost her job because it was the relative who had arranged for her position.

Nadine had several priorities she was attending to at once. She was trying to visit her mother as much as possible, and arranging for permanent housing. Nadine was juggling schedules, arranging for rides, gathering her documents together for housing and student loan applications, and thinking about and getting ready for university in September. She managed her scarce resources by walking to places where she could and relying on friends for rides. Despite the pressures and difficulties Nadine was dealing with, she presented herself during the interview and afterwards as friendly and helpful to the other young women in the residence.
The family caregiving activities that the Gen-Y young women described in this section are wide-ranging. Not only do the tasks differ qualitatively from mental to health care work, but the young women’s level of responsibility also differs. The young mothers in the group have full primary responsibility for their children, whereas others experienced ongoing caregiving concerns for family members but at a lesser level of responsibility than the mothers. I am not implying that the caregiving activities are directly comparable, even though I have presented them together in this section. Nor do I imply that caregiving for an immediate or extended family member is any less significant than caring for children. For young women like Melissa and Nadine, caring for their parents was a huge part of their everyday life. (The fact that the primary caregivers were mothers was likely an artifact of my sampling frame, which simply did not capture young women who were primary elder-caregivers.) However, I do suggest that the level of a young woman’s caregiving responsibilities, whether it is a primary caregiving role, will impart different consequences for her provisioning experience which are dependent on the kinds of supports, material and financial resources she has access to through her various family and social networks.

Community Work

Many of the young women were active volunteers in their communities. As a group, they talked about volunteering in various organizations including child care/day care centres, churches, schools, political parties, social services, health care and recreation centres. They performed a variety of tasks in the community, including office work, child care, elder care, mentoring, coaching, preparing holiday meals, organizing recreational and community events, fundraising and teaching Sunday school.
The young women said that they volunteered for reasons that confirmed findings of established research on voluntarism (Febbraro, 2001; M. Hall, Lasby, Gumulka, & Tryon, June 2006). They talked about how the experiences were fulfilling, meaningful and fun.

Melissa said:

“It [volunteering] has been very rewarding. The little girls, they’re amazing, they think of you as a role model. It’s great to facilitate different activities for the kids, show them how to do different arts and crafts and things that I enjoy doing myself.”

Nadine spoke about what she gets from volunteering:

“Just a sense of enjoyment, knowing I’ve helped another person. That’s all that it really does.”

Eve talked about how volunteering with elderly people related to her career aspirations:

“Well, I want to get into medicine, so that’s the hospital. I want to build on my people skills and communication skills and basically get a feel for different aspects out there and things like that, like different routes I can get into medicine, I guess.”

Some of the young women saw volunteering as a direct route to paid employment:

“If I can’t get [a paid job] by sending my résumé, then maybe I’ll work for free and they’ll hire me,” Elizabeth reasoned.

Chantal talked about volunteering at a supermarket for a similar reason:

“Why would someone volunteer there?” I asked.

“To get work experience. A lot of people do that. They volunteer there just to get the work experience.”

Alice also saw a direct link between volunteering and job prospects:

“You need volunteer experience. A lot of jobs like you to have volunteer experience or community involvement. That shows you’re going to be a good team member with your work.”

Annie said she began volunteering in order to fulfill her “community involvement activities” requirement for high school graduation in Ontario, but ended up enjoying herself:
“We got on the Girls Council after being here [the drop-in]. We thought it was cool to be on the council, to be responsible for things here, little things like the camp. We got to watch these kids and they were pretty well behaved so it was pretty easy,” explained Annie.

“So it was cool being on the council. Why was it cool?” I asked.

“Because you got hours [for school credit] done and it wasn’t like usually when you do hours. It can be boring, you’re not doing something that you like; you’re just doing it for school.”

“Okay, it’s your volunteer hours you’re talking about?” I clarified.

“Yeah, but in this case it was fun. Volunteering here was not just ‘oh boring’ because it’s kind of like you want to do it. Like, I like to do it. You need 75 hours, but I’ll still keep working here to get more, because it’s fun.”

The young women tended to volunteer in places that were familiar to them. This was the case for Nadia and Michelle:

“You said you do some volunteering?” I asked.

“Yes,” confirmed Nadia.

“Tell me about that,” I asked.

“At school, I do volunteering, like help the secretary with filing, photocopying, faxing and stuff after school,” Nadia explained.

“How come you decided to do that?”

“Because there is nothing for me to do, something to occupy myself with. . . . I wanted to be occupied with something.”

“How come you decided to do that instead of something else?”

“I don’t know what happened. Actually I wanted to volunteer in hospital but I’ve not the time to inquire about that.”

“You mention you volunteer as well, what do you do for volunteering?” I asked Michelle.

“I’m actually starting, I was volunteering at a day care centre about a year ago, and I’m actually going to volunteer at her old day care centre, I’m starting in September,
actually. I’m going to be volunteering at the first day care I ever put her in,” Michelle replied.

“Why are you doing that?” I wanted to know.

“I don’t know, because they had openings there and it’s always good to volunteer somewhere you’re familiar with just because you know it. It’s also good to get new experiences as well, but in this case I already know the place, I know the policies. I’d be a good person to volunteer there, because I could bring extra things into the organization because I know what they like and what they’re looking for. I know the direction they’re trying to go in, just because I was there before she used attend the school.”

Michelle also talked about volunteering at church when asked to do so.

Some of the young women made note of the limits of volunteering. Natasha said straightforwardly in her interview that she would rather work than volunteer. Melissa explained another limitation in terms of the actual experiences a volunteer can get:

“They encourage people to volunteer but when you utilize your skills to help out and take on more roles and more responsibilities, they tell you no. At the youth employment centre, I wanted to do more things, help with résumés, critiquing cover letters, but of course it’s sort of like an organization where they’re kind of stringent. There are certain things that volunteers aren’t allowed to do because of confidentiality. . . . There’s lots of things that are restricted to paid workers. Like even for this agency, I’m not allowed to stay alone with the kids and supervise them; there always has to be a paid staff. . . . So how do you get that experience? You’re not allowed to job shadow because of confidentiality. When people are counselling and working with clients, you can’t be there. So where do you develop the skills?”

Overall, Gen-Y young women seem to volunteer in many different ways and to hold different ideas about the meaning and utility of community work. Viewing the activities as a way young women provide for themselves and their families helps us to understand why they volunteer at what they do and where they do it. Seeing volunteering as a path to jobs, it makes strategic sense for young women to try to get some work experience in the area where they would eventually like to work. But because the young women have school and other work responsibilities to balance, they carefully balance the immediate benefits of
volunteering with their long-term plans and career goals. In this way, their class position can be seen to influence where they decide to volunteer. For example, volunteering at a supermarket might get them extra groceries, or volunteering in a day care allows them access to children’s materials and spaces to which they can bring their own child. Where, how and the extent to which they participate in the community reflects a combination and best balance between meeting immediate and future needs. This balancing of immediate and future needs will emerge as a recurrent theme in young women’s provisioning strategies.

However, as Melissa pointed out, performing volunteer work in the community does not guarantee secure working futures, even though volunteering is often prescribed for young people with little work experience. The volunteer opportunities young women have access to are also contained within the boundaries of their social location. For example, none of the young women were engaged in organizing charity balls for society’s rich and famous, yet this type of volunteering would give them exposure to social networks and opportunities they would not otherwise be exposed to.

**Grown-up Versions of Provisioning Experiences**

These descriptions of provisioning activities show the complexity of Gen-Y young women’s working lives. Many of the examples could not be contained within specific workspaces or traditional parameters of work. Emotionally based tasks like worrying about family members and other caregiving responsibilities were attended to on an ongoing basis in and between the spaces and boundaries of family, work, school and community. Before turning to young women’s provisioning strategies, I want to note how the young women’s provisioning activities look very grown-up. There is nothing typically youthful in these
descriptions of provisioning. It may not be surprising that this group appears more mature than their age since these young women find themselves dealing with life situations like homelessness and parenthood that are not likely faced by others in their age cohort. Yet some of the Gen-Y young women expressed provisioning concerns regarding aging parents and sibling care that may likely be on the minds of other young people. In this regard, the experiences they articulated challenge us to rethink our assumptions about what actually concerns young people, which perhaps may have been narrow-minded to begin with.

One area that did not show up very strongly in the data, which might have provided a more youthful flavour to the young women’s provisioning activities, was peer friendships. Some of the young women led me to believe they did not have much time for friends, and some even appeared to keep to themselves socially, save for their participation in the community program. Elizabeth talked a little about the pressures she felt to go out with friends, but she described the friendship dynamics and antics of gossip and dating as somewhat tiring.

Provisioning Strategies: How Young Women Juggle Priorities

Having documented in the first part of the chapter what the young women do to provide for themselves and their families, this section describes the strategies they use to manage their workloads and responsibilities.

Limiting or Prioritizing Paid Employment

Some of the young women manage their provisioning activities by limiting their participation in the paid labour market. They concentrate on schooling or on child care, or they prioritize
caring relationships. A number of the young mothers made comments about the criteria they were setting for their current job searches and employment options. When asked whether she took extra shifts at her telephone survey job, Chantal responded, “No, not really, not until school is done, because I want to be with my son. If I go to work, he hardly sees me. I don’t want that.”

Michelle also considered her time limitations:

“I’m not going to take a job that wants me to work seven days, wants me to work massive hours, because it’s not going to work with my schedule; it’s not going to work with my school, my homework and raising my child and seeing her and whatnot. Desperate as I am to find a job, I wouldn’t take it just because they’re offering it to me. It has to work with me, my environment and what’s going on around.”

Elizabeth gave an example from the past of how she rejected a high-paying job because it interfered with her education:

“They paid $13 an hour, but my education is still more important than $13 an hour right now. What happens if your business goes squat? What happens to me? I don’t have an education.”

For young women who receive social assistance, their benefits are cutback if they earn more than a specified amount. Yet without social assistance, Linda’s cashier job would not pay enough for her to support herself and her daughter. Linda explained:

“It [social assistance] pays my rent. The tricky thing about it: I can’t work a lot of hours ’cause I’d make a lot more money. They could cutback or whatever. So I have to be really careful how many hours I work, how much money I’m making. That’s why I’m trying to find a well-paid job, so I can get off of it so I don’t have to worry about making too much money or whatever.”

Putting limits on paid employment, does not mean that working is not a priority for the young women. Keesha decided that for the time being, working is the best way for her:

“Right now I have lots of bills to pay. I have to pay my mom rent; I have to take care of a lot of stuff. So right now I’m really concentrating on getting all that stuff done. Then, when I can actually move out and get my own place and I have everything stable, I can end up going back to school.”
Samantha also planned to work full-time after high school graduation:

“After high school’s done, I’m planning on working, getting about two jobs. I’m going to come off [social] assistance. That’s my plan after high school. Right now, I can’t work and go to school. That’s why, for a young person, I need a bit of help. After high school, I think I can be able to handle that pressure a little bit more. . . . It depends on how everything goes ’cause there’s courses you can take in the daytime… I’m just going to have to [leave it until] I get there. I want to get there in the next year and half or so.”

Even though the young women were generally keen to work, when making employment decisions, they had to consider child care, housing and transportation issues. Even though Alice’s mother provided child care for her, she had to reject a well-paid position in her field because the position required weekend work and the location meant she would have to travel one and a half hours to get to work. Whether they decided to prioritize employment or not, the young women were choosy about jobs, because many of them could not afford to settle for youth jobs. So paid work is an important aspect, but not the most important aspect, of young women’s provisioning.

**Using Government-Sponsored Programs**

When I asked Gen-Y young women how their participation in community programs helped to provide for themselves and others, they named a variety of tangible program benefits. They talked about how their self-esteem improved, how they got the chance to exercise leadership skills, how they got help with housing, parenting and employment, how they received meals and extras for their children, and how grateful they were that they had safe, warm shelter and a place to go. The next chapters will explore in detail the role and impact of community programs, including the possibilities and limitations of this space for helping young women with their working lives. For now, I note that while it is within their right to
access social assistance benefits and other government-sponsored programs and supports, the young women claim these income sources with ambivalence and unease. The young women expressed similar concerns about being in debt in the future and being portrayed as anything but hard-working and competent individuals who happen to depend on social assistance for the time being.

Some young women talked in the interviews about applying for and receiving social assistance and student loans to help them provide for themselves and their families. However, Keesha expressed disdain for both options:

"So people, women, young girls assume they can move out of their house and just ask the government to help them. . . . Some women believe they can live on welfare for the rest of their life and not work."

In her opinion,

"There should be reasons why you can go on welfare, not just you can apply for it and get it. It’s helping people to be lazy. . . . I’ve never been on welfare, and I’m not planning on going on welfare. That’s the reason I’m still at home with my mom."

Keesha also expressed her concern about being in debt, which would make it difficult for her to provide for herself and her child on her own terms in the future:

"I’m not going on OSAP [Ontario Student Assistance Program]. I refuse to go on OSAP, because I don’t want to owe any money. . . . I’m not owing any money to the government. Then I’m going to be indebted, and I’m going to have to end up choosing what I’m going to have to pay for or what I want to pay for, or whatever, and I don’t want that. I’d rather have all the money up front—just put it down. That way my daughter and I can live a happy life."

Later in the interview, however, Keesha softened her stance on OSAP but still saw it as a last resort:

"My whole thing is to be there [university] before I’m 28. . . . If I’m not there by 28, then I’ll have no choice but to go on OSAP."
Keesha saw her acceptance of OSAP as the result of having no choice, which perhaps reflects the real possibility that she will have very few options for financing her education.

Annie is in a different position than Keesha, because she does not have dependents and gets support from her parents by living at home. However, she too was not keen on relying on student loans:

"I want to start working this summer, start saving money. I want to pay my own way. I don’t want to depend on parents or anyone else, ’cause it’s important to learn that yourself while you can, and not just that. At least that way, if you make the mistake of not doing so great, you know how much work you put into earning all that money and when you lose it all, it’s your fault. You’ve got to work harder, you know."

The young women receiving social assistance emphasized that it is not something they will rely on for very long. Samantha said that while she is at school she just “needs a bit of help.” Linda said that social assistance “just pays the rent.” Eve said that applying for social assistance will help her for now, during summer, until she receives OSAP in the fall. In their plans and visions for the future, they generally feature themselves as independent and no longer reliant on social assistance.

A further conundrum of relying on government assistance was raised by Natasha, who talked about the “cracks in the system.” She was referring to her own situation of not being eligible for social assistance and associated employment supports because she had savings, but not quite enough to make it on her own. At the time of the interview, she was receiving Personal Needs Allowance,¹² which amounted to $116 a month or under $4 a day:

"It’s very hard when you go through the cracks of the system and they can’t help you. The shelter system is designed to help people but it doesn’t really help. It helps people who are starting out from scratch; you have to have nothing in order to get help [emphasis added]. People who actually have something, who took the time to be determined to get the money, need just a little more help. I’m not saying thousands of dollars, maybe $100 or two months worth of Metropass [public transit pass] and that’s it. . . . Or if you need start-up, they don’t help you with start-up. If you have money to buy your place but you have no money for furniture, what are you supposed
to do? Live in a box or sleep in a box or blanket? Nah, they don’t give you that. If you have money to move out, great. But I don’t have supplies to move in with. If you’re not on welfare, they expect to you have enough money.”

**Actively Waiting**

Many of the young women seemed to be stuck in an odd, in-between stage of waiting and wanting to move forward in their working lives. They seemed to be waiting for a host of things, including housing to become available, educational or community programs to start, and even children to grow up. Many could not wait to leave the shelter:

“I just want to get out of here. I don’t see myself staying here; I don’t even want to get too much used to the place. I just want to see myself out of this place,” said Nadia.

“What are some of the things you’re doing to get out?” I asked.

“I’ve applied for housing. I’m working on it [with a housing worker].”

Nadia was not clear about how long it would take to obtain a subsidized housing unit, although she implied that the process depended on people and factors beyond her control.

Eve was also waiting for available housing. “Right now, my top priority is to get out of here, to get my subsidized housing. I’m just in that phase of waiting for that phone call.” Earlier in the interview, Eve talked about how one could choose to “go to the private market to get her own apartment.” This way, she explained, one could leave the shelter sooner. However, she decided not to take this chance, preferring instead to wait for subsidized housing because “I consider that I’ll be in school, and my income is going to be very little. So looking at the options, I don’t think I can afford a one-bedroom for $700.”

The young women were also waiting for housing in safe neighbourhoods and for others to sort out their housing situations. Natasha said, “I have to feel safe, as a young female. Anything can happen nowadays. I have to feel safe and comfortable in the area, as
well as, it being convenient and a location I can access if I don’t have any money for the bus.” She was also waiting for potential roommates, because she could not afford her own place. One arrangement fell through, and she felt she had little choice but to wait for others. Though this set back her schedule for moving out of the shelter, she rationalized that it was better that she found out about her roommate’s commitment before rather than after they moved in together.

Some of the young mothers were also concerned about ensuring their own and their children’s safety in terms of where they lived. Michelle expressed hope that in the future, as a dental assistant, she could earn enough to live in “a nice, quiet neighbourhood,” as opposed to an area where there is “tension and chaos,” where children could be poorly influenced. Samantha also had plans to move, but was waiting on her mother.

“It’s going to be hard. I want to move... closer to the west end. But I don’t want to move yet, because my mom moving too, and I want to move with her in the same neighbourhood so we can be around each other—not together, though. So I don’t know exactly, but I should know by the end of the month.”

It is not the case that the young women were waiting passively for something to happen. On the contrary, they often engaged in provisioning activities in the meantime like gathering documentation for subsidized housing applications, gathering information about student loan applications, searching for jobs, finding adequate and accessible day care or purchasing furnishings. Apropos of the section heading, the young women were “actively” doing what they could to organize and orient themselves toward the future, but on some issues, they had no choice but to wait. Waiting, then, becomes part of their preparation for the future.
Getting Help from Family and Friends

One final way that young women managed their responsibilities was to rely on family and friends for help. For some of the young mothers, their mothers occasionally provided child care on an as-needed, informal basis. Alice’s arrangement with her mother was more formalized than the others, because her mother runs a home daycare to which she has access. In addition, the young women talked about how family members, mostly mothers and mothers-in-law, and to a lesser extent the fathers of their child, provide “extras” for their children. Samantha said about her mother: “If she sees stuff in the store, she’ll buy it for him. She bought him a pool because it was so hot. . . . just little things that she sees. And if he needs something, she’ll get it for him for sure.” Relying on fathers was somewhat hit and miss. Samantha said of her baby’s father that if she needed something, she would call him and he would provide it. However, she went on to say that she always needed something, and would prefer if she did not have to instigate every request. Michelle’s baby’s father sees their child and “babysits.” However, since he receives OSAP as his source of income, she was aware of his limited ability to contribute financially or materially. She rationalized: “I appreciate everything that he does, so I’m not going to push him and say, ‘You have to do this,’ because I might drive him away. It’s better that he’s doing something because a lot of people. . . . have fathers who don’t do anything.” At the other extreme, Linda’s ex-partner and the father of her child was a burden. She described one recent situation:

“He comes around and brings problems...he has some issues. He came over [about two weeks ago] and stayed with me for a while because, I don’t know, some people were after him and he was eating my food and he wasn’t giving me any money. I had to put him out because he was not respecting me, and he was not listening to what I have to say. I told him not to do this, not to do that, not to eat this, but he didn’t really care. So I told him I’d put him out a few days, but before that he had to give me money. . . . The money he’s supposed to pay me was supposed to pay off some
stuff so now I’m really stuck. He just likes to put his problems over to me. I don’t know why, but that’s just how he is.”

In the active waiting section, there were examples where the young women depended on family and friends in terms of housing. Just over a third of the group were either living at home with parents (Keesha, Melissa and Annie) or with a roommate (Samantha). Sharing residences cuts down on rent and, for some of the young mothers, provides extra support and child care. These living arrangements tended to be mutually beneficial, as was the case for Melissa, whose family relied on her to contribute to the family business and to administer health care to her father and brother. Of course, relying on family members for help is only an option for those who have family members nearby. The young women from the shelter were less likely to have family ties they could rely on, although Nadine spoke about asking friends for drives to get across the city to visit her mother in the hospice. Depending on friends and family as a provisioning strategy can be either advantageous or disastrous: while familial relationships can help young women with their responsibilities, depending their nature and history, these relationships are not always reliable or lasting, and sometimes entail substantial emotional investment.

Costs of Provisioning: “No time to fall sick, only time to die”

For the most part, the young women I interviewed were able to manage their responsibilities. Chantal explained how she manages everything:

“I have time when he’s sleeping to get everything done, and while he’s at my mom’s house, I’d be working. From there, my mom would drop him home. Everything’s basically done when he’s sleeping. I make food the night before so the next day food would be prepared for him. I can’t cook while he’s around, because my child likes to run into the kitchen and I don’t have a gate to put there. He doesn’t like to be in his playpen; he starts screaming. He likes a lot of attention, and nobody’s there to watch him. I try to get work done—I do homework—but sometimes I get in at midnight.
and I just want to go to sleep. Sometimes I do a little studying or I get up early in the morning to study. When I tell [people] I go to work, they think, “How could you do that? You go to school, and you have a son to take care of. Isn’t it hard?” It’s hard, but I have to do it for my son, not for me—for my son. [But then] it’s not that hard, ‘cause I have family to watch him, and I only work on weekends and his father is there to help me.”

Chantal’s comments imply that she has little choice but to do what she does to ensure her child’s needs are met. While the young women are resourceful in managing their responsibilities, I saw that they sustained personal costs as a consequence of dealing with their present realities using the strategies available to them. Specifically, some of the young women talked about health problems:

“Right now, I have a hypersensitive windpipe. I don’t have asthma, but my throat gets irritated, my windpipe, my bronchus gets irritated very easily; I’m allergic to something, like dust, and that’ll get me coughing for a while. Other than that, I don’t think I have any health problems. But if all of a sudden I have health problems, that would prevent me from achieving success,” Melissa described her health concerns.

“Take care of myself? I don’t have time. It’s like that Chinese saying: I don’t have time to get sick, I have time to die. Have you heard of that one?”

I had not heard of it.

Melissa repeated the saying in Cantonese, and then elaborated, “I wouldn’t have time to care for myself, so hopefully I don’t get sick. I just hope I don’t catch anything.”

“Are you doing anything to prevent yourself from getting sick?” I asked.

“Eating oranges, vitamin C.” (Melissa came to the interview eating an orange).

Michelle saw her sickness in the last year as a major setback: “I got sick unexpectedly—no one knows when they’re going to be sick. That was another setback. I couldn’t go to school, because I was constantly in and out of the hospital. I kept getting the flu back to back to back.” While the young women did not dwell on health issues, some mentioned feeling generally tired, agitated or restless (Melissa said that she sleeps about four
to five hours a night), and a few were worried about getting sick or worried that their mothers would get sick.

Given the stress of finding oneself homeless, it is perhaps not surprising that the young women from the shelter expressed concerns about their physical and mental health. Natasha said:

“Recently I’ve been feeling tired, and I found out that my iron level is average but it’s on the low end of average. I just thought I was getting sick every time. It’s just that my body is not used to adapting to the rules, the time, the food here [at the shelter]. Here you can only eat three main meals every day, and my body is getting more and more tired. It’s trying to adjust itself to the setting here. I try to take care of myself with the food here. I go outside for walks when the weather’s nice. I try to get to the gym in my area.”

Other young women echoed Natasha’s sentiments about the difficulties of adapting to, or feeling unsettled about, the shelter environment and group living situation; for example, having to eat different kinds of foods. Maintaining good health by making sensible food choices for themselves and others was a theme in the young women’s provisioning activities for others. In the course of conducting the interviews at the shelter, I heard people reminiscing about food and special meals, and on more than one occasion saw young women buying and preparing their own foodstuff.

In summary, Gen-Y young women used a variety of strategies to ensure they provided what was necessary to those for whom they felt responsible. They were resourceful to the extent that they were able to draw on different sources of support. However, the resources available to them were limited to a handful of community programs and private familial arrangements. Furthermore, in doing what they had to, to get to school, care for their children, and earn a living, they appear paradoxically too busy and not busy enough.
Conclusion

What I have emphasized in this chapter is how Gen-Y young women’s provisioning experiences and their life situations impact their educational and work-related goals. First, I found that Gen-Y young women who have substantial responsibilities and caregiving duties made decisions about their futures by prioritizing their current needs. But even though they were responding to immediate pressures, the young women were actually future oriented. In order for these young women to attend school or participate in the labour market, they had to first arrange for stable housing, access programs and services, care for their children, and perform other activities important to gaining order and control over their lives. To some extent, they were anticipating the future needs of their dependent children and family members. For example, the young women’s comments about not wanting to use student loans to finance their schooling showed their desire to live a debt-free future. It is not the case that these young women lack futuristic thinking. However, they are being confronted with their futures in a more immediate way than other young people who are not primary caregivers or who do not have dependent relationships and responsibilities. The young women’s immediate futures required them to attend to the exigencies of the present day by, for example, taking low-paying jobs in the short term. What the stories of provisioning demonstrate is that these young women were conscientiously taking intermediate steps, given their current situations, to position themselves so that they would eventually be able achieve positive outcomes in their future working lives.

Secondly, the stories of Gen-Y young women’s provisioning demonstrate a disjuncture between an idealized youth transitions model and the real conditions under which young women provide care and the necessities of life for children and family members for
whom they feel responsible. While on one hand a youth transitions approach imposes priorities for work and schooling on young people as part of the “growing up” experience, on the other, this normative model relies on women’s invisible work and caregiving contributions which uphold a particular arrangement of the family, market and state spheres. The social location of young women, particularly in terms of class, produces or fails to produce a standardized transitions trajectory from school to work to family. Young women in difficult life situations (like homelessness) with responsibilities (like caring for parents or children) resourcefully manage their responsibilities by delaying schooling or relying on the charity of friends and family. Not all of their strategies “count” as work preparation activities within a youth transitions framework. Outside the lens of provisioning, a young woman who is “actively waiting” might be seen as doing nothing, which fits the stereotype of deviant youth. The young women experience a type of disjuncture where their actions and choices are seen to reflect their progression through the youth transitions framework, which is inadequate in its ability to account for the actual conditions and circumstances of young women’s provisioning experiences.

One dimension of the young women’s social location that especially influenced how they were able to manage their responsibilities is class. The influence of class partially explains why young women choose to participate or volunteer in community programs, and/or to work in places where they could get some of their material needs met (for example, food or meals from community programs or discounts at stores where they applied for jobs). Class status also shapes their active waiting strategy, since the reason they had to wait for subsidized housing was that they were unable to secure housing at market rates. Finally, the limitation of relying on friends and family is class mediated as well, in that family members
may have the best intentions of helping young women with their provisioning activities, but poorer families likely have few resources to spare.

Returning to the title of this chapter, Gen-Y young women’s provisioning experiences are seen to challenge youth transitions in two ways. First, the gendered and class-based accounts of their provisioning challenge a youth transitions framework that suggests easy, natural progression into adulthood. Secondly, the transitions to adulthood are themselves challenging, particularly for lower class young women who have less access to resources and support. The nature of young women’s provisioning challenges in relation to this notion of youth transition is further explored through the production of Gen-Y young women as “at risk” youth clients in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 6: CREATING SOCIAL IDENTITIES: PRODUCING GEN-Y YOUNG WOMEN AS “AT RISK” YOUTH

In Chapter 4, I observed that “at risk” youth is not a new phenomenon, but that its meaning has changed to reflect the public and governments’ shifting focus on different subgroups of youth. History revealed who were, and it shapes who is currently considered “at risk.” What remains unanswered is how the category of “at risk” youth arises in the first place. In this chapter, I explore how the notion of “at risk” youth becomes established as a social category and how it functions administratively and ideologically to articulate social relations of ruling through the activities of young women, social science research and youth workers in the youth employment programs complex. My task is not to conceptualize dimensions of “at risk” youth, which are then used to theorize young women’s experiences. Instead, I aim to discover the social relations and processes that generate the specific character of the phenomenon that is the subject of inquiry. (This approach draws from Ng’s (1981) analysis of ethnicity from the perspective of immigrant women).

Based on young women’s and youth workers’ interviews, field notes and articles in the media, I find that the concept of “at risk” youth coordinates the activities of young women who are actively resisting negative youth stereotypes and stigmatization, and youth workers performing professional helping duties regarded as helpful to young women in disadvantaged positions. I argue that the activities constitute ruling practices insofar as they articulate an institutional logic as opposed to a logic derived from young women who manipulate social identities as a means of provisioning for themselves and their families. First, I present evidence of common-sense knowledge and descriptions of “at risk” youth. Secondly, I describe and analyze the Gen-Y young women’s responses to and resistance against the category of “at risk” youth. Thirdly, I diverge briefly to reflect upon the way this
research process produced “at risk” young women as study participants. Finally, I examine the everyday work processes of Gen-Y youth workers as they describe various interactions they have with “at risk” young women clients.

**Factual Character of “At Risk” Youth: Masculine and Ungendered Representations**

The United Way of Greater Toronto ad (Figure 1) provides evidence of the existence of “at risk” youth. Images such as this one represent society’s collective, common everyday knowledge of “at risk” youth. Note the prominence of the “at risk” young men in this ad which is meant to promote youth employment programs. It depicts an “at risk” young woman in the back corner, tomboy-like in her stance and dress. The ad subtly shows the masculinized character of “at risk” youth.

Paradoxically, other examples and sources of evidence that confirm our knowledge of the “at risk” youth concept take on an ungendered character. Here is a description from EYE Weekly magazine of “at risk” youth participants in a community program:

“The 24 young people—a group of street youth aged 16 to 24, comprised of prostitutes, drug dealers, addicts, runaways, squeegee kids and gang members—are being paid to be here. It’s the first day of a 10-week program run by the community-support group Youth Skills Zone (YSZ). Some participants were referred to YSZ by the shelters they call home. Others found it through word-of-mouth and, in some cases, YSZ support workers recruited program participants directly off the street, sometimes by searching under bridges” (Lewin, September 5, 2006).

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One youth worker described “at risk” youth in this way: “I think about risk if they’re in an abusive relationship, if they’re having issues with housing. ‘At risk’ means socially isolated, if they’re staying home all day in their apartment with their child and not getting out, not aware of community resources.”

“Are these definitions based on the program or your sense of it?” I asked her.

“My sense of it,” she confirmed.
“How it is different from more official program definition a funder might use? Or does it matter?” I inquired.

“I think it’s similar. It’s just maybe because I work with the moms, I can see more and verbalize what their issues are… it’s hard to put that question into words,” the worker tried to explain.

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A housing worker described other dimensions of risk: “We have lots of new immigrant women with children; so there are barriers with employment, education. There’s the issue of low-level literacy. Just having children—more than one—and being homeless are major barriers.”

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An employment counsellor saw some overlaps between being unemployed and disabilities that made young people “at risk.” She said, “Youth at risk can be underemployed; youth at risk can be people who have a few barriers to employment. So they’re youth, they don’t have a lot of experience, they have one or possibly a few disabilities. They might have a primary disability that qualifies them to get ODSP [Ontario Disability Support Program], but then they have a secondary disability; for example, someone who might have cerebral palsy might also have a learning disability that is part and parcel of having cerebral palsy, so the learning disability would also put them at greater risk of being able to sustain employment over a long period of time, or consistent employment, so they might have large stretches of unemployment, or if someone hires them noticing that, yes, they’re in a wheelchair and not realizing there’s a secondary disability that the youth hasn’t disclosed.”

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When Toronto’s Board of Trade launched “Youth One,” a youth employment program, representatives defined “at risk” youth as good kids with bad luck: “We got questions like ‘What have they been in jail for?’ “ said Glen Stone, the Board’s public relations manager. “People misinterpreted at ‘at-risk.’ They thought it meant gang members, criminals, drug users, bad kids. The truth is they’re good kids with the bad luck to live in at-risk neighbourhoods” (Goar, August 11, 2006)

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Writing about homeless youth, Kelly and Caputo noted that “at risk” youth have often been characterized as either victims who are disadvantaged by personal characteristics such as being a racial minority, early school leaver, poor and/or from single-parent families, or villains who engage in risky behaviours such as getting pregnant, which make them a risk to themselves and others. The authors recommended that research focus on structural and contextual factors and the impact of social, economic, political and cultural conditions, instead of individual and remedial solutions to address the social issue of “at risk” youth.
While these examples demonstrate that the fact of “at risk” youth as empirically observable (as a masculinized concept), and practically known (as ungendered), the category’s analytic character is, by contrast, vague. It is virtually impossible to determine who is or will become a youth “at risk” at any particular time and place. While there is a sense of who is “at risk”, there is also a sense that the definition is all-encompassing. Given this indeterminate quality, the analysis that follows proceeds to reveal the processes that establish “at risk” youth as social fact in an attempt to answer the question, “How are Gen-Y young women program participants produced as cases of “at risk” youth through community programs?”

In Smith’s (1990b) analysis, entitled “K is mentally ill,” she argued: “A fact is something already categorized, already worked up to conform to the model of what that fact
should be like. . . . If something is to be constructed as a fact, then it must be shown that proper procedures have been used to establish it as objectively known” (p. 27). In the examples above, the proper procedures that establish the fact of “at risk” youth include the first youth worker’s note that she was making an independent observation, that the definition of “at risk” youth is her own “sense of it.” She adds that she saw “at risk” youth this way “because she works with the moms.” Highlighting her direct practice and daily work with the young women, she gives authority to her account. The people in the above examples are positioned in relation to their statements in different ways that establish their observations as professional, expert or objective assessments of the “at risk” youth situation, whether it is through their reporting of youth programs, working in them or researching youth to promote understanding. Despite the variation in how the speakers achieved their authority to speak expertly about “at risk” youth, there is a “matter-of-fact” quality underlying their statements, the nature of which implies that whether we wish it or not, “at risk” youth exist, they are out there. The extension to the social fact of “at risk” youth from these examples implies that something must be done. These commonly circulated ideas and examples of “at risk” youth serve as the backdrop for the production of young women as “at risk” youth at the Gen-Y site.

Creating Social Identities: Gen-Y Young Women’s Perspectives

Young Women Do Not Identify as Being “At Risk”

What made Gen-Y young women “at risk” was not directly observable in the interviews with the young women. None of the young women mentioned being “at risk” unless I brought it up in the interview (see the following discussion on the impact of research processes on the production of “at risk” youth). Being “at risk” was not something that presented itself as a
reality for the young women as they conducted their actual everyday practices of caring for their family and themselves while balancing the pressures of school, family, work and community. In the following quote, Keesha described her daily activities:

“In the morning, both of us [she and her daughter] would get up. I get her dressed. I get myself dressed. At about 10 o’clock, I get her to the day care. At around 10:15, we’d be at the day care. At around 11 o’clock, I’d be—right now I’m looking for a job, right? So I’d be at a place nearby me that helps me to find a job.”

“What do you do there?” I asked.

“Research for jobs, and they do résumés and stuff. So they help, and assist me to find a job,” Keesha replied.

“You go there every day?”

“Yes, every day.”

“So that takes you till...”

“2:00 to 2:30. I go home,” Keesha continued. “I get everything ready—like, I’ll cook dinner. I get everything ready for her when she gets home, so she’ll be able to eat. Then I pick her up at about 4:30 to 5:00. If we’re going to the parenting group, I’ll pick her up at 4:00 and come here. After dinner, we just watch some TV, and at about 7:00 or 8:00 I get her ready to read her book. That brings us to 8:30 or so, because she likes to read books. We go to sleep around 10:00.”

When I asked the young women if there were things that they wished they could provide for their family and children, some said they would like brand name clothes, technological gadgets (cell phones, iPod), or more time for themselves. Others said that they had all the necessities they required for the time being. When I asked how they defined success for themselves in the future, they said things like having a career that is enjoyable and being able to earn enough to live in a comfortable home. Alice’s sentiment was a typical response:

“Success would be having a full-time career in the field I like and want to work in, doing something I enjoy, my daughter being happy, getting a good education herself, just enjoying life.”
These desires and plans do not characterize any of the young women as being “at risk.” Some of the concerns they brought up about their futures, like looking for a well-paying job or balancing work and family time, might also be concerns for other groups of young women or men.

After describing a few of her parenting experiences, Smith (1987) reflected: “In these fragmentary memories, there is no experience of being a single parent, though the work processes through which I engaged with those settings and relationships surely had that distinctive character, because I was alone in charge of my children in a world of two-parent families.” She went on to make the point that what the notion of single parent did was organize her relationship to the school and school system attended by her children. In a similar way, the concept of “at risk” youth is organizing the young mothers’ relationships to motherhood, schools and the labour market in a way that makes the young women’s behaviours accountable to the existing framework and specialized services for dealing with “at risk” youth. The young women know what is expected of being an “at risk” youth because the idea floats in the minds of the general public through examples like the ones described at the beginning of the chapter, and the “at risk” youth category also gives her procedures for analyzing her identity creation processes in relation to the assumptions of being “at risk.”

When asked specifically whether they thought of themselves as being “at risk” most of the young women said no. They responded in a definite way, without hesitation. In comparison, Nadine seemed slightly more uncertain than the other young women about whether she was “at risk,” but by the end of the quote, she concluded that she was not, after considering that she is simply doing what she has to do for the time being:
"Would you consider yourself at risk?" I asked Nadine.

"No. Well, I guess yes, because as a woman you are at risk; there are so many things out there. I can easily get wrapped up in drugs or prostitution or anything. I have lots of female friends who are in it currently, right now, or thinking about it. I think I'm kind of focused on what I need to do, so I don't let my mind wander. I mean, it does. I think about it, but I'm very focused on what I need to do. That's why I don't really consider myself at risk."

However, Nadine was less clear when asked how she would describe the other participants in the program, which in fact was designed for "at risk" young women:

"Umm, I don't know," she said. "I've met a lot of interesting women here. Everyone has a story to tell; everyone has an experience."

Others said they had not even heard of the term. When I probed further by asking who they thought of as "at risk" youth, they tended to refer to extreme cases of disadvantage.

"Have you heard of this term "at risk" youth, before?" I asked.

"No," replied Chantal.

"How about high risk youth?" I probed. "Who do you think of as high-risk youth?"

"Like a kid in danger?" Chantal sounded uncertain.

"What kind of danger?" I asked.

"Starving, no food, no clothing, or their parents are beating them, leaving marks on them," she elaborated. "That's what I'm thinking."

Other responses that the young women gave were "someone who's about to kill themselves," "someone in distress," "drug users," or youth who "don't have a mom or dad watching them," "don't get any attention," "have an attention deficit disorder," "have lack of [work] experience," unemployed, sick or homeless. Young women involved in prostitution or experiencing abuse were also thought of as being "at risk."
Most of the young women did not include themselves in the "at risk" youth category. Natasha was a notable exception, only because she shared in her interview that she was labelled "at risk" by her high school teachers. But in her comments, she resisted the label:

"I've been an 'at risk' youth. [laughs] It's not fun, obviously. But when you really can't do something, you can't focus, and in that environment it's hard for you to be anything but that. Since people learn in different ways, and people don't understand, they are gonna label you as that. But everyone learns different, and if you don't learn their exact way, at least at my school, you're considered 'at risk' because you're not learning the way they want you to learn."

When Natasha talked about being labelled as "at risk" of dropping out of high school by educators, she drew attention to the stigma associated with the category but rejected the implication of failure associated with the label. She explained that she simply learned in a different way that was not accommodated by the school curriculum or focus. Referring to "they" ("they are gonna label you," "the way they want you to learn"), her comments identified her teacher or some other school official as a person who imposed the label on her.

The presence of "they" could also indicate the backdrop of the education system in which her school is situated, where administrators develop policies to ensure that teachers have acceptable criteria and assessment tools to be able to make the judgement that Natasha is in fact "at risk".

In her interview, Keesha deliberately distanced herself from others she considered "at risk":

"If I realize my friend is taking drugs... I don't allow them to be around me because I don't want anyone to point fingers and blame me for something I don't do. I try to live my life properly so when my daughter grows up no one could ever say that your mom was this or your mom was that. That's another reason why I wouldn't go on welfare. It's not really that I watch what anyone else thinks or cares about me, but I have a standard within myself."
One of the reasons the young women did not identify as being “at risk” may be partially attributed to the masculinizing quality of the phenomenon mentioned earlier, that is, young women simply did not see themselves as being “at risk” because the common-sense notion of “at risk” youth translates as young men. However, I can only postulate the young women’s gender attribution of “at risk” youth, since gender was only mentioned when some of them linked “at risk” young women to prostitution. Otherwise, when they described “at risk”, they did so without explicitly mentioning gender or any other social location in terms of race, class or ability. What I would emphasize from a provisioning perspective was how Natasha and Keesha especially talked about being labelled and “at risk” and being associated with “at risk” youth as having implications for their ability to provide for themselves and their families because of the possible and real material consequences of being socially stigmatized under the “at risk” youth category.

**Young Women Do Not Appear as Typical Youth**

Many of the young women did not see themselves as typical youth. The following passages illustrate how the young women felt about being young, yet having responsibilities that are generally associated with someone more mature. Melissa, who lives with her family, noted that she was not participating in typical youth activities because her days were filled with work:

“I try to make time for myself, but there are a lot of things I have to cut out. I don’t have time for TV anymore. We don’t pay for satellite; we use basic cable. Because I don’t have time to watch TV, I don’t play video games anymore. I don’t have time to surf the Net. There are things I have to sacrifice.”

Eve, who was 18 years old and homeless when interviewed, talked about living on her own:
"I'm kind of scared because I'm so young and I think most people my age are with their parents and still in school. I think right now, I'm living like the 25 year old on my own."

"What makes you scared?" I asked.

"I know I'm going to have to achieve my goals. I don't really have anyone saying 'You have to go to school. I'm paying your tuition, so you'd best be a doctor.' Everything is on my own. I have to do it if I want to succeed 10, 20 years from now," Eve replied.

Chantal, a lone mother, said:

"I don't think about going to parties and stuff like that. When you have a child, you don't think about that anymore; you just want to be home with your child, be there for him. That [going out] doesn't even concern me."

Kelly talked about the difficulties of being a single parent:

"Just being a parent, a young parent, trying to do everything—it's crazy."

"It's a lot." I agreed. "What do you mean when you say everything?"

"Just being there for them [children] and trying to be there for myself. Doing things that. Like, you know, I'm still young." [emphasis added]

Michelle, also a young mother, outlined stigmatizing attitudes some people have about young mothers after describing an incident where a woman on the bus criticized her friend, another young mother, whose child was crying:

"[She was] trying to say young people cannot control their children, but I've seen people who are old and have screaming children. If a child's going to scream, they're going to scream regardless of your age. It's not, 'My mommy's old; I'm not going to scream,' or 'I'm going to scream because my parents are young.' That's not going to happen. If the child's going to scream, he's going to scream. It's just sad how people think. The only way you can do it [be a parent] is if you're older. . . . But there are people who are 40, who have children, who don't know where to begin. In my other workshop, the lady's telling us she knows people in their 40s that have kids and don't know the first thing to do with their children, and she sees someone who's 18 and has her child behave properly and everything else. It doesn't matter your age."

Later in the interview, Michelle expressed her desire to be finished school as soon as possible:
“School is not so much of a challenge. It’s just, I want to be done, I want to be done. It gets to the point where, ‘Oh my gosh, why am I not done yet?’ because I want to be done. . . . I was supposed to graduate a year ago. I got set back. I want to plan my steps and whatnot. I want to be in the dental hygienist program by this year so I could spend two or three years in the course, graduate by this year, get everything done sooner rather than later. I don’t want to keep postponing and postponing, because by doing that I’m getting older and whatnot. Everything’s better to be done now.”

In these comments, the young women appeared to be indicating something about the disjuncture they feel about being young in terms of their age but having responsibilities and experiences that make them appear and act unyouthful. To resolve the contradiction they experienced where they are providing for others as opposed to being provided for by adults, some of the young women opted to identify more strongly with socially acceptable adult roles such as mother or caregiver instead of youth. These women stress their responsibilities in relation to caring for their child, or some could identify as daughters with family caregiving responsibilities. Otherwise, some of the young women, like Michelle, claimed student status, which is a typical youth-based identity. But she sees it as an intermediate step toward an adult worker/professional identity. These social identities signalled the ways the young women were provisioning for others, but in these roles they are not fully youth.

Having caregiving responsibilities was not the only way the young women appeared as atypical youth. The young women without children also did not identify as typical youth, but there are not many social identities that these young women could comfortably assume. Talking about their living arrangements, Eve and some of the other homeless young women were concerned about finding safe and secure housing, which is an undertaking not many young people have to deal with. But there are really no socially acceptable, non-stigmatizing ways of talking about being homeless, social assistance recipients or unemployed, so it was not surprising that aspects associated with these categories, even though they would have

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likely impacted young women’s provisioning experiences, were not mentioned in relation to being young. However, many of the social identities claimed by Gen-Y young women were still problematic, because stereotypically, young mothers are bad mothers, and good students are not delayed in their studies by being homeless or having parenting and other caregiving responsibilities.

**Young Women Identify as Responsible and Independent**

If not “at risk” or youthful, how did young women describe themselves? First, the young women talked about being responsible. It was already noted in the previous chapter that the young women felt responsible for family members. Here, Samantha explains how her son depends on her, so she feels she has to do things as a “responsible person”

> “Tell me about being a responsible person. What does that involve?” I asked for clarification.

> “Getting all the main, the everyday life things—make sure they’re done,” Samantha explained. “Like having stuff to eat, to bathe, brush your teeth—those things. Certain things just have to be done.”

Later on in the interview, I asked:

> “How would you describe the young women who come to this program?”

> “Strong, because most of us are on our own,” replied Samantha. “Yeah, you have to be strong.”

> “Strong in what way?” I asked.

> “Mentally, physically, emotionally—everything—at least you have to try.”

For a couple of the young women, being responsible meant getting a “proper” career, in order to be stable in the future:
“I’m not working now because I don’t want to work in telemarketing so if I don’t get a proper job. I’d rather wait until I’m finished school and get a career,” Samantha rationalized.

“What’s a proper job?” I asked.

“Where I’m making good money, good hours, not too much hard work, hard labour, you know.”

In Michelle’s interview, she mentioned the difference between a job and a career:

“I think a career is more stable than a job. If I’m going to be getting a job, it’s only going to be a part-time job. Part-time jobs are great. They’re good for the meantime, because it’s better than nothing. But if I finish school, it’s not stable enough for me to live off working only three days a week.”

Many of the young women said it is important nowadays for young women to be or to become independent. For Eve, independent means: “You don’t have to sit down and wait for anyone to offer you anything.”

To summarize Gen-Y young women’s perspectives on how they perceived themselves in relation to the notion of “at risk” youth is to recognize that the young women were projecting an image of themselves as responsible and independent, and were either not identifying with or rejecting the “at risk” label. Before I describe how youth workers constructed young women as “at risk” youth, I turn briefly to the research processes that constructed them as such.

*Constructing “At Risk” Youth through the Research Process*

Although I am ultimately building a case against the uncritical use of “at risk” youth in youth research, I found that I nevertheless made choices in my own research process that were influenced by the concept. As a researcher—and more specifically, a PhD candidate conducting her dissertation research—I have a vested interest in producing a thesis about
young women in accordance with standard research protocols. These ethical research
protocols and discipline-specific requirements for dissertation research are institutionally
defined. The implications of these, given my time and resource limitations, were outlined in
the methodology chapter in terms of the site selection process. What I explore here is how I
am implicated in the production of “at risk” youth as a researcher bringing into being the
social relations that organize the category as a social fact from the research activities I
conducted. Here I consider practice and process of research as data itself and find that the
construction of the young women as “at risk” youth occurred in a couple of ways: first,
through the questions that I asked, and secondly, through the ones I did not.

By directly asking the young women and workers in the interviews what they thought
of the term “at risk” youth, I marked the concept as relevant in this research. Unless I
mentioned the term, the young women never voluntarily brought it up in the interviews.\textsuperscript{13}
The confusion and hesitation that accompanied the young women’s responses to my question
confirmed that being “at risk” was not on their minds. In their interviews, they would ask me
to clarify my question, “What do you mean by ‘at risk’ youth?” or they would give me an
answer and then they would verify it by asking, “Is that what you mean?” Their queries
indicated that they were striving to provide the “right” answer in the interview; somehow
they sensed, perhaps accurately, that I was seeking something specific from them in terms of
an answer. In contrast, youth workers, who were immediately aware of the term, did not
require me to elaborate when I asked them about the use of the term in their programs. Their
greater familiarity with the concept signalled to me that the youth workers were located in
the social organization of youth employment programs differently than the young women
clients. As a result, as I will demonstrate in the next section, they provide a different
understanding of the term, its uses and the influences it has on their work with young women than the young women did.

By asking, “Who do you think of as being ‘at risk’?” I required the participant to match her experience with some established criteria that reference the general and popular discussions of youth that exist “out there” in our social world. I was asking her to test the categorization of “at risk” youth that has already been made “out there.” The young women responded by giving descriptions—objective sounding ones, I might add—which they thought were appropriate, given the context of an interview embedded in research processes and practices where the researched is supposed to provide answers and opinions as a matter of routine. In the actual event of the interview, the “at risk” youth notion was being “worked up” into a particular form that could be used to direct the interview. This work of constructing the “at risk” youth occurred within the confines of the interview process whereby the interviewer and interviewees were making themselves and their questions and responses comprehensible, and posing their utterances in a legitimate, authoritative manner required of a research interview, in the context of behaviours expected of the interviewer and interviewee. In analyzing the account of the interview and the organization of its relationship to actual events it claims to represent—finding out who is “at risk”—I am not centrally concerned about who is actually “at risk,” because these definitions are inevitably inconclusive; however, what is gained from the interview process is that there exists this category of “at risk” youth and its fact is confirmed by a particular line of questioning structured as a research interview.

Incidentally, in the initial interviews, I asked the young women directly about being “at risk,” not realizing that by referencing the categorical dimension of the concept I was in

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fact reifying the category and assuming its character as an established social fact. After my early puzzlement over why the answers I received were not particularly informative (in IE language, the young women were providing “ideological” accounts that referenced the discourse of youth, not the actual experience of it (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, pp. 70-71). The following is an excerpt from my field notes about what I did to address the issue methodologically:

The original questions about what young women thought of the category at risk youth went nowhere. The question was revised to: “How would you describe young women like yourself, who participate in Gen-Y programs like this one?” This is to get at their own understanding of themselves as opposed to asking them to comment on the label “at risk” youth from an external source (Field note, June 13, 2005).

Once I changed my line of questioning, I could see that some of the young women were distinguishing themselves from other program participants in a variety of ways. For example, Linda noted that the mothers who were younger than her “have a lot to learn” and that she did not associate with the others in the group. From this revised line of questioning, they were seen to claim other social identities as students, unemployed, daughters or mothers. That some of these identities aged them beyond their chronologically youthful age has been discussed above. That the young women took up the identities they did was also mediated by the research process, which found the young women attached to specific kinds of programs—housing, employment, young mothers’ and girls’ programs. It might be suggested that other identities—for example, teenage consumer, superwoman, future leaders—might have been claimed at other youth-specific sites. In this way, the research recruitment processes coordinated with state funding and organizational processes that set up particular types of “at risk” youth programs as opposed to others.
By simply electing to study “at risk” youth, I have contributed to their construction, if only in the process of having to find “at risk” young people in “at risk” youth programs to interview. To elaborate how this social organization of youth programs has an impact on the production of “at risk” youth, I note that there were no known “teen fathers” programs. This absence suggests that how young men come to be seen as “at risk” differs from the social relations that produce their female counterparts as such. In this way, the social relation of gender is organizing the range of programs available to different groups of “at risk” youth; for example, where young women’s risk is located by teenage mothers’ programs that focus on their mothering/motherhood but where young men’s risk is not associated with parenting. And that same social relation of gender is also facilitating the research process, because as a researcher I engage with these programs to find my subjects.

The second way I contributed to the production of “at risk” young women was through the questions I did not ask. I am not trying to reconstruct the interviews here or to pose the questions I did not ask because those moments have passed, but what I will attempt is to discover how my own assumptions about “at risk” youth subtly influenced what got said and heard in the interviews. I will also assess how “at risk” provided a language and framework for elevating certain accounts as authoritative. In this way, I am less concerned about the questions I did not ask the study participants than I am about the questions that I did not ask of myself of the interview data as a result of being influenced by this notion of “at risk” youth. Upon reviewing the transcripts, I looked for places where I took the young women at their word without further probing. For me, these moments in the interview felt flat and difficult, and were, in a sense, characterized by a sort of misunderstanding.
One example of a misunderstanding occurred in the young women’s discussions about volunteering. Almost all of the young women talked about some community work they did, but their experiences were very wide ranging and I found I could follow some of their stories more easily than others. For example, Alice, Melissa and Annie said that they volunteered with children. Their motivations and what they said they learned from their experiences were in line with the general benefits associated with volunteering. I felt these exchanges went quite smoothly, and we were able to chat easily about their volunteer roles.

In other examples, where the young women talked about volunteering in non-traditional places (like Chantal, who thought she might volunteer in the supermarket) or in situations where the “charity” aspect of volunteering was not readily apparent in their descriptions, I had a much harder time trying to figure out what their volunteer contributions would be or how they saw themselves as volunteers in those “non-traditional” volunteer situations. It so happened that Alice, Melissa and Annie were, in different ways, less “at risk” than the others (Alice was White, Melissa was university educated and Annie was living at home).

I believe that I was unknowingly ranking the young women along an “at risk” continuum, trying to figure out which kinds of volunteering went with which level of risk. Instead, I needed to see that being “at risk” was organizing both types of responses to volunteering. Instead, I needed to understand that the young women’s different approaches to volunteering located them in a social organization where the education system required them to perform community service, where the option for student volunteering was shaped by locality (spatial, poor neighbourhoods), where state-based immigration processes and policies created and constructed good citizens as volunteers (Hyatt, 2001), and where young women were making volunteer choices grounded in their material need to access shelter,
food and work. I should have paid more attention to how they ended up in the volunteer activities that they did and thus, should have shifted my questions along those lines instead of being stymied by what I thought were odd responses based on my assumption of their “at risk” youth status. Only through this reflective piece could I discern that the “at risk” framework had something to do with my initial confusion around the young women’s volunteering experiences.

Imagine, for the moment, that I did not have the wherewithal to report on this misunderstanding. The account of the research might have proceeded by taking young women’s everyday experience of being “at risk” youth as the end product of analysis, thus confirming the distinction between a mainstream or lower risk group and a high “at risk” group, instead of taking the observation as an element for further analysis. What would have gotten written as the official account of research would not have much to say about how it is that the young women in these programs constituted an occurrence of “at risk” youth because I would have ignored the possibility that their volunteer choices had something to do with the way the notion of “at risk” youth organized their actual experiences of volunteering and my understanding of it. This would have occurred because in this research context, my account is privileged and legitimate to the extent that I adhere to dissertation research protocols and standards.

Whether I wanted them to or not, common-sense notions about “at risk” youth subtly influenced my line of questioning and my reactions to the interviewees. Even though I had no intention of reifying the category in the interviews, I was doing just that by being concerned about not making assumptions, by trying to be a “good,” non-judgemental social work researcher and by trying to write against the negative stereotypes associated with “at
risk” youth; I could not help but reinforce and legitimate its status as a social fact. It is impossible to deny or escape the historical and social contexts in which our research is situated and embedded. But methodologically, researchers can, and should, interrogate the practices and processes originating from the academic and research institutional complex that link knowledge production, the power of researcher to the researched to understand how categories like “at risk” youth come to be, and how particular accounts and reports reify its existence.

Constructing “At Risk” Youth through Youth and Women’s Programs

I turn now to community programs as another site from which young women are constructed as being “at risk” through the workers’ characterization and work with their clients. The young women clients were de facto members of the “at risk” youth category before their entrance and participation in Gen-Y programs. Their “at risk” status originated in bureaucratic processes and practices of schools, hospitals, welfare and employment offices, and other youth agencies that often served as a source of referral leading up to their participation in Gen-Y programs. However, the young women’s backgrounds say little about what actually happens once they are in the program. The question remains: “What happens at the local level of program delivery and implementation, and how do the workers understand what they have to do to serve the perceived needs of their young women clients and the programs goals?” The point of this section is to explore how youth workers locally accomplish program goals in a way that contributes to the construction of young women clients as “at risk” youth.
Youth Workers’ Assessments of “At Risk” Youth

In the interviews, I asked workers to describe the needs and goals of a typical young woman client and how these relate to the program goals. I asked them to elaborate on how the notion of “at risk” youth comes up in the program. From the workers’ perspectives, there were three main aspects of being “at risk” that they highlighted about their young women clients. First, the workers’ described how the young women are dealing with many serious and complicated issues at once:

“In shelter, they’re in crisis. They go through housing issues, legal issues, abuse issues, which are in the forefront. It’s not a fair assumption that amid all this crisis [we expect them to look for] employment. I bet they’re concerned about, ‘How am I going to survive?’ But they can’t be ready to face the workforce, because it’s difficult,” one manager explained.

“They’re in such a space of transition. Sometimes they’re so all over the place. They don’t know where school’s at, where work’s at, or even where home is. [I] try to focus on their future, something they want to achieve. I just give them information and talk with them about what they want, what they see, help them to see something if they don’t see anything,” said a youth worker.

“I had a girl call because she was being evicted from her apartment. Another girl wanted to have an abortion but doesn’t want to have the abortion. Another girl in the group was talking about her boyfriend and violence. It’s all over the place. Little things, like applying at school, to needing to move because they’re in a relationship that’s violent,” said another youth worker.

The staff might have been making implicit comparison between their young clients and “typical” or mainstream youth who have homes and do not have dependants but are dependent on parents or other family members. The workers also made note of clients who have additional challenges due to low education, low literacy, mental illness and/or unemployment.

Notice how the manager talked in terms of how clients “go through” housing, legal or abuse issues. This particular phrasing gives little sense of what a young woman actually has
to do in order to attain housing, seek legal advice or escape abuse in a social context where there is limited availability of affordable housing. As well, “go through” does not allow for explanations of her decisions around, for example, housing, as indicative of limitations of current housing arrangements and designs that reinforce expectations of how people are supposed to live, nor does this phrasing open up questions of how and why shelters are seen as an unacceptable living arrangement. As a result, the workers and the young women fail to consider the full impact of the lack of housing alternatives like cooperative, communal, shared living spaces. Seeing clients “go through” issues does draw attention to how workers are taking up homelessness or lack of access to legal aid or violence against women as relevant factors of being “at risk” which they can in their work, rallying, advocate or assist, for example, young woman who get evicted “go through” various systems, strategies and application processes.

The second aspect of “at risk” youth that the youth workers stressed related to the young women clients’ ability or motivation for change. Workers generally saw their clients as internally motivated to get work, leave violent situations and plan for their future.

“How would you describe the young women who come to Gen-Y?” I asked a counsellor.

“They say they’re at a point where they are ready to make a change in their lives by getting more education, more training. Perhaps they’ve been on social assistance for several years and they want to get off assistance and be independent,” she responded.

This focus on change is reinforced through Gen-Y’s documents like their Annual Report, which one year centred on the theme “Making History, Changing Lives.” The agency is projecting itself as a site for change in ways that include helping young women to make changes in their lives. For example, the shelter was described by the workers as a “planning shelter.” In an employment program, counsellor said, “They come voluntarily…some are
encouraged by their parents to get involved, but generally they come here with interest at looking at some sort of employment.”

In the girls’ leadership programs, the young women were seen to be motivated to take a chance or to seize an opportunity. A manager described the young women’s leadership program: “They are something else. They paint the room, make the decisions [in the program]. They have different outlooks on life and different possibilities.”

Annie described other volunteers in the girls’ program:

“I guess if they’re coming here to volunteer, these people have a sense of initiative to come and get things done, and they take a chance. I know that we took a chance. We won’t just go to anywhere and volunteer, but we didn’t even know the place. We took a chance and came. I didn’t know about this building.”

The youth workers seemed to be emphasizing motivation as a personal quality, even though they were aware of external motivating factors that required some of the young women to attend the programs because they were mandated to so (16- and 17-year-old parents receiving social assistance in Ontario must participate in some kind of learning, earning or parenting program).

“Blank slates” is the third way that youth workers saw their “at risk” young women clients. This logic suggests that clients do not know any better; they are young, intimidated, lacking skills and not able to articulate their skills. In addition, they do not know about their rights:

“Well, they’re still young, they don’t have—‘work ethic’ is not the word. I guess they haven’t been out in the world to know that if you’re going to be away from a job, of course you have a responsibility [to call],” said one counsellor.

“They’re young and little intimidated. They don’t want to tell me everything about themselves right away,” another youth worker said about the program’s intake process.
“Especially with youth in general there’s a deficit of skills; they don’t have the amount of years in the workforce. So we’re looking for employers who are supportive,” confirmed another counsellor.

Later in the interview she said, “Sometimes when they come in, they seem like clean slates [emphasis added], but then they start to articulate all these experiences and it’s a wealth of hands-on work experience that they have. That’s what we document on their résumés, and that’s what they promote when they go out to employers.”

Most of the youth workers saw their clients as being “at risk” in one way or another, even though they might realize that the clients themselves may not describe themselves as such:

“I don’t think they consider themselves at risk. Even when we talk about domestic violence, they’re like, ‘I’m not in an abusive relationship; he doesn’t hit me,’ but he might have control over her finances or is verbally abusing her. I think there are lots of misconceptions about abusive relationships with the young moms. And I think they don’t think they’re at risk because a lot of their friends are in the same situations. They might all have issues with housing; they might all have a hard time with money. So they wouldn’t think it’s at risk.”

“Yet the program is for ‘at risk’ youth,” I queried the worker.

“Yeah,” she admitted.

“Is it helpful or not?” I asked.

“To give them [the young women] that title?” The worker contemplated. “I would say it is, because we’re more aware of what’s going on, to know what things they need [emphasis added]. It seems to go in waves of housing or money—lately, there are lots of girls complaining they don’t have enough money, it’s always an issue with them, right?”

The youth worker explained why young women themselves do not identify themselves as being in the “at risk” youth category by noting how the young women compare themselves to friends as opposed to more mainstream youth. In the above passage, the worker saw the young women as being “at risk,” by virtue of her not recognizing her own disadvantage. That the young women do not know any better than to compare themselves with others in their situation was taken to be a sign of their uninformed understanding of who is at risk. It
was not taken as opportunity to question the validity of distinctions being made about mainstream and “at risk” youth. Furthermore, according to this worker, labelling young women as “at risk” is considered helpful because the workers are “more aware of what’s going on.” Smith (1990b) outlined this kind of logic in her analysis “K is Mentally Ill,” where someone is considered mentally ill (in our case, “at risk”) who cannot distinguish between ill and healthy behaviours (in our case, between “at risk” and mainstream ones). But this reasoning leaves intact the assumption that mental illness and health (“at risk” and mainstream youth) are distinct categories (Smith, 1990b, p. 32). Whether or not a client calls herself “at risk” is beside the point; the main issue is that the concept of being “at risk” remains the dominant framework for assessing behaviours. The youth worker has selected aspects of the definition for her own purposes, so that they are “more aware of what’s going on to know things they need,” and then they can match their understanding with what is available in the program to address these issues.

In summary, youth workers see their young women clients as having a lot on their plates, but as individually motivated to change, even though they are young and inexperienced. At this point, I should note that the youth workers’ descriptions extend above and beyond specific program criteria set out by funding agencies. For example, in the young mothers’ program, the maximum age was 22. (For further detail see the overview of youth employment programs in Chapter 4.) The descriptions offered by the youth workers are partially true in that most of the young women were really motivated, and indeed were dealing with multiple barriers and serious issues. The point being made is that together, these descriptions of young women clients, which confirm their risk in this particular form, justify and provide a rationale for youth workers’ interventions in these young women’s lives.
through community programs aimed at providing services to help this disadvantaged group. Young women’s homeless, lone or young mother status can be taken to indicate some sort of deficiency that deserves the workers’ attention and support. The next section shows how the workers’ helping processes have more to do with their professional obligations and resources available for program development than with meeting the needs of the young women they serve.

Supports Provided: Material Resources and Space

Many of the young women interviewed confirmed that they were grateful for the support they got in Gen-Y programs. The clients and program workers agreed on the main benefits of the programs.

“What do young women get here they don’t get elsewhere?” I asked a youth worker.

“Non-judgemental support, a lot of them being single moms; friends; financial support, in that they get the extra money if they come to the program and they get tokens when they come. Access to food: There’s a full meal when they come, and they can take food home with them. Access to community services: finding out about the child care program they might not know is in the basement of their building, just general information about topics they want. Having guest speakers: We have an Ontario Works lady that comes in talk to them once in a while. I was talking to the girl who knows the policy the social services has, but her worker is not giving her the money she should. So I called Social Services, because she’s entitled to it—so simple things like that. We advocate on their behalf and let them know what they’re entitled to,” the worker explained.

The young mothers in the program confirmed that they benefit most from the information they get. Some of the topics they found useful were child development and care, behaviour/discipline strategies, breastfeeding tips, information about library resources and housing, personal self-esteem and self-confidence building. One of the residents of the shelter said that the women were there primarily for the safe environment. It’s somewhere where they
can eat hot meals and sleep in beds. She clarified that in her case, “I’m here for the housing,” while waiting for subsidized housing (Field note, September 7, 2005).

According to both the young women clients and the workers, sharing experiences was another benefit for attending Gen-Y programs. This cut across the different programs I examined. In the employment program, the worker said that the clients learned about others with different disabilities who are also exploring employment opportunities. In the young mothers’ program, the worker and clients confirmed that the mothers learned from each other. The worker gave some examples:

“Sometimes we’ll just talk. Sometimes I just forfeit the group topic and let them talk among themselves, find out things. One girl will say ‘Oh, I can get that? My worker didn’t tell me that.’ They help each other out too if one girl gets pregnant and doesn’t have a stroller, another will say, ‘I have a stroller’ or, ‘my cousin has one you can have.’ They do a lot of sharing like that. A lot of them make friends on the bus on the way home. They really do establish long-term relationships here. The girl who I hadn’t seen in three weeks is still friends with another girl. They hang out all the time, they parent their children together. It’s nice.”

In this way, the programs can be seen as spaces where young women develop innovative strategies by sharing experiences. Gen-Y potentially provides them a space where they see each other and themselves in ways not restricted by the characteristics of being “at risk” youth as an identity not of their own choosing. The irony, of course, is that they are participants in Gen-Y programs only by virtue of their “at risk” status.

**Structuring Access and Choice for “At Risk” Youth in Gen-Y Programs**

There is no question that young women in Gen-Y programs need and benefit from the resources and support provided. The question is: To what extent do available supports challenge or reinforce particular notions of “at risk” youth? Here I outline some of the
limitations and contradictions of available resources and support by examining how options actually get carried out through rules and norms in program development.

**Access to Resources Requires Adopting an “At Risk” Youth Identity**

In order to access the programs and resources, the young women needed to adopt the status of “at risk” youth. For example, I observed during my field observation how a youth worker mentioned to her group that if they needed a bed, to call agency ABC. She then proceeded to prepare the women on what to say when they called. She said something like: “Just tell them ‘I’m sharing a bed now with my son, and he’s getting too big. He needs his own bed.” (Field note, June 16, 2005). The workers’ job then involved “teaching” her clients to be “at risk” and how to describe their needs in particular ways to help them get what they needed.

In another field observation, a youth worker introduced her group to a holiday matching program where young women clients with families were matched with “generous community members” who provided toys, clothes and food for the winter holidays. The young women were asked to complete a “wish list” for the matching process. I heard the young women asking each other what to request. Some seemed at a loss as to what to write down; some requested shoes with roller wheels for their children, electronics for themselves. One woman, who did not have children half jokingly said that what she wanted was an apartment. At the time, I thought to myself that she probably could not put that on her “wish list” (Field note, November 3, 2005).
Restricting Choices or Expanding Choices in Program Development

The program supports available and the form they take are structured around choices focused toward the future that align with workers’ portrayal of young women “at risk.” While I found the young women generally gave positive feedback about the programs, there were also some aspects of the programs that were not well received. The young women from the shelter especially viewed the house rules they were subjected to as barriers to their ability to meet their responsibilities and exercise their independence. In the case of the weekday “out the door” house rule at the shelter, many of the young women said that it was not helpful to be “kicked out” at 10:00 a.m. every day. Nadine said, “You have to leave; it doesn’t matter where you go.” Others mentioned how they did not have enough money for transportation, and that the women may not know what to do or have anywhere to go or may experience conflicts with their work or school schedules. One program worker rationalized her understanding of her work in relation to her role in helping “at risk” young women:

“The idea is that women need to go out in the world and look about their planning, try to figure out something that might happen for them. If you go out into the world and face it, maybe you’ll actually go to that employment centre, maybe you’ll actually go to that doctor’s appointment. If you’ve got medical reasons why you’re not going anywhere, if you’ve got a school schedule, you’re not going anywhere. If you’ve got employment in the evening, you’re not going anywhere during the day. But if you don’t have a whole lot of other things going on, the idea is to encourage women to get out there and do something. I think it works for some, but it doesn’t [for others]. If you’re a senior woman, if you have mental health issues, you’re not going anywhere; no one’s forcing you to leave during the day. But if you say that your goal is employment, get out to that employment centre. Here’s your token to get there. Of course, we don’t provide them enough; [they] get there okay but can’t get home again.”

The worker justified the house rule based on the idea that young women need to “go out into the world.” Asking clients to go out can be interpreted as exposing them to various choices for their future. This direct action is supported by an understanding of clients as
blank slates. It follows that workers and programs have a role and responsibility to provide opportunities. However, this worker seemed conflicted in her role as a rule enforcer, because she also talked about the futility of sending clients out with one token and limited funds. Later in the interview she said more vehemently: “If you want women to do planning, give them the resource to do it.” Reflecting on the future of the program and clients, this is what she wished for: “Having these women housed and safe in places they can afford to be in would be good. . . . We need more staff. We need more money. We need lots of things.” To make sense of the discrepancy between what she does to enforce the house rule and her feelings about how the program inadequately provides for young women to go out into the world, I suggest that she does what she feels she can for clients whom she believes will benefit from exposure to the outside world.

The extent to which choices offered by programs are limiting is seldom remarked upon directly. In fact, one program worker claimed that they try to offer clients “anything they want” in terms of programming. About the program choices, she said, “It’s fun. It’s educational stuff. A lot of it is free stuff.” When I asked her how she decided what to do, she replied: “It comes from them, it comes from me, from the community, what ends up on our doorstep.” She said that over the years she had drawn on some “pretty standard stuff.” She named a few topics that she had organized recently or in the past: workshops on self-defence, alcohol and drug awareness, sexuality and birth control, employment services and rights in the workplace. There had also been artistically oriented group activities in creative writing and knitting, and life skills training in money management and goal setting.

In a conversation I had with another program worker, she stressed the importance of offering “useful” programs. The worker was talking about different ideas she had for
activities for the women, while also thinking about who was available in terms of volunteers and resources. In the past, activities like knitting or creative writing were provided. She also mentioned how she was aiming to organize activities that would “give the women something” in terms of skills or make them more marketable; activities that might be “useful” for them. The assumption was that these women need “something,” but the young women I talked to had all sorts of employment experience already. My sense was that the worker’s intentions were good, that she was thinking practically in terms job search or budgeting but somewhere along the line, the standard social services mantra of “starting with the client” or “meeting client needs” got translated as meeting needs in “useful” ways with resources at hand, “useful” being defined as increasing a young woman’s “marketable” status.

Based on my observations, the actual workshops were hit and miss with young women. In the previous section, I mentioned the types of topics that the young women found most useful. Nadine gave me a review of a recent money management seminar that she did not find useful:

“It was okay, but it really wasn’t informative [about] helping the women get out of the situation here and moving back into the workforce and whatever. It was interesting to know how emotionally, we, as women, are tied to money and how it influences our spending habits. But she never really discussed helping women be more knowledgeable about saving and working.”

A final characteristic of choice in programs relates to the individualistic nature of the choices provided. One main way that this individualistic focus appeared across all programs was in life management skills workshops. The young mothers’ and housing program reports in 2004 outlined workshops conducted in areas such as parenting, health, nutrition, budgeting, self-esteem, relationships, body image, anger and stress management, and problem-solving. While life-skills training introduces useful strategies for everyday living, a focus on
individual choices often comes at the expense of acknowledging how young women’s choices are structured by labour, welfare, social and education programs that fail to produce conditions whereby young women can meet their responsibilities and actually achieve independence; for example, through access to post-secondary education or through the right to liveable wages.

When counsellors talked about the kinds of activities offered in the programs, they said things like, “It depends on what the young women want.” They stressed how they attended to and solicited young women’s feedback through mechanisms such as individual action plans, choices in work placements, intake forms that provide selection of topics or the drop-in structure. In this way, young women were seen to be exercising individual choices about how they wanted to engage in the program. Emphasizing programming that focuses on individual choices follows from a perspective of young women “at risk” as being motivated to change. That many of the workshops are positively received further confirms the professional description of “at risk” youth as the appropriate one for framing further and future initiatives. Smith refers to this kind of logic as an “ideological circle” (1990, p. 44).

**Conclusion**

What I have attempted to describe in this chapter is the ideological, administrative, socially constructed character of the “at risk” youth category. I have shown that the category arises as a result of the young women’s, researcher’s and youth workers’ activities that engage young women at the same time as they produce the “at risk” youth category. While there circulates in the general public a common-sense masculine version of “at risk” youth, young women themselves identify neither as being “at risk” or even as being “youth.” This
observation of Gen-Y young women's untenable hold on the status of "youth" continues the theme introduced in the previous chapter of the young women's unyouthfulness in relation to their provisioning experiences. The observations made in this chapter of how the young women do not appear as typical youth strikes another blow at the youth transitions approach for understanding Gen-Y young women's lived experiences: they cannot experience "youth" transitions, if they do not fit within typical parameters of "youth" in the first place.

Youth workers, however, do make use of the "at risk" youth concept by selectively highlighting aspects of the category to enable professional responses that are tied to institutional practices and processes related to research and program development. These processes have identified "at risk" young women in an ungendered way as being motivated to change even though they are dealing with serious issues with little experience. Youth workers train young women clients to claim the "at risk" youth label to access the resources they need. But often the range of program activities for "at risk" youth is limited by staff and volunteer availability, and, as a result, the program choices offered to young women do not expand young women's choice so much as they limit them to choices relying on individualistic problem-solving solutions (mainly using life-skills models). Functioning as an ideological concept, "at risk" youth provides ways of thinking about young women and ways of prioritizing and justifying particular types of program supports and choices, the limits of which are defined by funding agencies and program procedures. In the next chapter, I examine how the institutional and organizational processes and practices of setting up programs to help young women with career choices emphasize individualized responses to systemic problems, and in doing so produce particular understandings of race and gender.
CHAPTER 7: CHOICE, ANTI-DISCRIMINATION AND DIVERSITY: RACIALIZED GENDERING OF INSTITUTIONAL PROCESSES AND PRACTICES

In Chapter 4, I described how “at risk” youth have become more closely associated with racial minority youth in the last few decades, even though the category is hypothetically race-neutral. From my field observations and Gen-Y program reports, I indeed found that the majority of the young women program participants were members of racial minority groups. As I listened to “at risk” young women talk about their education and career goals, I found that their decisions seldom strayed from female-dominated vocations. Beginning with this set of observations, I explore in this chapter how institutional processes and practices position young women to make the educational and career decisions that they do. I analyze how ruling social relations of race and gender influence young women’s career decisions by shaping said institutional processes and practices.

To uncover how racialization occurs and underlies organizational mandates, I compare and contrast Gen-Y’s intended program goals with the ways staff members actually accomplish their work with young women, using data from the young women’s and key informants’ interviews, agency reports and public documents. I argue that race and gender social relations operate by creating institutional and organizational contexts in which the practical use of anti-discrimination and diversity policies inadvertently reproduces an understanding of racial difference that obscures the way ruling occurs in the everyday practices of young women’s decision-making and youth workers’ professional advice and work with young women clients. Ruling occurs even though anti-discrimination and diversity, equity and access policies are intended to address and ameliorate systemic racial and gender inequities.
Making Career Decisions in Gendered and Racialized Labour Markets

I begin this analysis of the ruling social relation of race and gender by examining the kinds of career decisions young women clients in Gen-Y programs were making. Specifically, I tracked the ways race and culture appeared in their interviews. In Chapter 5, I noted that these young women were struggling to provide for their families while dealing with the exigencies of their life circumstances, given the resources they had at hand. In addition to making decisions while juggling long- and short-term responsibilities, I recognize and account for the fact that as young women consider their future careers, they are entering into local labour markets characterized by gender and racial inequalities.

Gender Influences on Career Decisions

When I asked Chantal about her career plans, she said that she wanted to be a nurse or to work with children. When I asked why she wanted to pursue paediatric nursing, she said, “I love being around children; I love babies.” Later in the interview she said:

“I’ve wanted to do that [nursing] since I was young, probably because I have lots of aunts and cousins in nursing. I’m the next one. My grandmother always says it doesn’t matter whether you have a kid or not, you can still achieve your goals.”

In terms of educational preparation, Chantal said that she planned to attend a nursing program at a local college recommended by her mother and guidance counsellor once she finishes high school. Chantal showed confidence about entering into the nursing profession even though some details about exactly how she would manage her workload and the child care needs of her toddler son were not clear based on her interview responses.

In Chapter 5, I described the strategy of “active waiting” used by young mothers. I make note of it here in relation to career decisions to illustrate how Chantal’s choices seemed
to rely on the chance that her relatives and ex-partner will be available to help her with child
care. This does not mean that Chantal is simply leaving things to happen as they will, but the
probability that her plans will work out are nevertheless structured by the chance that certain
arrangements for care will fall into place. When asked about how to manage the shift work
in the hospital, Chantal said:

“My son will be old enough by then, because you have to go through university. By
the time I do that, plus his father is there [they are separated but she expects him to
return] and my grandmother is coming down here to live; she has no problem
watching my son. He’ll be old enough by then.”

The majority of the young women interviewed were in fact gearing themselves
toward similar kinds of professions; namely, female-dominated professional occupations
such as nurse, teacher, child care or social worker, dental assistant, law clerk and real estate
agent. Natasha said she wanted to be a cosmetician. Two of the young women bucked the
trend: Annie wanted to be a lawyer; Eve, a doctor. The only young woman I came across in
field observation who showed interest in an obviously male-dominated field (mechanical
engineering) was enrolled in a woman’s employment training programs for office
management training. When I asked why she was in a program that did not fit her career goal,
she said she was referred to it by her social assistance worker (Field note, June 17, 2005).
One of the program workers explained this mismatch between client and program goals as an
opportunity for career exploration:

“They might have an idea that they’d like to be in an office program, but when they
get into the program for a few days, they think, ‘No I don’t want to do filing, I don’t
want to answer phones, I don’t want to do letters; I want to look for another career.’
Sometimes it’s a sampling to see if that’s something they want to do as a career. It’s
career exploration, I suppose.”

The young women who chose career options that required longer educational
preparation were still drawn to female-dominated helping professions in the interim. For
example, Eve said that she would register in a Personal Support Worker program as preparation for medical school. Later in the chapter, I explore how young women are making gendered choices in the context of a gender and racially stratified labour market, and how these choices are institutionally supported at Gen-Y.

Immigrant Families and Cultural Influences on Career Decisions

None of the young women said that their racial or cultural background directly influenced their career choices:

“Have you experienced or observed any discrimination that affected your decisions around school or work?” I asked Melissa.

“It doesn’t really have that type of effect on me,” she replied. “I don’t really think about it. You know when you’re interacting with someone, you don’t really think that because I’m Asian they’re treating me in a certain way? I recognize that discrimination is out there, but for me, my experience, I don’t really find that affected my schooling or work. I don’t think people treat me any differently because I’m Chinese or I look a certain way.”

The young women also denied the impact of racism, poverty and homelessness on their career decisions. For Eve, being homeless is not a barrier. Instead, she spoke about not wanting to work in telemarketing-type jobs because she is not passionate about the work:

“My current [homeless] situation right now—I don’t think I’m being limited, because I have all the skills that I need to perform most of the jobs that I open the newspaper and see. It’s just me personally. I don’t want to do it. So I don’t think I’m being limited living here. It just comes down to what I like and what I don’t like.”

Channel, another homeless young woman, said:

“So I’ve had a lot of volunteer experience, because I’ve been very like career goal oriented. Don’t let the shelter situation fool you [emphasis added].”

While the young women did not deny that discrimination or racial profiling occurs in general, they did not name it as a personal limitation or barrier they faced in their own school
or career goals. (Around the period when the interviews were conducted, racial profiling, specifically the targeting of Black youth by police, was making local news headlines.)

Michelle confirmed:

“No, I couldn’t say I have experienced it [racial profiling] myself. I’m trying to think back if I’ve ever seen it, but I haven’t [been able to] process it. Sometimes you see things and you don’t really know what’s going on. So if someone explains, ‘Okay, if this and this and this happened, that means you were a victim of it,’ it clicks in your mind, ‘Oh yeah, something like that happened. In terms of myself, it [racial profiling] never happened to me personally—I’m trying to think back a bit. No, just the typical things you see on the news.”

When the young women talked about culture, it was in relation to their families and church communities as sources of support that they drew on for strength and motivation in difficult times. Recall that Chantal mentioned the positive influence of her mother and grandmother on her choice of nursing. For other young women interviewed, family influence did not take the form of direct advice on what career to pursue. Instead, family situations seemed to subtly and indirectly shape how the young women approached their career decisions. Nadine spoke about the influence of her Jamaican immigrant mother, who was terminally ill at the time of the interview:

“Having an ill parent helps me focus a lot. I think about the sacrifices my mom made to come to Canada from Jamaica, and it keeps me focused every day... It helps me motivate myself to be stronger and to focus on my goals and to complete my education and be the best possible person I can be and help other people.”

Eve chatted about how she enjoyed going to church as a child and the importance of the church as a place where she experienced Jamaican culture:

“I enjoyed being on the choir because I love to sing and to hear others sing as well. That’s my special art, I guess. Sometimes the church sermon itself was boring; the pastor went on, and a lot of people complained that it was too long. Basically, I had good friends in the church and had family members who went to the church, and it was just fun. Everyone was so close—maybe too close.”

“Do you miss that?” I asked.
"I do," Eve replied. "There was church dinner on Sunday, and stuff, and communion it was very fun. [We had] dinner, because I'm from a Jamaican background, there's a lot of Jamaican cooking, Jamaican talking, Jamaican culture, so you go back to your roots every Sunday."

"Why was that important?" I probed.

"Because it teaches you not to forget where you came from, and emphasizes that you could have a lot of problems in the future, but as a community we're strong together," Eve responded.

Annie talked about making her South Asian immigrant parents proud:

"[A friend] is telling me how his parents are like, 'Oh, if you can't do it, it's okay,' but I don't want to get into that 'Oh, if you can't do it, it's okay' type of thing. I want to try and do what I want to do. I don't want to give up; it's too early to give up. And you want to make your parents proud."

"Tell me about that. What would make them proud of you?" I asked.

"To be successful, especially in what you want to do, not just so you can be rich, but get somewhere where you're respected too," Annie answered.

Later in the interview, Annie shared her interest in joining an ethno-cultural student group at university although she was presently involved in culturally mixed groups.

"So how come you're going to check out the Sri Lankan students at university?" I asked.

"Because it's easier to relate to people who come from your ethnic background, I guess, like the sort of things that a person from another background wouldn't know about yours if they don't share any of that background. . . . It would be fun to join in where you can relate and share things about your background."

From the perspective of the young women, they did not experience their racial and ethnic backgrounds as a barrier to making career choices. (This does not, however, dismiss the possibility that young women may experience gender and racial discrimination along their career paths.) What the comments indicate is that they find strength and comfort in, and have a desire to connect with, their own ethno-racial and cultural group in times of stress and
uncertainty. The stories of these young women provide hints about a kind of emotional support or grounding that they need to make major life decisions. Therefore, the problem young women face is not that they are making poor career choices or that they feel restricted about the choices they have. I suggest that the problem is one of historical exclusion of racial minorities and immigrant populations from the labour market. Melissa’s decision-making experiences and practices provide evidence to support this claim.

Melissa, who identifies as Canadian, was nevertheless making career decisions within the context of her immigrant Chinese family. The family owns a small business with high employee turnover. Based on her history of volunteer work, Melissa decided that she would like to pursue a career in social services, where she could work with children and youth. Prior to the interview, Melissa planned to apply to a Master of Social Work (MSW) degree program, but then she got a job as a child care relief worker. By the time of the interview, Melissa was not sure she wanted to return to school, since she had successfully secured a job without the graduate degree. In the following passage, Melissa ponders her options:

“I thought that if I get my MSW, then I can get the job of my choice. . . . Because I was on the children’s aid website, and you can see that they’re hiring social workers. Of course, an MSW is way more qualified then a BSW, you know? That’s how it works, right? And I’m thinking, ‘It’ll look pretty impressive; it’s another accomplishment for me,’ right? But if I can get my foot in the door now, do I want to take another two years off, get away from work and do this MSW if I get in? I’m just going to let things slide. I’m going to apply and if I get, I get in, if I don’t, I don’t. [emphasis added] Last year I was thinking, ‘I’m going to apply to every MSW program,’ but now I’m just going to aim for the local university. If I don’t get it, I guess it wasn’t meant to be. If I get a full-time job, hopefully I’ll get bumped up from the relief worker position to a contract worker or even full-time.”

Besides thinking that there would be more career advancement opportunities with a higher degree, Melissa talked about how being a student allowed her freedom from her responsibilities at home:
“When I graduated, it’s like, ‘You graduated. You have to watch your dad; you have time to do it.’ But when I was in school, I had less family obligations. Before, they [my parents] thought of me as a full-time student. But now, since I’m not a student, I don’t have any excuses. I can’t say I’m doing my homework, right?”

“Now that you’re not a student, you’re…?” I asked for clarification.

“I’m just unemployed. So I should be helping out,” Melissa explained.

Referring to her immigrant parents as “traditional,” Melissa interpreted this orientation as the reason that formal education was important to them, and thus, why they excused her from family chores and responsibilities while she was a student. However, “tradition” is not enough to explain her mother’s ambivalence toward her taking full-time work. She said:

“My parents are kind of traditional. You know, ‘Focus on your education. Do other things on the side.’ But then on the side you have to do other family things. They wouldn’t tell me not to go to school to take care of so-and-so. But after I graduated, when I’m working at the family business, it’s a little different. While I’m working, all of a sudden, ‘Well, your dad’s sick. Drive him to the hospital’.”

Later in the interview, I asked, “What will happen when you get more work, like this on-call job?”

Melissa responded: “They’ll find ways to manage, and they just know I’m not someone that they can depend on like before. Every time I find something sort of different, my time with family is sort of—they sort of find other people to do it [the work]. My mom will take over, or someone will take over, because they have to, right?”

“Are they understanding of these changes?” I asked.

“They don’t need to understand. That’s how they are. They just want to know who’s going to get the job done. They’ll think, ‘We have to manage this. We have no choice’ [emphasis added]. Not that they want this to happen. I don’t think my mom wants me to get a job, right?” Melissa clarified.

“You don’t?” I probed.

“Not really, unless she can find someone to work at the family business. It happened so fast; we’re going to have to deal with it.”

“But she wanted you to go to school” I asked.
Melissa answered: “It’s kind of weird. She wants me to go to school as well. I don’t know.”

In Melissa’s case, the historical racial inequities in the labour market manifested in self-employment, which is one of the strategies immigrant families have been known to use to overcome employment barriers. Based on what she said in the interview, Melissa’s family members were not advising her to pursue particular career opportunities or continue the business. Even so, her future career prospects have been and are being influenced by her family’s need for her to work in the family business even though she is actively making career decisions and struggling to find her own way.

Melissa and Annie both suggested that their participation in formal post-secondary education was important for their immigrant parents. One of the program workers confirmed this outlook on education while commenting on trends in volunteering (Field note, April 19, 2005). The worker suggested that, based on her observations, there were cultural expectations for some ethno-racial girls not to volunteer, the rationale being that the girls needed to concentrate on schooling. We then briefly discussed whether it was good educational policy to mandate students to complete a community involvement requirement in order to graduate from high school. I sensed from the worker that she thought volunteering was a good idea for all the right reasons, such as developing social and leadership skills.

While on the surface, the worker’s and immigrant parents’ advice on whether or not young women should volunteer appears discrepant, they actually are not, because both suggestions articulate a race-neutral framework which stipulates that education and/or volunteering is the best way for young women, regardless of ethno-racial background, to achieve success in the labour market. That both education and volunteering are good for young women is not in question here. What I do highlight is how ruling social relations of
race perpetuate a dominant understanding of decisions around education and voluntarism as free of racial influence.

From the young women’s interviews, there is evidence that contradicts this dominant race-neutral perspective. I would make the case that at least some of the racial minority young women volunteered in places where they could provide for themselves and their families by meeting ethno-specific needs for community belonging and support. For example, several of the young Black women (Eve, Michelle, Keesha and Nadia) spoke about going to church and involvement with their church community, which from their descriptions were ethno-specific cultural spaces. Granted, I did not query the young women’s subjective motives, nor was it my intent to analyze why they volunteer where they do. What I can surmise by tracing race as a social relation that coordinates these seemingly disparate responses to volunteering for young racial minorities, is that the discussions maintain choice structure as race neutral; this occurs regardless of whether racial minority young women actually decide to volunteer. In a sense the discussions are about racial barriers for young racial minorities, but the solution references a structure that is seemingly race neutral. In this way, immigrant parents’ desire for post-secondary education for their children is aligned with policy and research that confirms the desirability of youth voluntarism, which frames the problem of racial and gender inequities as partially due to immigrant youth’s reluctance to take on volunteer experiences.

**Career and Job Decisions not Made**

Most of the young women sounded definite and declarative when they talked about their career goals and decisions. What was absent from their stories was a sense of discovery,
exploration and, dare I say it, the risk-taking one might associate with young adulthood. (The irony here is that there is a social expectation for all young people to take risks while they are young, rather than later, when “real,” i.e. adult, responsibilities begin to accumulate, but young, marginalized women end up making choices and taking particular kinds of risks that they cannot afford to take, given their dependent relationship and responsibilities.) In fact, a couple of Gen-Y young women said at different times in casual conversation with me that they wanted “to be sure” about future job prospects before enrolling into college or university (Field note, June 16, 2005). And all of the Gen-Y young women planned to enrol in nearby colleges and local universities.

I realized that there were many choices that young women could not make around part-time jobs after I ran a workshop on job search for the young mothers as part of my field observation (Field note, May 26, 2005). At the workshop, I suggested that the clients target their job search, because looking for “any job” is ineffective. This is standard employment counselling advice: Customize your résumé and job documents for specific positions. One young woman countered by saying that there is no difference; a minimum wage job is a minimum wage job. It did not really matter whether she did cashier work or stocking or whatever, she just needed “any job.” In retrospect, I see that she was telling me that the choices she had were not really the choices she wanted to make (i.e. choosing between a couple of minimum-wage jobs).

I bring up these unmade choices to demonstrate the limited nature of choices from the perspective of young women who have to juggle provisioning responsibilities in the context of inequitable social conditions. In a sense, their choices have already been made for them based on existing gender and racially based realities. In the examples, the young women
were calling attention to a disjuncture between what ought to be (they should be carefree, risk-taking youth) and what really is (they cannot be carefree) in terms of their career and educational choices.

Professional Interventions on Career Decisions

Based on my interviews with youth and program workers at Gen-Y, I found they provided two main kinds of responses to helping young women make career decisions: The first was downgrading; the second, motivating. In this section, similar to the previous one, I approached the analysis by tracking how race and culture appeared in the key informant’s interviews.

Downgrading Educational Goals

In my field observations, I volunteered to conduct a workshop for Gen-Y young women on going to university. The program worker commented that college would be more relevant. Another counsellor verified:

“Not to generalize, but I don’t think our clients seek that higher level of education and profession. They could, but I’m not familiar with any who have. Most do something at community college, if they go on, or they work.”

Some of the young women explained to me that their school guidance counsellors suggested vocational options for them but seemed to agree that college was a better option, although Linda expressed regret that she went to college for what sounded like a general arts program based on counsellor’s advice instead of going straight into nursing:

“I did a science course. My counsellor from high school put me in that course because she said it would help me get into nursing and you also take math and English. It was okay, but I find I still should’ve had straight nursing.”
Program workers who recommended that young women select college instead of university saw the college option as something the clients wanted and what they needed, referencing their professional discourse of starting with the client (see Chapter 6). In any case, education and career advice was treated as gender- and race-neutral personal choices that just happened to fall in line with existing occupational segregation by gender. Even though one counsellor said she is hoping that trends change, she still said, “I think it’s a female thing to want to be in helping professions.”

**Inspiring and Motivating**

The second response that young women got from professionals who wanted to help them with career decisions was an uplifting, inspiring and motivational approach. Examples of this approach came in the form of two public events I attended as part of my field observations. Neither event specifically targeted young women, although there were young women in both audiences. I include accounts of these events, because they contained messages for young women even though the community leaders’ were speaking generally about young people’s or women’s education and career options.

In an evangelist-style public presentation entitled “Assisting At-Risk Youth—Lawyers and Communities Working Together,” organized by the Law Society of Upper Canada in February 2006, a Black motivational speaker, originally from Grenada, told an audience made up mostly of students from inner-city high schools that while life will be unfair, young people have the capacity, drive and wherewithal to achieve their dreams. He said that all young people need is an “insatiable desire for success.” In his speech, he challenged young people to act. He shared extraordinary rags-to-riches tales. He rallied
Program workers who recommended that young women select college instead of university saw the college option as something the clients wanted and what they needed, referencing their professional discourse of starting with the client (see Chapter 6). In any case, education and career advice was treated as gender- and race-neutral personal choices that just happened to fall in line with existing occupational segregation by gender. Even though one counsellor said she is hoping that trends change, she still said, “I think it’s a female thing to want to be in helping professions.”

**Inspiring and Motivating**

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audience members to believe in themselves. He suggested that young people could overcome poor health, poverty, alcoholic fathers and single-parent families by rising above negative messages and racial stereotypes (Field note, February 22, 2006)

Another example of a motivational talk came from a women’s employment program. In a Lunch-and-Learn event, the director of a community-based legal clinic shared her career path and journey with an audience of mostly mature women participants in employment programs (Field note, May 10, 2005). There were also a few younger women, representatives from funding agencies and local businesses present.

The event was introduced by the Executive Director, who talked about the agency’s historical beginnings over 100 years ago in two program areas: housing and employment. She talked about how the agency was avant-garde in its training of rural young women, who moved into the city, to use typewriters. At the time, it was considered “risky” for women to use typewriters because this work was thought to adversely affect their reproductive potential. Then she mentioned that women in the current programs are taking “risks” by participating in their programs, and that the agency was proud to be part of women’s career journeys.

The guest speaker identified herself as being from a supportive White middle-class family. Her father was university educated; her mother was a full-time housewife. In her presentation, she recalled her own career trajectory, which was characterized by taking risks and leaps of faith. She conveyed that much of her drive and passion arose from her experience of being a young, single mother. She told the audience how she started out as a writer (restaurant reviewer), and then opened a restaurant without knowing how to cook. Then she wanted to be a lawyer, but needed day care, so she advocated for day care at university. Her message was: If you have passion and a goal, if you are determined, you will
find a way to do what you want. In her final remarks, she advised women not only to learn job skills but also to build networks and get support, because people do not often achieve goals without help from others.

During the question period, women in the audience said that they felt inspired by the speaker’s remarks. When audience members asked for suggestions on how to overcome obstacles, she answered, “Just clench yourself up and send the nervousness to other parts of your body, like your knees.” She said that one has to find a way around, over or under the obstacle. In her presentation, the speaker acknowledged her privileged White middle-class background, and that some women may not be in a place to take risks. At points in her talk, she said things like, “It may sound corny, but if you’re determined, you’ll find a way to do what you want.” At others points, she said things like, “It’s always scary, even though I might seem confident. Speak your mind, even if your voice is shaky.” She acknowledged that women may encounter barriers beyond their control in pursuing their dreams. I spoke with a program worker afterward who said that she liked inspirational message but also recognized that “just wanting to be a lawyer” was simply not enough for some of the clients she comes across.

Juxtaposing the downgrading and inspiration approaches in relation to what they prescribe for young women reveals their common characteristic features: Both approaches encourage personal risk-taking behaviour; both approaches ask young women to make choices and to take certain risks. The choices that workers see themselves helping clients make relate to career and housing, income support, educational and high school equivalency program, job training and work placement, and parenting skills options. In the downgrading approach, young women are asked to take what appear to be smaller risks than in
motivational approach but from neither approach is the question raised why women should be asked to take risks in the first place. Particularly, why are Gen-Y young women, who are already disadvantaged in labour markets stratified by gender, race and age, and who are responsible for a substantial amount of caregiving, being asked to take risks, given that the margins for success are fairly narrow?

No one asked the Executive Director to clarify what she meant by saying that women were taking risks simply by participating in community programs. In some respects, being participants in Gen-Y programs merely signalled an “at risk” status already conferred onto the young women prior to their program participation by way of their immigration, racial minority, poor or lone mother status. The workers’ focus on helping young women make future-oriented choices obscured how young women’s choices were restricted before they landed at the doorstep of the program. One woman from the shelter articulated the irony of not acknowledging historical trajectories that shape young women’s current and future life choices when she said that no little girl grows up thinking she’ll end up in a shelter (Field note, November 9, 2005).

Finally, while the downgrading approach downgrades the influence of gender and race, and the motivating approach highlights gender and race as barriers to career success which presumably can be overcome, both approaches are premised on the social fact of a racial difference that is ignored in the first case and highlighted in the second, but is overcome in both by personal risk-taking behaviour. At this point, program workers can intervene to help young women make choices and deal with discrimination. The next section documents how youth workers attempt to help the young women overcome individual acts of racism or sexism, and how their responses are linked to institutional processes and practices.
Program Workers Juggle Professional Obligations and Organizational Mandates

Focus on Anti-Discrimination as Individual Acts of Racism

Based on the interviews, counsellors were generally aware of and acknowledged that young women face systemic forms of inequality. In one example, a program worker alluded to racism in the workplace when she admitted that she did not know how the employment counsellor in her program advised young women who wear hijabs about employer expectations and standard Canadian employment practices. Another worker from a different program said:

"They [clients] face a lot of discrimination. I have one girl who pretends her child is her little sister. She took her to a job interview and they [the interviewer] asked, 'Is that your kid?' She said, 'No it's my sister; I have to babysit her today.' Same thing with housing: I've had girls who go to apartments, and it's illegal [for landlords] to ask if she's on welfare or a single mom. But the girls don't know; they don't know the route to take to sort that out."

Focusing on anti-discrimination was a key way in which racial discourses and understandings of racial difference are produced through workers' actions and interactions with clients. Counsellors generally made well-intended efforts to help their clients strategize the everyday sexism and racism they encountered. Workers were especially attentive to, and immediately addressed, oppressive acts that occurred among clients while they were in the programs. The following are two examples of situations counsellors dealt with.

In the first example, I heard a casual conversation among a few young mothers and the counsellor in my field observation. Other clients were sitting around in the program space before the formal group session. In their nattering, the young women used a term that was derogatory to refer to a common acquaintance from Trinidad and Tobago. When the counsellor gently but firmly reprimanded them for using a racist term, the young women did not seem to see what the big deal was, since they did not consider their use of the slang as
derogatory. The young women then accepted the counsellor’s alternative terminology in what appeared to be a good-humoured, light-hearted exchange (Field note, May 26, 2005).

In another example, a program worker described the shelter’s anti-discrimination policy to me with a fair amount of pride:

“There’s an anti-discriminatory agreement that women have to sign when they come in... we talk about discrimination, cooperative living [and] what it looks like. Both staff and resident sign [the agreement]: We are going to try not to be discriminatory while we live here. [emphasis added] So that opens women’s eyes up for the first time to homophobia or issues of racism. A lot of different women are coming from different places; they may not have encountered a gay/lesbian person in their lives,” explained the worker.

“How do you introduce that form?” I asked.

“It’s part of intake. It says all women have the right to be treated with respect; everyone has the right to be here,” she replied.

“So you just explain that [to the women]?” I asked.

“Yeah, there’s all sorts of examples of discrimination, from transgenderism, to homophobia to racism to ageism to lookism. We even made up some names ourselves for what it is, like it’s not okay to make fun of people for who they are, how they look, what they say, how they dress, what they eat—anything like that. So that’s laid out right at the beginning. I don’t think a lot of them have considered that before in their lives. It’s something to call them on, to bring them back to should they be behaving in a way that’s not okay, you know. ... You [the client] could get a serious warning for being seriously discriminatory, or you may get an exemption depending on the situation, what was said, how it was said, if you can own it, if you can recognize it and have a conversation about it and take a step back and say ‘Oops, I shouldn’t have said that. That was a really dumb-ass thing for me to have said,’ that might be an exemption. If it’s an outright, ‘I know what I said, I’m glad I said it,’ that’s a serious warning. There’s all kinds of room to do education around the issue.”

These examples of young women’s racial remarks and their potentially racist actions might be considered understandable within the context of their lives. In the first case, the young women were using racial slurs without thinking about their meaning. But they appeared to be using the term descriptively, not necessarily with any ill intention but as part of typical youth-speak with friends. In the second case of shelter behaviour, it is

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understandable that women who are living with strangers in close quarters at a time of crisis feel vulnerable and scared, and might lash out at each other in racial terms. This, of course, is not to say either act is acceptable.

The relation of race is coordinating two related courses of action that reference professional and institutional norms in these two examples. First, both workers in the above examples see educating clients on anti-discrimination as part of their job ("there’s all kinds of room to do education around the issue"). The way she executed the anti-discrimination policy in practice, the shelter worker focused specifically on the micro-level manifestations of discrimination, in the form of name-calling and personally harassing behaviour. From the shelter worker’s ever-expanding list of “isms,” she seemed to be using diversity language to mean, be nice to each other; (note her comment that “it’s not okay to make fun of people”).

Furthermore, aside from the fact that everyone agrees that name-calling and other manifestations of “isms” should not be tolerated generally, it seemed that the shelter worker was in part relying on anti-discriminatory policy to maintain order in the group program or shelter. Appropriate behaviour and conduct of clients is an institutional priority. The shelter worker said, “We are going to try not to be discriminatory while we live here,” thus tying discrimination to communal living. In other words, the shelter residents were expected to abide by the anti-discriminatory policy in particular while they were living at the shelter. The manifestation of racism and sexism by this formulation—that is, as individual behaviour to be regulated—takes on a form that is distinct and separate from the systemic barriers young women face outside the program walls.

This emphasis on individual acts of discrimination assists the counsellor in her professional duties. If a counsellor is not constantly breaking up fights, she would have more
time to do counselling or give referrals which would allow her meet her obligations as a professional youth worker. The worker was not unaware that she has to meet the organization’s expectations for getting her work done. She explained the rationale for the “out the door” house rule in relation to organizational pressures and staffing:

“Basically between 10:30 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. you’re supposed to be out of the building every day. . . . Honestly, it’s a staffing issue. Staff have to make referrals and make phone calls and meet with individual women. If you’ve got 49 other women knocking on the door going, ‘Hey, I need some laundry soap, hey, I want to use the phone, hey, have you got any mail for me?’ it’s just too much.”

By acknowledging the institutional rationale for the “out the door” rule that originated from low staffing levels, the worker suggested that program decisions are not necessarily made in the best interests of the young women. However, workers did not appear to be cognizant of the way they were constructing a particular individualized character of race and racism as individualistic acts that neglects the systemic forms racism takes and the organizing aspects of race as a social relation on the operation of women and youth programs. By way of explanation, I suggest that articulating, addressing and acting upon racism as individual acts allows workers to accomplish both their professional and institutional responsibilities in a way that does not appear to compromise the clients who also benefit from participating in programs in environments of mutual respect and free of harassment.

**Gender Relations Organize the Housing System**

Just as the explication of the social relation of race through the counsellors’ attentiveness to individual discriminatory acts was difficult because their actions were embedded in their everyday practice of being counsellors, it is also challenging to figure out how gender is operating to organize the housing system as it does at the Gen-Y women’s shelter program.
To trace how gender is functioning in relation to and in conjunction with race, I recall the young women’s expressed ambivalence and discomfort with living in a shelter. While the young women interviewed generally recognized that the shelter was a space safe from violence where they could collect themselves, make plans, get help, and stay warm and fed, a couple of the young women told me that they did not want to “get comfortable.” Some sounded more patient than others in their interviews, but they all generally wanted out of the shelter as soon as possible.

Applying and waiting for social housing could be a lengthy, anxiety-provoking process. It required the young women to have identification and documents that constitute “proof” of their need for subsidized units. The housing application timelines were not always coordinated to the messy timelines of people’s lives. As pointed out by housing counsellors, young women often take longer to get on their feet after experiencing violence than allotted timelines for applying as a priority case for social housing. The counsellor explained the process to me in an email:

To apply for housing, you must fill out a rather lengthy and complicated form, and select possible buildings from their listings. In order to be considered for their “special priority housing,” you must have a letter from a counsellor/housing worker/doctor or someone detailing your experiences of abuse. You also require supporting documentation to verify your claim that you are leaving an abusive situation. Doctor’s letters, a police report, and proof that you were living with the abuser such as a lease, a landlord’s letter, copies of bills with your name/abuser’s name, etc.

Sometimes providing proof of cohabitation with the abuser is challenging. Often youth would not have access to things like signed leases or bills showing that both parties lived there. It can also be quite dangerous for someone to have to try and collect these sorts of documents [i.e. going back to the site of abuse]. We have a hard time sometimes coming up with the necessary proof. . . . The three month time limit can be problematic [women applying to the priority list for social housing on the basis that she is leaving an abusive situation must do so within three months of leaving]. This can sometimes be stretched to six months with some serious advocacy on our part. The wait time is still lengthy even once you have been accepted onto the list.
Women can spend six, eight, even twelve months going through the whole process (E-mail, November 22, 2006)

That young women in the shelter feel stressed and act out is at least partially due the circumstances of violence that led them to the shelter in the first place. When gender is viewed as a ruling relation coordinating the housing market, it reveals, first, that there is a shortage of affordable housing alternatives, and secondly, that a shelter system developed and delivered separately from mainstream housing options is the only option for women escaping abuse and violence. The young women who end up in shelters are identified as “at risk” not only because shelters are set up outside the continuum of normal housing arrangements, but also because of their inability to access appropriate housing (in family or independent units) in the private market. Even if they wanted to, the women could not stay at the shelter for much longer than a year (in a supportive housing program, the maximum length of stay was two years, according to the worker).

The coordinated actions of young women and youth workers that bring the relations of gender and race into being in particular forms are quite subtle. Approaching issues of gender and race as individualized actions is acceptable professional practice. It is difficult to see how this course of action, which constitutes ruling, maintains gender and racial inequity, because to curtail personal, hurtful and racially motivated actions that young women volley at each other under duress is absolutely reasonable and necessary. However, what this indulgent approach to discrimination obscures is the systemic violence that the young women experience as a result of gender relations, which extend beyond this local women’s shelter to the broader housing system. As the social relations of gender pass through and coordinate youth employment programs at the site of the Gen-Y’s shelter program, gendered
understandings of violence were also being produced at the local level in the limited responses and services for women who had experienced abuse.

**Accounting for Program Success: No Accounting for Relations of Race or Gender**

This section illustrates the way funding agreements and practices around program assessments and evaluations shape the workers’ approaches to anti-discrimination and diversity by applying frameworks and defining criteria for program success that do not accurately capture the actual work youth counsellors undertake to effectively help their clients. Funding agencies often require “unit of service” measurements in their budgetary assessment of programs to enable them to calculate a “price per unit” for services provided. While programs have leeway to define what “units of service” they will provide, funding bodies generally offer some standard indicators. For instance, in the young mothers’ program referred to above, what counts as “units of service” for funding from the City of Toronto’s Family Resource Program are measurements such as the number of adults and children served in the program, the amount of contact with clients through phone calls, group sessions and/or one-on-one counselling, and/or the number of workshops or seminars provided (City of Toronto, November 2006, p. 17). These criteria of program success create a context where the youth workers gear toward documenting these types of interactions.

These evaluation frameworks impact the organizational context in which youth workers work with young women. One counsellor of young mothers explained how funding directly impacts staffing and workloads when, she talked about what would help her to do her job better:

“What would make it better is if there were two of me. Because if a girl comes in crying, I can’t say, ‘Hold on until the end of group.’ I have a student from September
to April; now I don’t have a student. I’m torn between doing the group and counselling the girl because you never know when they’re going to come and what their issue is going to be.”

According to the annual report for the above program in 2004, funding allowed for five staff persons working the equivalent of 1.5 full-time positions to serve 305 clients (the program actually ran a deficit in 2004). I suggest that by creating an organizational context whereby time is a scarce resource, funding indirectly influences counsellors’ preference for dealing with the immediate kinds of racism that appear as individual acts. It would take considerably more effort to develop and launch a sustained and comprehensive approach from an analysis of systemic features of racism. This is not to say that counsellors are not equipped to take a systemic approach (in fact they often recognize the systemic nature of discrimination) but that such an approach would require time and energy that counsellors do not have, given that they are dealing with high workloads and crisis situations in their day-to-day work. What counsellors end up doing is coaching young women to stand up for their individual rights, or advocating on their clients’ behalf to social workers, doctors/medical professionals or police officers/legal professionals.

In contrast to the way that funding bodies account for program success, workers/managers describe how they work with clients and the less tangible, affective impacts of the programs on the women clients’ self-esteem and confidence levels as success. A counsellor described some work activities:

“We have an employment counsellor who makes appointments with them, assesses their résumé, assesses their job readiness, and helps them create a plan, but she can lead them to the water but can’t make them drink.”

In describing what happens to clients in employment programs, another counsellor said:

“For youth this is an esteem- and confidence-building experience, first and foremost. One of the things they notice when they complete the program is that they feel much
better about themselves, about their skills and abilities, and overall a higher level of self-confidence."

A manager described the impact of the programs on individual women:

“If you come the first day of the program, and you observe [the women] after they complete the five week [program], they’re different people. It’s just amazing. They stand up and talk about goals and so on.” Later she said, “Some women need a lot of care, work around their needs—it could be family, housing, this or that. You should come to the graduation, hear what they say: What it was, what has been, what they think. We feel the change is significant. But that’s the extra work [emphasis added].”

One of Gen-Y’s recent Annual Reports stated:

“We make a difference in the day-to-day lives of women and girls at turning points in their lives. They come to us for critical information, shelter, support and advice when they have nowhere else to turn. . . . We draw on the knowledge, experience and ingenuity of women and speak out when a public policy needs changing or a regulation has a negative impact, or when the progress of achieving true equality for women and girls is stalled on the wrong track or no longer a priority in public life.” [emphasis added]

While the agency draws on knowledge and experience of women, which presumably includes their knowledge and experience of the systemic nature of gender and racial barriers, the evaluation frameworks do not reflect this approach. Then, when the organization advocates changes to social structures and conditions through public policy, the program evaluations that program administrators complete are not particularly useful in substantiating or determining any particular course of action at a systemic level.

The qualitative outcomes described by the program workers and administrators are not easily captured by the statistics collected for funding agencies. The measurements never sufficiently capture the “extra work” or the ongoing negotiations and struggles that result in young clients who start to “feel much better about themselves.” In the first quote in this section, the counsellor alluded to the unpredictable nature of her work with young women when she said, “You never know when they’re going to come and what their issue is going to
be.” What the worker does to deal with her clients’ pressing needs and multiple concerns never fully translates into the program evaluation criteria requested by funding bodies. At best, the evaluation framework, processes and practices attached to funding account only superficially for the programs’ specialized nature and the counsellors’ expertise and knowledge of how they work with clients to “lead them to the water”; at worst, the evaluations draw the program workers’ attention elsewhere (like toward legitimizing their own work) which prevents them from doing what they do best: make a difference.

That the funding criteria and program evaluations have taken the form that they have is not particularly surprising. Dominelli (1999) has written about how professional care work under neo-liberal globalization has undergone “Taylorization” and social workers have been turned into technicians who have to account for their work in social services under evaluation schemes derived from market models. Smith (1990a) argued that in these types of institutional arrangements, a disjuncture (between what gets accounted for and what actually gets done) occurs because institutional hierarchies are organized such that people who create policies that, for example, define legitimate program evaluation criteria, are positioned peripherally where “ideological organization insulates governing schemata from encounter with the givens of local historical experience” (p. 96), whereas, front-line workers directly experience how program evaluation policies play out in the context of “local historic experience.”

Theoretically, there is nothing to prevent agencies from defining evaluative “units of service” to better reflect what actually happens in the programs or to reconfigure them to measure racial aspects of work processes and decisions. The new measurement would need to attend to what it really takes to encourage discouraged youth in the context of systemic
race- and gender-based realities. Specifically, programs would provide enough resources, time and space for counsellors to teach coping strategies for working in racially and gender stratified labour markets, while at the same time strategizing long-term steps to eliminate these stratifications altogether. In this way, programs could truly incorporate the actualities of counsellors’ work in the context of racial and gender-based realities.

Evaluation frameworks and mechanisms that are not sensitive to gender- and race-based realities run the risk of perpetuating existing gender and racial inequalities, because counsellors, faced with pressure to work efficiently with high-needs clients, offered well-trodden career advice and strategies that maintained the gender and racial status quo.

Encouraging disadvantaged young racial minority women to go to community college is better than steering them away from post-secondary education altogether. But the likelihood of their success may not be particularly high, given historical patterns of inequality in the labour market and the burden of their caregiving responsibilities.

In some ways, the Gen-Y young women seemed attuned to the fact that the program workers’ actions primarily articulated organizational concerns. Some of the young women noted how their counsellors were helpful in some ways but not in others, and not always.

Here is what Elizabeth said about program staff:

“Well, they have counsellors who work with you one-on-one. Personally, I haven’t met a counsellor or whatever yet. I’m still doing my own thing. [For] certain things, I need somebody’s help. I might need somebody to write me a letter. I can go to them, and they can write me a letter of reference or whatever.”

Channel spoke perceptively about how counsellors might be dealing with their own issues:

“The counsellors, they just—I dunno what they do. They just find out about our business and it just stays up in the air, they open sentimental doors and they don’t close them properly, and I don’t know what they’re doing. Maybe it’s because they’re going through some transition from like scheduling or something [emphasis added].”
In fact, Channel’s program had recently gone through major changes. Due to funding difficulties, managers decided to relocate the program. The staff experienced modifications in their job descriptions as a result of new space-sharing arrangements. From the perspective of the young women, some of the ways the workers articulated and reinforced organizational mandates and priorities were more visible as workers took on a kind of gate-keeping role, where they made sure that the programs run smoothly and successfully, and that house rules were followed. What remained less visible were the ways race and gender relations interacted and coordinated the courses of action and activities that led the youth workers to address individual racism without understanding its connection and particular manifestation in relation to funding criteria and evaluation of Gen-Y programs.

**Dreaming about a Different Kind of Program for Women**

Young women’s career decisions to pursue female-dominated occupations can also be traced to institutional policies and practices, which are organized by relations of gender and race. This social organization provides a structure for the types of programs available to young women. Recall how Chantal and some of the young Black women were making decisions based on their family work patterns and histories in nursing. This analysis does not aim to question the women’s motives for pursuing nursing. Instead, I suggest that their decisions are being informed by their understanding, based on familial experiences, that nursing is a decent, respectable career option for racial minority women, notwithstanding documented racism in the nursing profession (Calliste, 1993). A similar analysis is offered by Mirza (1992), who found that the young Black women in Britain she interviewed were choosing caring professions like social work, teaching and nursing as strategic careers because these
pragmatic and rational choices allowed for occupational mobility via the route of formal education within the confines of racially and sexually stratified labour markets (p. 122).

Based on my observations, I would suggest, along with Mirza, that the extent to which racial minority young women reproduce historical patterns of labour market inequities hinges upon their exposure to a wide range of occupations and career advice. Herein lies the possibility for intervention via career planning programs that broaden young women’s options.

However, what I noticed at Gen-Y was that career exploration programs targeted older or mature women making career changes. At one site, career exploration programs were located just upstairs from the young mothers’ program, but a youth worker commented:

“I think it really is because of the age issue that we haven’t had more meshing of the programs, because our girls would benefit from the employment programs, but we’re like two separate identities. If we have a teen mother who has an employment question, it’s kind of intimidating for them with the counsellors being so much older than them; it’s hard [for them] to relate to [the older staff].”

Programs meant to broaden young women’s career options did not appear attractive for the young women clients, who found older employment counsellors who might have appeared “intimidating.” In fact, one of the employment counsellors told me that staff members see themselves as working role models for their clients in that they dress, talk and behave in a manner appropriate for business. This approach, not to mention the office décor, created a program space that had a more grown up feel than the young mothers’ program space. In addition, the women’s career change program in question was actually open only to women over the age of 18, the assumption being that younger women had access to school counsellors or youth programs. Consequently, younger women could not or would not enter the space to engage in career exploration activities or discussions.
When the programs were structured around age, which is a funding issue because certain types of programs are funded for different groups of women, the ruling and coordinating function of race as a social relation that contributes to young women making gender- and race-based career decisions becomes obscured. Using an age-based program structure that supports age-specific distinctions like entry into the workforce for the younger women and re-entry and career change for mature women, leaves out questions about how it is that racial and gender patterns of occupational segregation continue to exist. Age trumps gender and race in the youth employment program structure; age takes centre stage; gender and race remain in the wings, offstage.

Then again, at least the funding does exist. Gen-Y often struggles to find support for women-only programs for women of any age. One strategy the organization used a few years ago to access program funding was to open some of their employment services to men, even though their mission and priority was to improve the lives of women and girls. This is the way one of the managers rationalized their decision:

“To serve women in that community, we are going to also serve the men; that is the choice we made. But in some programs, we want women only.”

From the above, I noted how funding agencies in their program assessment and evaluation practices do not recognize the expert and specialized knowledge of Gen-Y to help women provide for themselves. One manager suspects that Gen-Y’s expertise in delivering women’s programs is overlooked in funding decisions that favour cost efficiencies:

“Sometimes [the call for proposals] is not women-only. We put in women-only and see what the decision is, we let [the funder] decide. No one ever tells us, ‘We’re not funding you because you’re women-only.’ Sometimes we don’t get it because we don’t know what the competition is putting forward. When I call to follow up—try to see what was weak in our proposal, what we can do better—which I do for each one, it never is because we are serving women only, but it could be because of costs.”
Gen-Y has had to seek alternative sources of funding. For instance, one of Gen-Y’s women-only employment training programs which had previously received federal funding was reinvented and currently operates as a social enterprise that is income generating and supplemented with multiple funding sources, some of which are private foundations.

According to the Gen-Y manager, securing funding is an ongoing concern, even though Gen-Y, as a larger agency, has more options for prioritizing and juggling programs and space than smaller agencies. The agency strives for a holistic approach to service delivery. Its Annual Report in 2004 stated:

“When women and girls come to us, their lives fractured by violence, poverty, homelessness, or unemployment, we address the whole picture; who they are, what they face, and who they want to be.”

But it is clear that funding places constraints on the kinds of programs that can be provided. At least one manager dreams about a different kind of service delivery model than what is currently supported:

“It would be wonderful to have a women’s centre. It’s my dream to have a women’s centre. Women can come to research, to get counselling, to participate in groups, look for a job. It would be just wonderful. It would be for all women, not just women in crisis—all women.”

The innovation here would come from creating a space where different groups of women can relate their experiences to each other in different ways. It would be a place that does not problematically construct them as unemployed, homeless, at risk, dependent, older or younger women. This space could be ruled by fun or play, or something else altogether.

**Funding Agencies Demand Diversity**

In this section, I will describe examples of how Gen-Y responds institutionally to issues of diversity and representation that are related to funding processes, which produces the
problem of racial difference as a problem of access and representation to programs and services. Often, funding agencies like the United Way, require as a condition of funding, the adoption of anti-discrimination policy and address barriers related to access to programs. Under the criterion of accessibility, the United Way of Greater Toronto membership information package (2007, p. 7) states:

“Agency uses its multicultural/anti-racism policy to systematically address barriers to participation.”

One of the points under this standard reads:

“Agency works to broaden access to diverse groups in its community, including racial and cultural groups, men and women, people with disabilities, people with different sexual orientations and people in varying economic circumstances.”

It should be noted that the United Way is revered as one of few funding agencies that provide “core” funding for agencies’ base operations, in addition to program-specific funds.

In response, Gen-Y has incorporated a range of access and equity goals into their program reports. Here are some goals gleaned from the 2004 program reports: For the youth employment program, the goal was to increase contacts to ethnic media for outreach purposes; for the shelter program, find renovation solutions to accommodate women with disabilities; for the young mothers’ program, outreach to Aboriginal and Asian young mothers. Aside from the fact that there was no reason given for the proposed outreach to Aboriginal and Asian groups specifically, this last goal was most peculiar, since almost three quarters of the young mothers served in 2004 by the program were already identified as members of visible minority communities. In the case of this young mothers’ program, the problem is not one of access for racial minority young mothers; the problem is indicated by their overrepresentation in the program. The institutional uptake of the funding guidelines for equity and access has occurred in a way that is actually counterproductive in examining
the actual manifestation of racism that in this case has little to do with access to programs because the clients are already diverse.

Staff in the fundraising department of Gen-Y also expressed concern over displaying ethnic and cultural diversity in their promotional materials targeted at individual donors. One fundraiser explained:

“T’ve worked in organizations where you always want to maintain a diverse image when you’re putting out materials, but it’s much more relevant here because our constituency is really diverse and if we’re not making sure the images we’re using and language we’re using are culturally diverse, you’re not speaking to all of our constituents [donors]. They will just leave and never give us money again.”

According to annual reports, Gen-Y’s fundraising contributed an average of 20% of total revenue between 2003 and 2005. It is difficult to predict whether fundraising will become more or less significant as funding sources and priorities shift around equity and women’s programs; however, what is clear is that diversity was raised as a concern throughout the organization and was tied in intricate ways to funding practices. In some instances, the practice of increasing diversity in programs to address the problem as one of access or representation succeeds only in focusing our energies away from asking critical questions about the meaning of the existing ethno-racial composition of program participants.

Conclusion

This chapter analyzed how particular responses to issues of race and culture in relation to young women’s career decisions were directly tied to institutional processes and practices at Gen-Y. Reviewing interview data, I demonstrated that the Gen-Y young women were making choices that were supposed to lead them to labour market success. They were choosing post-secondary education; they were choosing stable, professional careers. As they
were making decisions, young women’s career paths were impacted by a structure of choice that functioned in a two-way dynamic. Despite making the “right” kinds of choices, the young women’s future plans and outlooks involved some aspect of chance; some were taking a kind of “let-things-slide” approach. To say that these young women’s choices are affected by chance also refers to chances that are shaped by their being racial minorities from immigrant or lone mother headed families situated within a socially inequitable society. This dual choice dynamic is further impacted by the types and support levels of youth programs available and the extent to which they facilitate or hinder young women’s access to options beyond those provided by their personal and familial histories.

In Gen-Y programs, I discovered how program workers were limited in the breadth and depth of equity work they could reasonably accomplish while helping large numbers of young women with multiple, diverse and complex needs with their career decisions. In addition, funding arrangements and evaluation practices neither accounted for the nuanced and textured subtleties of youth workers’ counselling and rapport-building approaches, nor did they facilitate the development of holistic and proactive women’s programming. Both professional and institutional obligations pressured program workers and administrators to make compromises that allowed them to perform their work in a way that met both organizational mandates and clients’ needs. As a result of funding pressures, program workers resorted to strategies of working with young women that confirmed, rather than challenged, choice structures aligned with racial gender hierarchies. By enacting policies in such a way that perpetuated dominant understandings of racial difference as a problem of individual acts of discrimination and representative diversity, youth workers and administrators reproduced, albeit inadvertently, existing racial and gender inequities.
In making the observations and analysis that I have of the linkages between choice, funding, professional and institutional practices on one hand and understandings of racial differences on the other, I am not suggesting that organizations ignore issues of diversity, equity and access to programs and services, or that workers be chastised for not taking more systemic approaches to dealing with racism and sexism. In fact, I would argue that these kinds of organizational responses are necessary attempts to right the wrongs of well-documented historical problems of access to services faced by many marginalized populations. What I draw attention to is how program workers and administrators enact particular understandings of racial differences as a problem of individual acts of discrimination and diverse representation at the behest of funding and organizational policies and practices (Smith, 1990). The specific processes of racialization that are deeply embedded in the everyday organizational practices of professional youth workers, young women making choices, and funding criteria, program evaluation and reporting procedures never fully materialize unless they are explicated. Current responses to the problem of racial differences and outcomes comes at the expense of recognizing how racialization happens; that is, the way that race functions as a ruling social relation that organizes and coordinates various actors and responses to racial differences across institutional sites. Because these everyday institutional processes and practices remain unavailable for scrutiny, it is difficult to fully assess how ruling occurs at local sites such as Gen-Y, and through local sites with their connection to extra-local sites in the youth employment programs complex.
CHAPTER 8: LEARNING FROM YOUNG WOMEN'S WORKING LIVES

The Story of Young Women Provisioning

This institutional ethnography fills in the details of the story of “at risk” young women outlined in the introduction of this thesis. The story of Gen-Y young women’s provisioning goes something like this. Gen-Y young women perform a large amount and variety of work to provide for themselves and their families. They provision as mothers, daughters, students, workers, clients and volunteers. Their provisioning activities are often performed in and between the spaces of home, the workplace, school and community settings. However, not everything they do is considered productive in a traditional sense, even though waiting for housing, using social services or being dependent on social assistance may be the best way for these young women to meet their responsibilities for dependants, and to balance immediate and future needs. Ultimately, young women want to be able to live comfortably, care for their loved ones and work in decent jobs that are fulfilling.

Occasionally, young women need help from youth or social programs, but in order to access services, they need to identify as being “at risk.” Youth workers want to help “at risk” young women, whom they see as being inexperienced in dealing with serious issues, but who are nevertheless motivated. However, funding often directs the character of the helping project and limits what youth workers can reasonably do. For example, the existing programs are under-funded and, as a result, program workers rely on volunteers and community partnerships to develop programs or program content that does not necessarily address the clients’ actual needs. This gap also occurs because funding often fails to incorporate a holistic program framework desired by the agency (program-based versus core operational funding) and because program evaluation frameworks fail to adequately capture
the essence of youth workers’ work with young women. Youth workers end up encouraging young women clients to take risks and make choices that might seem reasonable in the short term but may put them at risk for economic insecurity in the future. Incidentally, Gen-Y young women often agree to delay longer term educational and career goals. Program workers and administrators inadvertently reinforce existing class-based racial and gender inequalities in their attempts to balance institutional and professional obligations and pressure and do the best they can to help young women while being subject to restrictive funding arrangements.

Gen-Y young women are apparently making the right kinds of educational and career choices. However, notwithstanding their optimism and tenacity, their future social and economic well-being is far from guaranteed. Their positive outcomes seem even more uncertain, given that programs and policies fail to anticipate how ruling operates through local articulations of social relations of gender and race in the work of young women’s decision-making and youth workers’ and administrators’ professional efforts.

Policy Contexts Shape Young Women’s Provisioning

Offer Choices by Limiting Choices: Gender Impacts

Beyond describing young women’s provisioning experiences, this IE study aims to explain how young women find themselves in particular situations where they make the decisions that they do to provide for themselves and their families. To achieve this understanding, and in keeping with the IE framework, the analysis in Chapters 6 and 7 began to document how broader social relations produce institutional arrangements of policies and programs at Gen-Y through which young women’s experiences arise. Those chapters concluded that the youth
employment program complex organizes young women’s career options through two powerful mechanisms: locally based funding arrangements and program evaluation practices. These institutional processes are embedded in social relations of gender and race that coordinate young women’s decisions about work, school and caregiving with program workers’ and administrators’ efforts to meet their professional obligations and organizational mandates. While Gen-Y programs were developed to help young women, the funding pressures shape the organizational context in such a way that program workers’ and administrators’ applications of anti-discrimination and diversity, access and equity initiatives inadvertently reproduce the social inequalities they are meant to eliminate. This discussion further elaborates upon those conclusions by situating them within the current social policy context and projecting them against future policy trends. While it is impossible to provide a comprehensive review of all the policies shaping the youth employment programs complex that impact young women, I offer this selective survey of the policy landscape, guided by young women’s provisioning experience to critique policy models that feature choice and risk.

The notion of choice has been lauded in policy debates where market-based orientations and delivery mechanisms prevail in the social services. The choices one has nowadays around work and education are actually quite plentiful. Apparently it is now possible to obtain even graduate degrees, through institutions specialized in post-secondary online education like Athabasca University based in Western Canada. From the literature review, it was mentioned that youth researchers have been thinking about how youth identities have been created as do-it-yourself projects or biographies of choice for some time (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). It seems that there are choices for everything from the most
obscure life details to the most substantive aspects of lifestyles, livelihoods and identities. Then again, choice has also signalled radical possibilities in its association with women’s movements. This and other social justice movements see the availability of choices as a means of achieving, for example, reproductive rights and freedoms or economic independence. Recognizing the politics of choice, critical thinkers rebuke the notion of choice as unproblematic. Instead, they ask how the choices we have are actually limited or expansive. Gen-Y young women’s provisioning experiences exemplify the specifics of such a critique. The choices they have been given are not necessarily the ones they want to make.

Most often, programs based on youth transitions frame the choices for young people as choices they make around school, training or job search that will lead them to paid employment. Because almost all of the Gen-Y young women have to support themselves and their families, the choice not to work is not really a choice at all for them. The main challenge for young, marginalized women is not their ability to make unproblematic choices that eventually lead to successful school to work transitions. Instead, their struggles arise from the contradiction they face between being good mothers/daughters who fulfill their caring responsibilities or good future workers who supposedly have no such responsibilities. For young women with dependants and family responsibilities, the choice is not so much whether to work or not to work; rather, it is the choice to care or not to care for their families.

The current dominant and idealized “adult worker citizen” model adequately supports neither the choice to care nor both sides of the breadwinner/caregiver dichotomy. In Chapter 2, the literature pointed to the gendered nature of the model as well as its “workism” focus and “universal breadwinner” (Fraser, 1997) assumption. Based on existing labour policies, and lack thereof, the adult worker model has yet to be optimally implemented for young
women workers. Because young men and young women workers tend to be positioned in low-end service jobs (Tannock, 2002) and non-standard work that rarely come with benefits (Vosko, Zukewich, & Cranford, 2003), they are adversely impacted by labour policies that tie wages and access to benefits only to “good” jobs. The current proposal in Ontario to increase the minimum wage to $10 per hour certainly helps to make work pay enough to make a living; however, the accompanying political silence on employment and pay equity issues can potentially undermine benefits gained through across-the-board wage increases. Under these policy arrangements, young women can act like good, responsible adult worker citizens but still never achieve universal breadwinner status, because in reality they earn too little to support themselves and their families.

Addressing the caregiving side of the breadwinner/caregiver dichotomy, the current Conservative federal government provided choice through its Universal Child Care Benefit, a direct monthly payment for parents to purchase their own child care. Notwithstanding the policy’s shortcomings with regard to its failure to achieve an equitable distribution of net benefits across income and family types (Battle et al. 2006), it is unclear how this choice-based allowance increases young women’s options if affordable, accessible, quality child care spaces remain at a premium. At best, the benefit provides the family with some pocket money, but as a strategy, giving choices for child care fails to alleviate the responsibilities young women have as both caregiver and breadwinner, since the benefit addresses only minimally the caregiver side of the caregiver/worker dichotomy. That providing care is the responsibility of young women in the first place reveals gender as the social relation that organizes an established sexual division of labour. None of the young women interviewed suggested that the care work they do could be shared with the baby’s father or brothers, at
least not in a substantial way, whereas some did acknowledge the help they occasionally got from mothers or sisters.

If young women are going to be able to adequately provision for themselves and their families, the entire array of labour and education policies, including employment standards, equal opportunity (employment equity, hiring and recruitment), pay equity, training/employment (wage subsidies, skills development), education (student loans, grants, subsidies to post-secondary education institutions, foreign-trained professional accreditation), and work/life balance policies (child care, maternity leaves, compassionate care policies, etc.) (Human Resources Development Canada, 2002) must be reconfigured to effectively dismantle the breadwinner/caregiver dichotomy. As it stands now, young women are expected to assume both caregiver and breadwinner roles, but the current mix and confluence of labour, education and social assistance policies makes it impossible for them to do so. However, the current mix does protect certain groups of privileged young men and women; for example, those who do not rely on student loans or who can pay market rates for child care or whose families are well situated along class lines to give them access to social networks and opportunities.

In terms of education, all of the Gen-Y young women recognized that education is the key to better jobs and secure futures. However, with the exception of student loans, there are very few resources for young women on low incomes to draw on to meet rising tuition and living costs. As Keesha explained, carrying a heavy debt load that could compromise her future ability to provide for her child is one additional responsibility she would rather not have. Instead, she, Samantha and others opt to work until they save enough money to return to school in a few years. On the surface, this approach is reasonable; however, in the context

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of the present labour market, characterized by low-end youth jobs and stratified by gender and race, this short-term strategy may lead to long-term poverty, because working in the short term restricts a young woman’s ability to pursue higher education and thus secure gainful employment in the long term. Pursuing the long-term strategy of higher education would require her to be dependent on social assistance or student loans. Whether they work or go to school, neither strategy results in independence for these women, even though both choices are prescribed by a school-to-work transition framework that shores up the adult worker citizen model. These struggles demonstrate that the only plausible route to independence for young women who have dependants is dependency, whether on state provisions or private resources. The young women’s struggles suggest that they need a range of supports that enable them to adequately provide for their families while they study and will not burden them with huge debt afterwards.16

The choice of applying for social assistance is not one that young women necessarily take, but those who do may find that the system exacerbates as well as alleviates the tensions arising from their breadwinner/caregiver conflict. Social assistance benefit rates are known to be set below poverty levels in Canada (National Council of Welfare, Spring 2005). So while social assistance gives young women a minimal level of income for caregiving and schooling, many young women still turn to family members for help with child minding or extras for their children. Strictly speaking, current policy in Ontario penalizes social assistance recipients for being resourceful and seeking help by stipulating that “gifts” be declared as income, the value of which is deducted from benefits (Government of Ontario, September 2001, p. 29). Elsewhere, Neysmith, Bezanson & O’Connell (2005) documented how relying on private resources from family and friends to make up for inadequate state
provisions resulted in precarious situations and strained relationships for the people involved. In the interviews, a few young women expressed concern that their own or their mother’s unforeseen health problems could prevent them from achieving secure and comfortable futures. Perhaps what is most problematic about policy arrangements that compel young women to rely on private sources, while at same time punishing them for doing so, is that the real cost of raising families is hidden because women of all ages take up the extra workload.

At present, social policies and programs impact young women’s provisioning by framing their choices as one over another. Subsequently, measures of program and policy effectiveness tend to ask young women about their choices: Why did they choose care work over paid employment, pink-collar jobs over skilled trades, nursing over doctoring, college over university? This analysis recommends extending this line of inquiry to ascertain not only why young women choose what they do, but also how is it that they choose what they do. How are their choices related to their immediate families and circles of influence, which are structured by the realities of gender, race and class, and how did the confluence of policies and gender assumptions that sustain their particular arrangement shape those choices? We learn from young women’s working lives and provisioning experiences that social policies primarily offer choices by limiting choices. As a result, young women are caught in a no-win situation: With inadequate resources and supports for caregiving, they cannot afford to engage in paid work, yet they cannot afford not to work either. The choices young women are left with are no choices at all.
Promoting Risky Choices

The case has been made that the notion of being “at risk” has a stronghold on framing youth problems. Similar to choice, the generalized concept of risk, which is related to but distinct from the idea of being “at risk,” brings to mind a range of connotations. Depending on the historic and social context, risk and risk-taking behaviours have not been and are not always negatively evaluated (Bessant, Hil & Watts, 2003). Applying the concept of risk to the society as a whole, “risk society” (Beck, 1992) is characterized by hazards, anxieties and uncertainties for families, markets and states, and is associated with disruption of taken-for-granted traditions and the established social order. In risk society, people and groups seen in any way as non-conforming, deviant or a threat to social ideals, norms, harmony or stability become visible targets for reform. Whereas neo-liberal enthusiasts aim to reform “at risk” youth, those who see people’s vulnerability to risk as a result of exclusionary impacts of social policies are more apt to question whether corrective strategies should aim at “high-risk populations or risky public policy” that divide young people along the lines of deserving and non-deserving citizens (Bessant et al., 2003; Neysmith, Reitsma-Street, Baker-Collins, Porter et al., 2007).

From the analysis of young women and youth workers at Gen-Y, being an “at risk” youth was indeed not a given but rather a category produced through institutionally based practices and processes. The young women were actually already deemed “at risk” before they entered the programs; nonetheless, aspects of their “at risk” status became redefined in the context of the program to fit a case profile of an “at risk” youth who could be legitimately served according to organizational and professional mandates. Funding arrangements shaped organizational and program mandates and content such that youth workers performed their
work; for example, by reinforcing gendered career paths or developing program features that focused on productive, marketable skills. The program workers and administrators, through their enactment of the dominant discourses of race and gender as categories of differences, and racism and sexism as barriers, can effectively circumvent an understanding of the coordinating and organizing ruling functions of gender and race as social relations that inadvertently undermined the equity goals of policies. In the end, young women were persuaded to make risky choices that potentially reinforced their marginalized status under present social, economic and political conditions where gender and racial equality had yet to be achieved.

In this discussion, I will outline three policy areas—diversity, state funding of community organizations and programs, and youth “citizen in action”—which are likely to have some impact on the dynamics promoting young women’s risky choices. First, it was demonstrated from the interviews that youth workers were fairly concerned with issues of diversity, access and equity. At the level of the state, Canadian governments’ outline their commitment to diversity through multiculturalism, employment equity and human rights policy, and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. While these policies together articulate shared values around diversity and promote public awareness of diversity issues, the critique often launched against them is that they are too grand, and without proper reinforcements, they rely on the Pollyannaish hope that people will do the right things to eliminate racism and/or sexism. Mine and other IE studies of policy practices advance this general critique by arguing that policy discourses, practices and everyday experiences are institutional factors that need to be considered when advancing the goals of diversity and equity. It is not simply enough to have equity policies in place; it is necessary to investigate how policies translate in
everyday practices and how power permeates and manifests through these practices in the context of social institutions (Chan, 2005).

Secondly, state funding of community-based organizations and programs is another area of policy that impacts program workers intending to do innovative equity work with young women. The general concern about the nature of changes to funding relationships has been raised by various multi-stakeholder groups. For example, the Voluntary Sector Initiative was developed in June 2000 with a mandate to enhance the relationship between the federal government and the voluntary sector. The Joint Service Canada/Voluntary Sector Working Group was an ad hoc group formed in 2005 to make recommendations on funding approaches, structures and administration of programs and agreements between Service Canada and their partner organizations (Service Canada/ Voluntary Sector Working Group, November 18, 2005).

Around this time, community organizations, particularly smaller agencies expressed concern over a confusing call for proposals process introduced by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada that seemed to favour for-profit agencies and those politically affiliated with department ministers. As a result, some community agencies lost their funding for job-skills and employment programs (CBC News, January 28, 2005) even though they had histories of successful program outcomes. Ironically, private-sector providers have no such record of success to speak of. As the Gen-Y manager mentioned in her interview, the impacts and effectiveness of social service delivery by for-profit agencies is as yet unknown. However, the noted shifts in funding suggest that partnership development in relation to program delivery remains an area for future investigation.
In addition to trends related to state funding of community organizations and programs, the absence of equity principles is expected to have some notable impacts on youth and women's programs. It was noted from the overview of youth employment programs in Chapter 4 that no specific commitments were made for gender equality in the negotiations or implementation of Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDA). More recently, the Conservative federal government announced a $5-million cut to the Status of Women Canada (SWC) administrative budget in September 2006 (CBC News, October 5, 2006). According to a news release on the eve of International Women's Day (March 7, 2007) from the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, a new funding mechanism for the SWC's women's program would be in effect by April 2007, but the SWC's original gender equality mandate remained absent as a program goal. Practically speaking, as advocates for social equality, we still need to support groups calling for the implementation of gender equality policies. However, as was the case for diversity initiatives, we should insist on investigating how equity policies actually work in practice.

The absence of gender and racial equity principles from funding frameworks has ramifications for program workers and administrators. This IE analysis of Gen-Y programs and policies suggests that the policy impacts on programs and services occur indirectly as a result of program workers' and administrators' work processes such that, for example, if there is little funding for women-only programs, administrators need to search harder and longer for appropriate funding options to launch innovative programs. Subsequently, program workers' and administrators' time and energy are diverted from working effectively with clients or crafting imaginative programs, to working through administrative tasks to search for funding and account for their own work and program progress in ways that are
legitimately recognized within gender- and race-neutral funding frameworks. In the explication of racial and gender social relations, I observed how it was not only their work tasks that shifted but, in the process, workers and administrators relied on ubiquitous, common sense gender and racial assumptions that referenced racial and gender differences as categories of difference rather than social relations. As a result of these complex institutionally based processes, the programs offered within the youth employment complex at the Gen-Y site have but a slim chance of being truly progressive and innovative in terms of promoting gender or racial equality. That the administrators are able to maintain an optimistic outlook about the future of women’s programs under these rather bleak funding trends is a testament to the strength and dedication of the individuals who work at Gen-Y.

The third area of policy that I suggest has implications for young women’s choices derives from a youth-based “citizen in action” model that emphasizes citizenship responsibilities and aims to empower young people to contribute to their communities (Hall & Coffey, 2007). I predict that in this context of responsible citizenship, issues and policies around youth voluntarism will gain popularity either in relation to education policy and/or youth employment programs. Also from education, zero-tolerance policies like the Ontario Safe Schools Act (2000), were meant to regulate problem behaviours in students by taking a zero-tolerance approach to discipline in schools. There is already evidence that suggests that taking a hardline, criminal justice approach results in racial exclusion and discrimination rather than empowerment (Bhattacharjee, July 8, 2003). Recently, in February 2006, the Province of Ontario launched a youth challenge fund meant to support local community initiatives and create opportunities for young people. Each of these components of the “citizen in action” model begs further study as a site of racializing. The appropriate approach,
based on this IE analysis of the youth employment programs complex at Gen-Y from the perspective of young women's provisioning experiences, would involve investigating actual policy practices and young people's experience of the policies in local settings.

Learning from young women's working lives reveals how racialization happens. The analysis suggests that it is insufficient to study any particular policy as a harbinger of racial and gender inequality. The analysis suggests that individuals are impacted by the cumulative effects of social policy as organized and organizing social ruling relations manifest through work processes and practices of policy and program implementation. How policies are actually implemented is by no means determined. Instead, policy practices are negotiated at local levels at specific sites and enacted by the various actors. Equity policies and youth employment programs may have been well intended, but in practice they failed to live up to their liberating potential.

*The Dynamics of Choice and Risk*

**Gen-Y Young Women's Standpoint**

In the early stages of my research, when I explained Gen-Y young women's provisioning experiences of juggling multiple tasks and roles to friends and academic acquaintances, they responded, "Is that not the case for everyone?" They wanted to know what was special about Gen-Y young women. At a conference, I was asked whether I was going to compare Gen-Y young women to other groups of high-, medium- and low-risk youth. At a dissertation committee meeting, one of the committee members reminded me that I would have to make a case for what was gained by examining Gen-Y young women's perspectives as opposed to those of other youth groups. In this section, I address these queries by reviewing the
epistemological basis of the standpoint from an IE perspective and by clarifying what the
Gen-Y young women’s standpoint actually illuminated.

Recall that Smith (1987) initially conceptualized standpoint neither as an epistemic
privileged stance nor as a given and finalized form of knowledge. She later clarified that
standpoint is the “ground in experience from which discoveries are to be made” (Smith, 2005,
p. 8). Smith used standpoint to establish a subject position for IE as a method of inquiry, not
as a category of position. Standpoint creates a point of entry into discovering the social
world in a way that does not subordinate the knowing subject to objectified forms of
knowledge. In this way I was not examining what young women knew or experienced in
comparison to others, or in relation to a normative or dominant set of experiences. As I
noted in the methodology, this study was not about young women per se, although it
proceeded from their experiences. The analysis mapped out the social relations that
organized and coordinated their activities without their explicit awareness but with their
active involvement.

The Gen-Y young women’s standpoint led to the mapping of social relations in a
setting of the youth employment programs complex. Their experiences pointed to how
community programs and organizations operated as an “engine of inequality.” Griffith &
Smith coined the notion “engine of inequality” based on their research on mothering to
describe how differences in the unpaid time that women had available for their mothering
work contributed directly or indirectly to the functioning of public schools as an engine of
inequality (p. 9). In a similar way, Gen-Y and its programs function as an engine of
inequality. The point is made not to lay blame, because in many ways Gen-Y is an
exceptional women’s organization with a complement of knowledgeable and dedicated staff
who do what they are supposed to in order to service young women and make a difference in their lives.

My analysis examined how the “engine of inequality” operationalized choice and risk through program and policy practices along racial and gender lines. The Gen-Y young women’s standpoint provided a view of choice and risk as problematic concepts. Choice and risk might also serve as the problematic of IE investigations elsewhere (for example, André-Bechelé (2005) examined public school choices made by mothers). While my research aimed to explicate the social ruling relations at the Gen-Y site, the generalized and generalizing character of gender and racial relations revealed in the study connects it to other IE project sites. I acknowledge that this IE study revealed only one segment of the social world. To propose future IE projects is to amass more pertinent knowledge about the nature and operation of ruling through a wide range of mechanisms and processes of complex social institutions at specific local sites. This arsenal of knowledge should equip advocates for social equality to argue for innovative alternative strategies that counter inequitable practices.

From the analysis of young women’s decisions, I was able to trace the generalizing character of gender and race relations in a way that accounted for the gendered racialized social contexts of young women’s experiences. Recall that one of the critiques of youth employment studies conducted within the youth transitions framework was that they failed to account for the contexts in which young people worked. The difference between this IE study and more standard sociological approaches to studying young women is that instead of confirming “at risk” youth as a racial category of difference, I examined how being “at risk” was produced administratively and constructed ideologically, based on the young women’s experiences in community programs. When risk was conceived of as a concept grounded in
a complex of social relations and practices, it functioned as a divining rod that located a social organization of processes and practices in spaces where disadvantaged young women resided. More significantly, it indicated a site from which new and existing forms of racialization were created and reinforced.\textsuperscript{17}

\textbf{Provisioning as the Basis for Social Policy Development}

In the early stages of my research, when I told friends and academic acquaintances that my thesis was on young women’s provisioning, most asked what I meant by provisioning. In early WEDGE meetings (recall that my project is part of a larger study of provisioning, women and community), the research team members struggled to determine what kinds of tasks provisioning entailed. We worried that the definition of provisioning was too broad for it to have analytical value. We wanted a term that would capture both old and new forms of work and that was new and stimulating. After a while, I realized that in adopting provisioning as a new way to conceptualize work, the shift we wanted to address was not simply a semantic one. We were not just using “provisioning” as a synonym for “women’s work”; we were addressing a theoretical challenge that revealed itself as a problem of naming or a lack of word and language.\textsuperscript{18} We were not attempting to add to or expand on old theories of work; we were theoretically far more ambitious. Our conceptual task aimed at challenging the foundational value base upon which the concept of work was developed and upon which we come to understand something as work.

While my research aimed to understand young women’s provisioning, it has occurred to me that I also learned about provisioning from young women’s accounts of their working lives. Provisioning was used as a lens to view and make sense of the dynamics between
young women’s career choices and risky policies. The key element of provisioning that made these dynamics visible was its focus on relationships. This focus on the context of relationships was absent from previous conceptualizations of work, yet relationships featured centrally as the basis from which young women performed the tasks they did and made the choices they did in the way they made them. From the young women’s perspective, risky choices, regardless of whether they appeared rational or not, made sense in light of the resources and strength they drew from the relationships they had with loved ones and other community members. The provisioning young women performed in the context of relationships reflected their different social locations, particularly their class status, which mediated their access to resources. Recall that anti-racist feminist critiques of traditional models of work refer to their failure to account for experiences of different groups of women positioned along social dimensions. Provisioning, by virtue of its reliance on relationships, is a notion that gives primacy to social location for understanding how the intersection of race, gender and class matter.

Thus, what provisioning offers is not simply a change in definition of work; I mean it not as just a word, but rather a concept that signals a different basis from which we can develop social policy. Mine is by no means an original proposal. Others have found that when we investigate women’s actual lived experiences, we are likely to find alternatives to the way we generally do things in policy. For example, in the 1980s, feminist economist Marilyn Waring suggested that time and time-use data be considered in policy and program development, based on her observations of women’s rural, agriculturally based work lives and experiences in developing countries (Nash, 1995). My study and the WEDGE project support the work of others (Nelson, 1998; Neysmith, Reitsma-Street, Baker-Collins, & Porter, 215
2007; Power, 2004), which suggests that provisioning is a feasible notion to develop in social policies and programs aimed at equitable social and economic outcomes.

Re-visioning Choice and Risk: Potential and Challenge for People-Centred Social Policy

In this research, learning from young women’s working lives offered a critique of choice and risk. Now we know not only to ask what the choices are or who is at risk, but also how choices emerge in particular social settings, how policies force young women to make risky choices and how do programs produce risk as well as signal its production. I examined young women’s lives, but I also investigated the social setting; specifically, how policies and practices organize particular paths for Gen-Y young women.

Concretely, this analysis suggests policy criteria for creating equitable social conditions. Three specific directions present themselves in the current labour and social welfare policy context. First, facilitating young women’s provisioning without compromising their future requires labour policies that ensure young people’s access to good, secure, well-paying jobs. Policies that fail to protect contingent workers’ rights, improve working conditions or promote secure, equitable access to decently paid jobs create risky conditions for marginalized workers.

Secondly, ensuring that young women have a real range of options from which to choose to manage her provisioning activities requires both publicly supported caregiving initiatives, like a national day care program, and adequate but flexible forms of income support that enable young women to productively contribute to society as students, parents, elder caregivers, workers or any combination of these and other roles.
Finally, community-based programs need to be adequately funded to enable the program workers and administrators to develop and build on ways of working with young women clients to address their immediate needs in connection with advocacy on systemic issues. This also means revising program evaluation criteria to accurately formulate and measure broad, systemic indicators of social equality.

The implication of the analysis is to ground social policy development in the lives of actual people and their experiences of the social world. Yet, this is not the way we currently do social policy. What challenges do policy decision-makers face in implementing such a reasonable, intuitive proposal to build people-centred policy models? To ask what is stopping policy makers from designing effective policy models that address social inequalities is to ask what prevents us all from seeing the ways social relations connect our lives to the lives of others. From an IE perspective, we should ask what is it about institutional structures, processes and practices that prevent us from seeing how the stories we tell are connected and constructed, and why do we tell the stories that we do? I suggest three possibilities. First, as a society, many of us are invested in maintaining a discourse of liberal democracy (Henry & Tator, 2006), which suggests that as a society, we support equality and we believe equality will eventually come, so there is no sense in pushing against the natural timeline; such is the logic. Secondly, many of us are invested in the advantages and protections professional institutional processes and practices provide us. We take pride in defining ourselves as social workers, social scientists or advocates, and the social relations organizing these meaningful experiences and aspects of our social identities would also need to be held up for scrutiny. Finally, some of us may suffer from a lack of imagination or lack of vision as a result of having to negotiate, struggle and maintain on an ongoing basis our
place, professionally and personally, in the social world. These challenges are infused with power, and the stories we tell convey how we deal with and relate to power in its myriad forms. To know about power, then, is to investigate the stories we tell as social work professionals and researchers. We must ask how we are implicated in the production of power.

**Positioning Ourselves in Knowledge-Production Processes**

How might social scientists and researchers begin to query social work’s discipline-based conceptual practices and research strategies to determine their role in ruling? First, we might consider the social context in which we conduct our studies. Demographically, the large baby boomer cohort will determine many a social agenda in the proximate future. This will likely shift the research themes from young people to older folks, but it may also open doors for research on intergenerational projects and spaces. The trend toward globalization of work structures and arrangements may steer research toward nebulous global projects. The challenge in theorizing globalization from an IE perspective is to interrogate how local and global relations are constructed via the generalized and generalizing character of social relations that come into being in the activities of people in local settings. To articulate local/global connections while maintaining a politics of locality is a concern that originated from, and continues to preoccupy, transnational anti-racist feminist debates (Dua, Razack, & Warner, 2005). Other themes that will impact research agendas related to this project include the changing nature of work, voluntarism as a character of “good citizens,” and the changing role of non-governmental and social work professionals. This is not to say that these trends dictate our future research projects in any specific way, but we should be alert to the ways
that broader social trends influence the kinds of projects we propose and the ones that receive research grants and funding.

Secondly, to explicate ruling relations organizing knowledge production in social work, I suggest we draw theoretically upon provisioning and methodologically upon IE and the findings of this study. Such an inquiry would pose a research question that addresses how social work professionals provision for themselves and others as members of professional and community groups.¹⁹

Finally, to understand how the social world works, IE methodologically forces us to see ourselves in it. This implies that as social scientists, we should think about how we are implicated in gendered racializing processes. We should ask: What social relations do we, as social researchers, positioned inside and outside our disciplines, institutions and communities, produce and enter into by making social relations of gender and race visible in the everyday world? What does it mean for me, as a researcher, aspiring academic and Chinese Canadian woman from a working-class, immigrant family, to be participating in the explication of relations of race that are organizing my doctoral studies and the production of this dissertation in this particular historic moment?

Assuming that I have established an understanding of how Gen-Y young women are caught up in a set of social relations and how this type of analysis can provide the basis for change, I am still faced with the conundrum of how to enact alternative discourses within the context of the academy that produces and organizes a particular set of social relations. In fact, this particular presentation, in the form of a dissertation, and the actual everyday experience of my writing are embedded in and intelligible only in the context of an academic institutional complex which demands that I demonstrate proficiency in its conceptual
practices; that I speak in a certain way, use specific language and terms, demonstrate analytic skills, publish in peer-review journals, present at academic conference to peers from whom I need both validation and critique, and so forth. The young women, on the other hand, are embedded in a set of social relations with institutional conceptual practices in their everyday lives that take different forms than they do in the academy, even though social relations ultimately connect their practices and mine.²⁰

Returning to the question of how scholars and researchers can begin to query social work’s discipline-based conceptual practices and research strategies to determine their role in ruling, I offer the following: that we turn the spotlight on ourselves and interrogate our knowledge production processes for how they articulate marginalizing discourses and practices. Thus, to precisely understand our social world, warts and all, we start by asking, how do we know ourselves?
NOTES

Chapter 2
1 Writing about the internal logic and mechanism of capitalism from a macoeconomic perspective, scholars warn against the limits to economic growth in “casino” economies where stakeholders gamble for higher profits by moving capital into the speculative financial realm. To shift current consumption patterns in favour of long-term investments requires fictitious capital formation, which is credit money based on private debt. The problem is that the movement of capital does not result in substantial productive activity or creation of real wealth. In his book *The Limits of Capitalism: An Approach to Globalization without Neo-Liberalism*, economist Dierckxens (2000) predicts an impending global depression if investments continue to grow in the speculative sphere and market values become increasingly dissociated from real values and real wealth. From another perspective, environmentalist Milani (2000) anticipates the casino economy’s limit will be reached as result of critical environmental impacts. For Milani, capitalism’s dependence on debt, destruction of nature, exploitation of people and production of waste cannot be sustained in the long run.

2 Studies of youth cultures that focus on the construction of youth identities are also part of the literature on youth. However, this work is not comprehensively reviewed here because the research has issues of youth violence, consumerism and sexuality rather than work or employment as its central concern (Bucholtz, 2002; Harris, 2004; Raby, 2001). In addition, studies of young women’s identities tend to probe subjective states, attitudes and behaviours, and interpret these individual acts in relation to ideal constructions or discourses of femininity and masculinity (for example, Leadbeater & Way, 1996; Mazzarella & Pecora, 2000). However, I do point out later in this section a connection between youth identity issues, my interest in young women’s work and the social and economic processes that construct young women workers in the contemporary moment.

3 There have been some notable exceptions that studied young women’s work (Andres, 2002; Brah, 1996; Proctor & Padfield, 1998), but these studies either focused on concerns other than work—for example, identity was the focus in Brah (1996)—or their analyses were theoretically underdeveloped.

Chapter 3
4 IE views objectivity as a type of institutional ideology. It is a concept that the research or knowledge building enterprise uses, practices and defines in particular ways to express the work activities of researchers as accountable. Smith (1987, p. 162) said, “Institutional ideologies are acquired by members as methods of analyzing experiences located in the work process of the institution.” To interrogate the conceptual practices that produce this notion of objectivity, we might investigate the conditions under which objectivity can be claimed and how it functions, and what is its function in research contexts inside and outside the academy.

5 The WEDGE research was unique in two ways. First, it was different from previous research in its focus on provisioning as a concept, recognizing that women’s work occurs simultaneously in and across families, workplaces and community spheres. Secondly, the research was innovative in conceptualizing community as a space that serves as a source of both support and extended responsibility for women’s provisioning. WEDGE researchers argued that focusing on the community sphere advances and builds on previous analyses that tended to situate women’s work in either the family or the workplace.

6 Methodologically, the WEDGE project utilized a global ethnography approach or “extended case method” (Burawoy, 2000), which is distinct from IE. Smith (2005, p. 35) explains, “One key difference between the extended case method and IE comes in the former’s ontological shift as inquiry passes from micro to macro, from the ‘life world’ to ‘the system.’ While at the ‘micro’ level, the extended case method is ethnographic, using participant observation, at the macro, it is theory that is operative.” While global ethnography commits to concepts such as global dominance and resistance to understand processes operating at the system level, IE makes no such theoretical commitments. Instead, IE explores trans-local social relations ethnographically while global ethnography examines these system dimensions theoretically. The significant difference between the two methodologies relates to how each one views the connections across the various sites or “cases.” Further elaboration of the global ethnography is of little import for this IE study since WEDGE’s analysis of its six sites lies beyond the focus and scope of this dissertation.

7 WEDGE researchers used 10 site selection questions (see Appendix A). Each of the site researchers responded to the questions to document transparency and decision-making, and encourage reflexivity in terms of why we selected the sites that we did and the circumstances surrounding individual sites.

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In fact, the language of “sampling” is not used in IE as it is in other research methodologies because the study participants do not really make up a “sample” from which IE researchers generalize findings. However, I use the term here to relate to other methodologies, while recognizing that the process is not equivalent.

There is some discussion among IE researchers about whether using computer programs for qualitative data analysis runs counter to the logic of IE. The concern is that grouping data or coding it by theme can decontextualize or abstract it from its meaning in the everyday world. DeVault & McCoy (2001, p. 768) advised that computer programs could be used effectively if the coding procedures adhered closely to the interviewees’ “talk and institutional processes.” For the WEDGE project, the data from the Gen-Y site was coded using a common coding scheme the emerged from and was applied to all of the sites. Some of the codes described were useful for my analysis (particularly for Chapter 5), but they were also limited for the reasons outlined by DeVault and other IE researchers. I do not present the coding scheme here, because while the coding process stimulated my thinking and supported the analytic process, it was not integral to it.

Chapter 4

It is curious that sexuality (lesbian and gay, bisexual and transgendered youth) has not been associated with “at risk” youth in employment programs as often as other dimensions of social location. What does this mean? First, one could argue that this confirms the invisibility of gays/lesbians in hetero-normative workplace contexts. Secondly, one might be tempted to ask why and under what circumstances some aspects of risk get highlighted over others in the public discourse. (The production of “at risk” youth cases is the subject of Chapter 6.)

Chapter 5

The Gen-Y young women had relatively fewer relationships of responsibility compared to more mature women in the other WEDGE project sites who were connected to larger networks of friends, neighbours, ex-husbands and extended and step-families across wider geographical locations. This likely reflects a life course difference. It does not imply that the relationships young women have are qualitatively less important.

The Personal Needs Allowance (PNA) is provided to individuals living in Ontario provincial psychiatric facilities, long-term care facilities, shelters, hostels and other specific types of housing to meet their incidental costs other than those provided by the facility. These costs may include clothing, shoes, hair cuts, hygiene products, nutritional supplements and other items related to basic comfort and quality of life.

Chapter 6

Cassin & Griffith (1981) and Ng (1981) made similar arguments about how the researcher constructs the notions of ethnicity and immigrant, which they sought to interrogate in their research.

Chapter 7

Integration of immigrants into the labour market has been the subject of a large literature within which debates about immigrant entrepreneurs and ethnic economies resides. For a review of contemporary Canadian studies on immigrant entrepreneurs, see (Lo et al., 2000).

Chapter 8

Incidentally, feminist sociologists have recently noted how the use of feminist language and the success of women’s movements have been usurped to serve regressive, neo-liberal agendas. This has occurred in part because political conservatives have represented the youth tale of optimism, which links choice with success in the new economy, as a monolith of youth experience (see McRobbie, quoted in Harris, 2004, p. 44).

In their reports on subsidies for post-secondary education in Canada, the Educational Policy Institute has studied the differential impacts of “needs-based” versus “income-based” systems of grants in relation to definitions of dependence and independence (Usher, 2004a, 2004b). The specific policy recommendations from these and other reports should be assessed along with young women’s provisioning experiences.

In an early IE study, Cassin & Griffith (1981) launched a similar analysis of the concept of ethnicity. They argued that the definitional problem of ethnicity, analogous to the definitional problem of risk, could be resolved methodologically by locating the actual process of production of ethnic difference in the socially organized practices of individuals in the context of capitalistic social formations.

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After reflecting on discussion and attempts to revise awkward, long-winded definitions, I realized how the art of naming is a foundational task of conceptual work in the social sciences.

Some of this work is already under way, as members of the WEDGE project move toward documenting "collective" provisioning to examine the tasks and activities members of women's groups and organizations perform, which go beyond their professional roles (Reitsma-Street et al., 2006). I suspect we will discover, through women's collective provisioning experiences, how organizations have had to compromise their focus, mandates and commitments to access funding and stay in operation. This project on collective provisioning should suggest ways we can realign our professional practices with social equity goals and the vision of society we wish to achieve.

As I see it, one way of disrupting an institutional boundary that makes the everyday lives of the young women appear distinct and separate from my own might be to require that one or more of the young women sit on my dissertation committee. In which case, the thesis may or may not appear different in the end, but by virtue having research participants positioned as powerfully influential committee members, the process would at the very least poignantly reveal how the conceptual research practices in academic institutions are shaped by power relations. This proposal is analogous to applying IE to understanding the basis of participatory action research frameworks that aim to include participants in substantial ways.
Ten Site-selection Questions for WEDGE

Drafted and Revised, September 30, 2002

A. Background

1. Name of person completing the questions and date
2. Name of the site
3. How was the information gathered on the site (e.g. notes from a conversation? Website?)

B. Questions

1. What made you think of this site as a possibility?
2. What is your relationship with the site? (present, past, future)
3. Describe the site generally, and then specifically on each of the seven site criteria.
   3.1 Known boundaries
   3.2 Provisioning activities
   3.3 Innovations
   3.4 Group activities and collective learning for benefit of community
   3.5 Focus on women or interest in exploring gendered relations
   3.6 History and changes over time?
   3.7 Cultural context? Governance structure e.g. grassroots, NGO, coalition.
4. Why would the site join the WEDGE project? What activities, processes, benefits and risks do you think they may see if invited?
5. What steps would we take to invite the site into the WEDGE project?
6. What are the drawbacks to selecting this site?
7. What documents, previous research, archives and key informants do you know about that will help us understand the site, make connections and do a community history?
8. What resources (financial, staff, information, other) are needed to help negotiate a research agreement and complete the research at this site?
9. What questions do you have? Fears or hopes about this site?
10. Overall, how feasible is it to consider this site for the WEDGE project?
APPENDIX B

Descriptions of Young Women Study Participants

The individual, face-to-face interviews were conducted at Gen-Y locations between May 24 and June 30, 2005. All names have been changed to respect the confidentiality of the young women’s responses.

Alice was a 24-year-old White lone mother with a 15-month-old infant. At the time of the interview, Alice had just finished an employment program in office management skills. She was looking for an office job but was interested in child and youth work. She said that she wanted to go back to college to finish her child and youth worker diploma. Alice leaves her child with her mother, who operates a home-based day care. Alice volunteers with a children’s group and takes her child to community-based Early Years program. After the official interview questions ended, Alice commented that she had job restrictions, now that she has a child. Whereas before she might have considered other career options like flight attendant or police officer, the shift would now be a barrier.

Annie was a 16-year-old, high school student from a South Asian immigrant family. Annie talked a lot about school and going to university in the interview. She seemed to feel some pressure to do well and make her parents proud. She was slightly concerned about a falling mark in math. She saw her own procrastination as a barrier to a successful future. Annie recognized that although she depends on her parents and family now, when she goes to university she will have to depend more on herself and work really hard. Annie thought that she would make connections at university with students who share her cultural background through social clubs.

Channel was a 21-year-old, biracial young woman who was homeless and looking for work at the time of the interview. She appeared eager to be interviewed and was articulate and talkative during the session. Channel talked about taking care of her father, who is aging, her boyfriend, who has a disability, and her nephew by being their “emotional backbone” and checking that their diets were healthy and nutritious. For Channel, having good relationships was a priority in her life. Channel previously worked in food services and child care. She also attended university with a focus in social science, but it did not sound like she found the experience productive or engaging and it was not clear whether she actually finished her degree. At the time of the interview, Channel said that she wanted to start her own business as a law clerk or real estate agent. In the meantime, she was looking for clerical or volunteer work and going to adult day school for upgrading. Channel claimed that she was career-oriented in spite of her homeless situation. She also thought that women leaders are sometimes “stuck” because they have to be “masculine/manly/mannish” to be successful in the workforce.

Chantal was a 19-year-old, lone mother of Black heritage who lives on her own. When she was interviewed, Chantal was attending school full-time and working part-time conducting telephone surveys. She was separated from her baby’s father but seemed to expect they would get back together soon. She mentioned that it is hard to balance school with work and housework, but that she does what she does because she has to, for her son. She said that she
gets help from her mother, sister, grandmother and the baby’s father. Chantal decided not to take extra shifts at work because she would not have time to see her child. She wants to pursue nursing, and has family members who are nurses. In her interview there was evidence of a close mother-daughter relationship. Chantal mentioned different kinds of advice that her mother had given her. Chantal was very focused on her child and her role as a mother. She said that she was not into parties or anything like that; instead, she wanted to spend time with her son. Her main concern was making sure there was someone to watch him while she did her chores and made plans for further schooling.

**Elizabeth** was a 22-year-old woman and the oldest of four children in an immigrant family from the West Indies. During the interview, Elizabeth was quite talkative, and at times deeply reflective. While at the shelter, Elizabeth still felt responsible for her younger brothers, whom she took to the mall or to movies on weekends. Elizabeth expected to care for her parents as they age and when they need help. She was looking for work, but feeling discouraged by her job search. Elizabeth did not want to do telemarketing; she was looking for “honest” work. In the interview, she stressed the importance of education, and gave an example of how she rejected a high-paying job because it would interfere with her education. She talked about the difficulties of being on her own. She said she wanted to be a teacher or a flight attendant but was enrolled in college for a general arts diploma. When I asked her after the interview why she did not go straight to university, she said she did not feel confident enough to do that. She talked about her friends but also said she preferred to be alone sometimes.

**Eve** was an 18-year-old, Jamaican woman living in a shelter. She spoke proudly about her high school achievements, her high marks and her extra-curricular student activities and involvement. Eve talked about having too much time on her hands. She was waiting to hear about getting into subsidized housing, but in the meantime she was looking for a summer job and starting to volunteer in a seniors’ program to fill the time. She was also waiting for school to start (she will enter first year university). Her long-term career goal is paediatric medicine, but she was thinking of doing personal care support work in the meantime. Eve specified that she wanted a career not just a job (Michelle and Samantha also made this distinction). In the future, Eve hoped to be independent and able to support herself. Eve also spoke about the comforts of her Jamaican church community.

**Keesha** was a Black lone mother with a 2-year-old daughter. She was planning to get her high school diploma equivalency through writing the GED (General Education Development) test, after which she planned to study nursing. Keesha has family members who are nurses. In the meantime, she was working in food services, though she was job searching when interviewed. Keesha presented herself as a responsible person and mother who wants to live her life and do things “properly.” She made some comment in the interview about how social assistance was making young women lazy and that she would never apply for this type of assistance. In order to pay off her debts, she was living with her mother. She was doing volunteer work with her church, which she described as a nice place for her daughter to be. Keesha talked about wanting to provide singing and dancing and gymnastics lessons for her daughter. She hoped to make a decent, comfortable living because a minimum-wage job was not enough.
Kelly was a 22-year-old lone mother of Jamaican background. She has young children and was receiving social assistance. Kelly was a bit nervous at the interview (and this was my first interview). At times, Kelly got quite emotional talking about her experiences at Gen-Y. She seemed to have learned a lot about herself, and had set some career goals. Kelly wanted to get a customer service job in the short term and pursue social work with seniors in the long term, but first she would do some academic and literacy upgrading at a community-based agency. Kelly’s days centred on her children who attend two separate day cares. She said that she did not get help from friends or family. Kelly sounded isolated and restless at home by herself before participating in the Gen-Y program. She mentioned how hard it was to stay at home with no help, having to do everything by herself, and how she wanted to get out and be with people because she felt too “closed in.” Kelly also spoke about being young and wanting to see what was “out there.” She sounded a bit overwhelmed and slightly upset talking about her experiences. But she also was determined and was “trying to get back up there” and “make the best of things.” She also talked about young people in the news getting into trouble with violent behaviours, and worried about safety in the community her children would grow up in. She saw that the best way to help her children was to stay involved and keep them active.

Linda was a 21-year-old, lone mother. Her ethnic background is African Canadian. She was receiving social assistance and working part-time as a supermarket cashier at the time of the interview. Linda mentioned a few times she did not have much time with work and taking care of her daughter. She said that she rarely went out socially and did not have many friends. When she had time for herself she enjoyed watching daytime soap operas and listening to music. She remarked casually without much explanation that she moved twice in the last year and was living in a shelter where she lost her CD collection. She wished that she could get her music back or be able to purchase an iPod. Linda said that she takes her child with her everywhere except to work. Attending the young mother and parenting groups gave Linda a break from child care so she found it annoying that some of the young mothers in the group did not leave their child in the child care service while attending the group. In this way, Linda did not identify with other program participants; she called them “young” and said, “They have a lot to learn.” Linda wanted to find a job where she could make enough money to make ends meet. She mentioned that she would like to get a “piece of paper” (i.e. a certificate or diploma) which she thought might help her get a good job. Unlike some of the other young women interviewed, Linda was vague about how she planned to go back to college. Her mother and sister seemed to provide some support; her ex-partner though seemed to cause her grief when he comes around without paying her for room and board. Linda’s outlook seemed less optimistic than the others interviewed. Linda wore a hearing aid but health issues did not come up in the interview.

Melissa was a 24-year-old, Chinese Canadian and recent university graduate. She lived at home with her immigrant parents and two brothers. She was doing lots of health work for her aging father and diabetic brother on an ongoing basis. Melissa also worked long and odd hours in her family’s bakery. Melissa had a history of doing volunteer work in social services and said that she wanted to work with children and youth. She planned to apply to graduate studies. But, because she got a job as relief worker, she was not certain about going
back for a 2-year program. Melissa seemed to be trying to figure out how to build a career while also attending to her families needs. She commented that if she were to meet the expectations for young women to have an ambitious career, it would be “selfish” of her because could not just drop her family obligations. Melissa also seemed to talk about being a student in a nostalgic way. While she was at school, she had to do homework, and so there was “less pressure” to do family chores. But, once she graduated, she was considered unemployed so her family called on her to perform domestic and care work. Melissa said she only sleeps a few hours a night, and was worried about getting sick or catching a virus. She came to the interview eating oranges. During the interview, she quoted a Cantonese proverb to illustrate her situation, “no time to fall sick, only time to die.”

**Michelle** presented as a confident young Black mother with one two-year-old daughter. Michelle was receiving social assistance. Her main priority was going to school. Michelle clearly stated her career goal—to be a dental assistant in a clean, calm, office environment. Michelle was 19 years old. She said she felt “set back” or behind in her studies (she took some time off when she had her child and was sick on and off in the past year). She seemed in a hurry to finish school and get a career, which will give her stability. Michelle made the distinction between a career and a job, and specified that she was seeking the former, rather than the latter. Michelle gave good examples of how she was making plans and setting limits for herself. She also described a poignant example of an encounter she had with her friend on the bus with a stranger who made stereotypical comments about young mothers not being able to control their children.

**Nadia** was a 23-year-old Ghanaian woman and recent immigrant to Canada. This was a difficult interview because Nadia had a soft voice and was not very talkative although she answered all of my questions. We were sitting in an open, public space which probably was not ideal for interviewing. In retrospect, I might have been more pro-active in probing her answers. In reading the transcript, it appeared that I was anticipating her responses, and jumping to conclusions sometimes, which meant she did not always have a chance to respond. At the time of the interview Nadia was attending high school to upgrade and get credits for university. She was also volunteering at the school doing clerical work because it was something to do. Nadia was also teaching Sunday school at church. She said she would like to volunteer at a hospital with sick children since her career goal is paediatric nursing. Nadia spoke a bit about how hard it was at first to adjust as a new immigrant, and also about how hard it is to live in the shelter with little privacy and rigid schedules. Nadia believed strongly that one needed to work hard, be hard-working, and to study hard. She said, “You have to be determined if you want something.”

**Nadine** was a 25-year-old, Black homeless woman. Nadine was looking for work because she had to support her mother who was living in a hospice but who did not know she was living in a shelter. Nadine was counselled by her mother’s doctor not to tell her mother about her housing situation, so as not to worry her. Prior to being at the shelter, Nadine was living with a relative in an unsafe situation. This living arrangement was initially made so that she could save rent money, which could be put towards her mother’s care. When she moved out, Nadine lost her job, since it was the relative who she was living with who had arranged for her job. Nadine talked about doing a lot of juggling tasks, like arranging rides, trying to get
her documents for housing, getting ready for school again in September (she’s enrolled in teacher’s college). She managed her daily personal allowance by walking a lot and relying on friends for rides. Nadine was concerned about racial minority young women and their work choices. There was a passage in the interview where she resisted the “at risk” label but, at the same time, acknowledged that there needs to be more support for young women. Nadine was generally talkative and upbeat when I saw her during my field observations.

**Natasha** was a homeless, 18-year-old woman. She was struggling to move out of the shelter, where she resided for last five months. She spent most of the interview talking about the barriers she was experiencing in moving out. She felt restricted in the shelter environment. She commented about how residents had to leave at 10:00 a.m. each morning, the regimented food schedule, and general lack of freedom. She said that she didn’t feel like an adult who was able to make her own decisions at the shelter. She resisted being involved or getting too comfortable at the shelter for fear it would decrease her motivation to leave. (Nadia and Eve also said this.) Unlike many of the other young women, Natasha’s priority was not school though she was attending an alternative high school. She had some vague plans for college and a career in cosmetology. She said she wanted to work to save money to move out but that saving money when her income was meagre was difficult. She did not apply for social assistance, because it was not enough. She said that she just needed a “little extra” help like a Metropass or a couple hundred dollars to cover start-up costs (for furniture, pots and pans, etc.). Natasha also spoke about waiting for potential roommates to make up their minds about their living situations because she did not earn enough income to live on her own. She suggested that a person had to have absolutely nothing before they qualify for any type of help, which she identified as a gap in the social services system.

**Samantha** was a single Black young mother, who lived with a roommate. She shared insights about having to do things to be a “responsible” person and wanting to get a “proper job.” She aspired to be a nurse, even though she was unclear about how she would manage and finance this educational and career goal. She said that unless you’re “lucky” most young women have to “work their butts off” to get an education. She repeatedly said how she would like a career that was “not too hard.” What she meant was that the career would not be hard to get into or that it would be hard to get a job afterward or involve too much schooling. She wanted a “hands on” type career. She wanted something that paid good money with good hours, although she realized nursing often required long hours and shift work. Samantha presented as a practical woman. She did not see the point of philosophy or French subjects if one is never going to use the information. She was interested in education directly applicable to everyday life. Samantha also talked about not wanting to just “work, work, work,” but also being able to take some time off and go for a massage or get her nails done.
APPENDIX C

Interview Questions for Young Women

Thanks for agreeing to be interviewed. Remember, we can stop at any time if you have questions or don’t want to continue. Give examples. No wrong answers, just your own opinions and experiences.

First,

1. Who do you provide for? Who are you responsible for taking caring of? (family-children, parents, siblings, friends, neighbours, others-community, volunteering)
2. What do you do to provide?
3. Time: Do you have enough time to do these activities? Do you ever run out of time? Do you have time for yourself?
4. Are there things you wish you could provide that you can’t?
5. How do you make sure things get done?
6. Have there been changes in your situation that make it easier or harder to provide?

The next set of questions will ask you about your experiences with paid employment.

Tell me about work experiences you had and how they have impacted you?

7. Are you working now?
   a. If yes, tell me about your work (present).
      i. Where do you work?
      ii. What do you do?
      iii. How did you get the job?
      iv. What do you like or not like about the job?
      v. How is it related to your schooling, your career ambitions?
      vi. What made you decide to take this job?
      vii. How did you prepare for this job? (continue to 5.b.i.)
   b. If no (future)
      i. What are your plans for working in the future?
      ii. What kind of work do you want to do?
      iii. Where would you want to work?
      iv. How did you decide this is the kind of work you want to do?
      v. How will you prepare yourself for this line of work?
      vi. What kinds of skills, or knowledge do you think workers need now?
      vii. What kind of messages do you think young women get these days about working from friends, family, media?

The next questions will ask about your education experiences:

Tell me about your experiences of school and how they have impacted you?

8. Tell me about your experience in school.
   a. Are you in school now? (where, when, what program?)
   b. What are, or what were, your education goals and plans?
   c. How did you decide what program or courses to take?

The next questions address your participation and experience with this community agency.

How has your participation at Gen-Y helped or not helped you (to provide)?
9. Has your experience and participation at the Gen-Y helped you to make decisions or plan for work?
   a. If yes, how?
   b. If no, why not?
10. Why did you decide to participate in this Gen-Y program?
11. Are you involved in other volunteering/community organizations/programs? If yes, tell me about these experiences.
12. How would you describe young women like yourself, who participate in Gen-Y programs like this one? Who are the young women who attend the program?

The last few questions will ask you to reflect on your future.
13. Will there be more or less work and responsibilities for you in the future?
14. How will you ensure that you meet your future responsibilities?
15. In terms of the future, how would you define success for yourself?
16. What do you think would help you to achieve success?
17. What might prevent you from achieving success?
18. Realistically, how optimistic do you feel that you will be able to achieve your future goals?

Finally
19. We recognize that different groups in society experience different types of discrimination; for example, we know that racial profiling exists in relation to criminal activity. Have you observed or experienced discrimination that affected your decisions around school or work?
20. How old are you?
Interview Questions for Key Informants
The main point of the interview was to find out how the program worked for young women and how the program impacted how young women provide for themselves and others, also how the informant performs her work in the program.

Feel free to give examples of cases (without using names).
1. Tell me about your work specifically with younger women.
   a. What are the typical tasks you do in a day?
   b. What do Gen-Y programs provide for young women?
   c. What makes your work with young women clients easier or more difficult?
2. Tell me about the program goals for young women.
   a. What is defined as program success? How is the program evaluated?
   b. Are program goals and definition of success the same as young women's goals?
   c. Are concerns brought up in group/program that are not related to program goals? Do you have an example? What happens?
3. Tell me about the intake/assessment process. Think about a typical young woman client on your caseload,
   a. Describe how she gets to the Gen-Y program (referral practices). How do young women get referred to this Gen-Y program?
   b. How does intake proceed? What information is required?
   c. Are there special criteria to participate in the program (age, single mom, job ready? etc.)?
   d. Do you have to turn women away? When and how does that happen?
   e. What are the needs of young women clients and how do you assess them?
4. How would you describe the young women in these programs?
5. Tell me about what happens in the program.
   a. What do they do in the program?
   b. What agreements are made about participation?
   c. What plans are made for working with young women?
   d. Who else contributes to this planning?
   e. What happens when things don’t work out?
6. What kind of follow up do you do with young women participants after completion of the program?
   a. What are the main concerns of young women when they leave the program, and how do you deal with them?
7. What do young women get from this program that they might not get elsewhere?
8. Finally, what are some external pressures and issues that impact your work with young women?
9. Have there been organizational changes around the organization’s mission, policies, or practices or program changes in terms of caseload, organization of work, agency-wide initiatives, budget restraints or funding that have limited your ability to help young women to provide for themselves and others?
10. Do you foresee any changes, trends or pressures in the future that would impact the way you work with young women to help them provide? How will these changes make things more or less difficult for you to do your job with young women?
REFERENCES


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