

Changing the Subject: Violence, Care and (In)Active Male Citizenship

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Welfare regime literature reports convergence around the concept of activation, or active citizenship, across affluent western democracies, while simultaneously documenting substantial variation in policy and program implementation (for a discussion see Cox 1998; Halvorsen and Jensen 2004; Skevik 2005; Taylor-Goodby et al. 2004; Martin 2004; Knijn and Kremer 1997). The concept, which is my focus in this article, signals a social policy orientation that privileges labour force attachment. The active citizen discharges social responsibilities primarily through employment or search for paid work. Conversely, social entitlements, to the extent they exist in various national settings, are organized to promote social inclusion by facilitating, and sometimes obliging, labour market activity from 'able' citizens.

Although labour force participation is acclaimed for the population as a whole, the activation concept has practical significance particularly for adults under the statutory retirement age who receive public income assistance and who are at risk of long-term exclusion outside, or at the periphery, of the labour market. In Anglophone countries, the active citizenship concept therefore associates closely with 'welfare to work' or 'workfare' discourses. As one cabinet member in the government of British Columbia, Canada, explains, "We strongly believe that a job is better than welfare."¹ Lone parents, the majority of whom are lone mothers, represent an important target of this discourse given their difficulties in integrating alone the roles of breadwinner and child caregiver.

In this article I explore the implications of an employment-oriented vision of active citizenship for the gendered dimensions of welfare regimes, and particularly for the place and status of child caregiving. Given the emphasis on labour force attachment, the debate about activation invites feminist scholarship to privilege the "working mother" as the unit of analysis. Much of the debate thus far evaluates whether activation signals (1) progress for women to access paid employment and/or (2) retreat from social entitlements that support single women to form and maintain autonomous households in recognition of their social contributions through caregiving. Readers will recall that these are the analytic dimensions recommended by Orloff (1993) to advance comparative welfare regime scholarship from perspectives that are sensitive to gender.

Although sympathetic to these dimensions, Brush (2002) urges scholars to be cautious about adopting a singular focus on the "working mother" as the subject of policy analysis and political theory. She concedes that privileging this subject "is an important counter to androcentrism." But it also has "troubling implications. It glosses over violence against women and the extent to which women can be trapped by both poverty and abuse. At the level of both theory and politics, privileging working mothers allows politically concerned researchers to document and presumably fight women's vulnerability without actually talking about (let alone blaming) men, masculine privilege, or male dominance" (177). One result is that the incongruence between earning and caring that so many systems of social organization perpetuate is depicted as the "primary contradiction in women's lives," at the expense of engaging sufficiently with "male violence." Unless we change the subject, situating, for example, the battered wife along side the working mother, welfare regimes are depicted as gendered only "to the extent that they mediate between markets and families (not, for instance, to the extent that they reinforce male dominance at work, at home, and on the streets)." Thus, just as active citizenship implies, Brush observes that in much feminist literature:

"Hope for women's emancipation rests primarily on women's increased labor force participation (not, in contrast, on feminist organizing to end battering, rape, and prostitution). The framework barely accommodates accounts of violence against women or women's sexual subordination. The resulting focus on working mothers... comes at the

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expense of dealing straight forwardly with the notion that perhaps masculine privilege, male power, and men's violence are implicated in welfare regimes (178-9).

In this article I heed Brush's advice to change the subject, while also confessing that my own recent work on gendering citizenship is guilty as charged for privileging the working mother (eg. Kershaw 2005). The change in focus is necessary, however, if the gendered implications of active citizenship are to be fully appreciated. Workfare presumes that a lack of employment is the primary problem that women parenting alone grapple with as they struggle to overcome social exclusion (eg. Quaid 2002). But this presumption is misguided for a number of reasons, including because it obfuscates the male violence against women that precipitates many mothers entrance into the welfare system by dramatically constraining the context of choice in which some women parent alone and make employment decisions. In response, I argue that male violence must receive renewed attention as an integral causal contributor to the feminization of poverty and workfare, along with the associated rates of economic insecurity for children.

My arguments draw on a unique longitudinal qualitative data set developed in British Columbia, Canada, which tracks twenty-two mothers who parent alone and receive income assistance over three years. The project explores how lone mothers cope with welfare to work requirements, or "Employment Assistance" in BC, and the impact of policy change on their own and their children's lives over time. Actual life-course transitions experienced by the lone mothers are therefore juxtaposed against those expected of her by Employment Assistance policy, over a three-year data generation phase. Particular attention is paid to the normative social timetables that activation policy presumes in BC. One key transition is when the mother's youngest child reaches the age of three, at which point the BC government deems a lone-parent employable. A second is reached when the mother has been in receipt of Employment Assistance for two years after her youngest child reaches age three (i.e., when her youngest child reaches the age of 5), at which time the mother is at heightened risk of being cut off income support. The sample design is organized around these prescribed social timelines.

In order to examine mother's daily-lived experience and life-course transitions over time, the project is using a qualitative research design involving multiple in-depth semi-structured interviews. The findings reported in this article draw on transcripts collected during three interviews with the women over the first 18 months of the project. It is worth noting upfront that the evidence on which I draw to analyze the implications of male violence and care inactivity for workfare caseloads is entirely from narratives offered by women qua their experience as victims of violence and male irresponsibility for care. It does not draw on narrative evidence from the biological fathers of their children. This methodological approach to exploring male citizenship patterns closely resembles fatherhood research in the U.S. by Haney and March (2003).

We will see in the first section of the article that male violence pervades the narratives of women in our study regardless of whether they live in rural or urban settings, their ethnocultural membership, or their status as a landed immigrant or citizen. The longitudinal component of our semi-structured interviews in turn allows us to develop relations of trust with study participants over a period that allows us to track the disruptive legacy of male violence in the years that follow women's escape from (some) abuse – a legacy that includes fear and insecurity which manifest themselves physically, emotionally as well as economically. I will argue that these themes in our participants' narratives lend further support for the body of literature that has built on Orloff's (1993) important insight that gender welfare regime analysis must attend to the degree to which social policy supports women to escape abuse by forming autonomous households without attachment to men.

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The same narratives, however, also invite us to critically evaluate how we approach this analytic dimension as part of a broader cluster of feminist concerns. If considered only from the perspective of the legitimate needs of the battered spouse, this dimension risks absolving men of responsibility for the consequences of their decisions regarding violence. The demand for policy to support autonomous female households implores the state to compensate for male assault and rape by providing income support and child caregiving services. But it does so *without* requiring that men change their behaviour. It aims to manage the consequences of male citizenship dysfunction rather than expect men to remedy their dysfunction.

Male dysfunction does not end with violence, we will see in the second section of the article. Many men who have reproduced with women in our study demonstrate a will to ignore the responsibilities that attach to their fertility and offspring to a degree that borders on social pathology. Like male violence, male fertility unmatched by any adequate commitment to care again precipitates entrance into the workfare system for numerous mothers in our study who are actively fulfilling far more than their fair share of citizenship caregiving responsibilities. Regrettably, however, not only does this care by the mothers in our study go relatively unrecognized as valuable civic contribution by the state, they are explicitly critiqued by the dominant activation discourse in BC for failing to achieve adequate attachment to the paid labour force. The contemporary narrow construction of citizenship duties, rights and participation primarily in terms of employment thus serves as a mechanism of patriarchy in at least three ways. It (1) ignores and excuses the dominance men systemically exert by means of active violence and care inactivity, while (2) reducing public support for women who suffer abuse at the hands of men and/or who compensate for men's privileged irresponsibility by caring extensively outside the labour market; and (3) publicly criticizing women for failing to live up to androcentric employment norms that are tremendously difficult to achieve in the light of (1) and (2).

A more adequate discourse of active citizenship, I argue in the final section, must expand the subject even more broadly than Brush recommends to include the male abuser, the promiscuous male, and the male free-rider on female care as a primary focus of the active citizenship literature and discourse. This would amount to supplementing the tremendous insight about gendered citizenship that has so far emerged from debates about care, decommodification, commodification, and the capacity to form autonomous households with another analytic dimension. This other dimension would explicitly evaluate the degree to which social policy across nation-states decentres patriarchal norms by enticing or requiring men to change dysfunctional or irresponsible behaviour in their own individual lives, and among men as a heterogeneous social group more generally.

Operationalizing this additional dimension requires feminists to walk a tightrope balancing multiple factors. I draw on the transcripts from our study to demonstrate that it will be necessary to acknowledge explicitly the extent to which gender equality depends on men transcending patriarchal norms about citizenship activity. This acknowledgement must be sufficiently sophisticated, however, to ensure that renewed focus on masculine dysfunction does not reinforce male power and privilege through the backdoor of critique, as is happening with the fatherhood discourse in the U.S. Simultaneously, the demand that men change their behaviour by integrating more care activity and a more caring, less violent, citizenry disposition must not amount only to a punitive measure designed to villainize male agency. The transcripts in our study reveal, instead, that caregiving for children is an activity through which some women resist political disinterest in their lives, and define an empowered identity. Feminist discourse may demean this important aspect of caregiving if it does not invite men to enjoy the same empowerment through inclusion in care activity as they forgo their privileged irresponsibility. I conclude by considering the policy implications of these findings for child support and spousal maintenance policy in and beyond welfare

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Male Violence Fuels Income Assistance Caseloads Among Lone Mothers

The focus on employment that dominates contemporary discourse about active citizenship reflects the presumption that a paid job is the primary solution for the problems confronted by recipients of income assistance. Unfortunately, this diagnosis oversimplifies the lives of some lone mothers because it fails to consider the extent to which unemployment may be a symptom of other circumstances, including a great deal of harmful male activity. For example, Olivia, a 50-year-old aboriginal mother, has maintained a relatively strong labour force attachment along side substantial child rearing responsibilities for fifteen biological children conceived with two men who have been absent for most of their children's lives. Rather than any alleged distaste for paid work, her narrative indicates that abuse inflicted on her by men has motivated her to terminate employment on multiple occasions in order to escape violence. "When I was 15," she reports, "I started in a restaurant, serving coffee, and... meals. I worked there for a while. And then I went and got married. I worked in a nursing home, and school at night... And then my husband started to beat me badly, really bad. So I left my nursing home and my schooling."

This transition saw Olivia leave her abusive partner for the tar sands of remote Alberta, where she worked for more than six years. The search for support from extended family while parenting alone eventually took Olivia to the province's capital, Edmonton, where her mother assumed shared child rearing responsibilities. In Edmonton, Olivia worked at an Army and Navy store, but struggled with anxiety attacks and depression due to self-perceived, and government-stated, failures to care adequately for her children alone. Her self-described "hard life" in the Alberta capital motivated her to seek out a fresh start in Calgary where she "worked in a pizza [restaurant]. But male violence, this time in her place of employment, once again circumscribed her options. "I was always fondled by these guys that worked there, you know... the owners. But I was still so much, you know, like I was so much depressed that I didn't even think of-you know, suing them or whatnot. That's my part of my life. Even my first marriage I never got anything from him because I didn't want nothing, I just wanted to leave him because he raped me, and he-that's how I got the kids, and I just wanted to get away from that, I didn't want to have nothing to do with him."

Skill development and finding paid work is thus not obviously a major problem for Olivia, let alone the primary problem that social policy should concern itself with in her case. The near-singular focus on employment that pervades debates about citizenship activity deflects attention from the ubiquity of violent patriarchal activity in Olivia's narrative. Repeated abuse at the hands of various men so conditions her expectations, employment and otherwise, that her will to resist the infliction of physical, emotional and economic harm is tempered. As she remarks, violence – "That's part of my life."

Olivia's narrative is echoed by Anna, who in her late twenties is a Canadian-born, non-visible minority mother of two living in northern BC. Rather than weak levels of human capital, the income assistance system was called upon to support Anna because she terminated her relationship with an emotionally abusive spouse. "My kids' Dad is here, I think that's the only thing that's keeping me here, is the sake of the kids seeing him. But we don't get along. Like he plays games with me. It's a lot of head games, "I made you who you are, and you're nothing without me", and just whatever.

Prior to claiming welfare system, Anna already had employment experience in the hotel business and other service industries. Six months into our study she had left income assistance by accessing a student loan for schooling where she was earning high grades in almost all her courses. Nonetheless, as our relationship with Anna continues over time, we see that the legacy of the emotional harm that she endured

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at the hands of her ex-partner is compelling her to leave town to put geographic distance between the two of them. "I'm hoping to relocate this summer," she explains. "For the school, and a lot of personal reasons. I want to stay away from the ex- because every time I see him it's very stressful..." While ongoing post-secondary opportunities represent part of Anna's interest in moving, the desire to avoid engagement with a former abuser will likely see her forgo ties to her current community, including relationships with previous employers. Relocation will therefore weaken the social capital on which we might otherwise have expected her to draw in order to restore linkages to the paid labour force, at least in the near term.

Molly, a migrant from Latin America, has an even more solid employment background than Anna with her diploma as a civil engineer from her country of origin and work-experience with the program Auto-Cad. Against this backdrop, her narrative illuminates again how male violence, coupled with transnational skill (mis)recognition, is intimately implicated in her precarious circumstances in Canada, more so than any unwillingness to work. Molly entered Canada on a student visa in order find solace from an abusive partner without realizing at that time that she was pregnant by him. The subsequent birth of her child interfered with her studies and her ability to apply for a work permit, all the while her student visa would not sanction formal employment. As a consequence, Molly has been forced to work for an aunt and uncle in Canada for her room and board, and has supplemented her income with a casual job under the table at the same architectural firm where her aunt is employed. Six months into our study, Molly was still unable to obtain formal work due to her lack of Canadian employment experience. Nonetheless, she insisted that she did not want to go back to her former home because she is vulnerable to the violence of her daughter's father, while her own father's patriarchal attitudes about marriage mean he will not accept her status as a lone-mother. Since her aunt and uncle in Canada do not enjoy sufficient finances to sponsor Molly as a landed immigrant, the Canadian government indicated that her only other alternative to deportation was a refugee claim based on "treatment, in my country... My daughter's father he was mistreating me, and abusing me." By the time of our third interview (one year into the study), Molly had been granted refugee status in Canada, as well as a work permit. The latter empowered her to leave the architecture firm due to abuse on the job that she and other immigrants reported. Although she currently remains on income assistance, she is very ambitious and is pursuing a career in web-design.

While Molly sought out family and the insecurity of income assistance in BC because the social policy system in her country of origin offered still fewer opportunities for (even well-trained) women to live autonomously without attachment to men, Natalie shares her story of being sponsored to Canada by her future husband. Schooled only until age 14 in her African country of origin, the sponsorship invitation to an economically developed country appeared very attractive to Natalie. But this category in Canada's immigration process systematically reinforces sexual inequality within the family by rendering the sponsored spouse, typically the wife, legally dependent on the other. Those sponsored are ineligible to claim access to federally-funded language training programs, subsidized housing or income assistance. As Arat-Koc (1999, 212) reports, this unequal access to state support "increases the likelihood that a sponsored immigrant would stay in an abusive and/or unsatisfactory family relationship." Natalie's story lends credence to this view because, as she explains, "I couldn't have a job. I couldn't read and write [in English]." Her immersion in the BC welfare system eventually occurred only after she and her children suffered years of abuse from her spouse who was convicted and jailed for assault. In her words, "there's a reason why I'm a single mom. I have a crappy man who treat us so bad."

He beat me. He knocked my tooth black... He choked me. I was pregnant... He kicked me one punch and the baby come, and I hold on. He beat my son. He managed to sex molested my son. And that's why he was so dangerous. So we shouldn't be with him

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because if we should deal with him, he'd take the little baby like when she was 6 month--a year, he'd throw on a window. Smash baby girl on a window. He took my--broke my window, so like that's kind of--? If someone taking baby like this, pouff on a window. I hid the little girl. She was in hospital. He's very dangerous. He went to jail for like two years. Which two years is nothing, they could put even ten years.

He bring a woman in our house... Said, "I don't want you, I want her." He said, "I don't want you. I want her". And he beat that woman, he beat me, and he beat the children. That's how it was. And then he tell that woman go to hospital and have abortion. The baby, they kill one baby. So it was like nightmare, man. So my son actually is the one going to report everything. The eldest son.

In the light of Natalie's graphic narrative, and those of the other women considered so far, it is an understatement to conclude that the mothers interviewed in our study regularly affirm Orloff's (1993) valuable insight from over a decade ago that gender welfare regime analysis ought to be attuned to the degree to which social policy supports women to form autonomous households without attachment to men. In British Columbia, the state weakened its support for this dimension of social citizenship in 2002 on a number of fronts, including welfare cuts to monthly living allowances, restricting access to so-called 'crisis' grants, and reducing eligibility for child care service subsidies. The most symbolic retreat, however, is the provincial government's reduction in the value of the shelter allowance available through income assistance for families of three people or more – cuts that range from about \$55 to \$75 a month (Klein and Long 2003, 19).

Although the policy maker who presumes that insufficient employment is the lone-mother's primary problem may regard this cut as appropriate on the grounds that it adds extra incentive to accept any paid job, none of the women featured in the above analysis express an unambiguous opposition to having paid work, even when their children are preschool age. What their stories reveal, instead, is the physical and emotional insecurity that confines their opportunities, along with the causal connection between this insecurity and their reliance on income assistance. Cuts to shelter allowances only exacerbate their vulnerability to male violence by shrinking women's escape roots from abusive homes or places of employment, and by adding incentives to return to unsafe relationships because the cost of sheltering oneself and one's children alone are unmanageable at current income assistance shelter rates. As Natalie observes, "Sometime I say... my ex-husband, he was beating me... But he used to give us nice food, nice car. We didn't have a problem with rent; we didn't have a problem with food... We didn't have problem with clothes. At least, he beat me, but sometimes I thought why, I wish in ways I can go back to it. Because there's so much benefit there, and that's why I keep [quiet] for seven years. But since, right now, I'm freedom, that thing gone, there's no food. There's nothing, you know. You living daily by daily, and nobody will eat." Shelter cuts are especially risky for women in urban environments like Vancouver where Natalie lives because housing costs are particularly high. "Based on market rents for Vancouver—the region in BC with the largest percentage of welfare recipients," Klein and Long (ibid., 21) report that "the maximum shelter allowance for a three person household permitted that family to access only 0.4 per cent of all two bedroom apartments in Greater Vancouver, and no three bedroom apartments."

As is reflected in shelter allowance reductions, the BC government's emphasis on citizenship activity in employment thus far ignores just how active many lone mothers are when they endure, evade, and cope with the fallout from abuse inflicted by men in their lives. Any adequate policy designed to support or (punitively) entice the mother to work for pay must therefore be supplemented by heightened attention to

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the avenues that policy makes available for women to escape or avoid violence; programs that promote safety, physical, emotional, and economic security for women; and, just as importantly, policy that proactively mitigates or minimizes male violence against women. The narratives of the BC women in our study instruct us to regard the latter as an especially important strategy for preventing poverty and insecurity among women and their children over the medium term.

The reader must not be sanguine that all of the coping activity to which mothers turn in the face of violence is socially desirable. Adequate reorientation of policy will require legislators to engage realistically with the fact that some lone mother's responses involve activity outside of the law. Natalie reminds us that deprivation inclines "some mother[s]... to prostitute... And you know, there's a mother I know, I don't want to name it, she's my friend. She have to go and hook money every day so she can feed her kids." Depression, mental illness and even paranoia are problems in Natalie's own life to which she alludes. Substance abuse is in turn a coping mechanism for Natalie and other women in our study, in part to deflect the violence they have endured, or the prostitution on which they rely. For instance, Ann, an aboriginal mother of five children, was psychologically and physically abused by the father of her first child. She has since lost custody of all her children to the state in large part due to her addiction issues, which she is struggling to overcome in the proximity of many other users at Vancouver shelters. She adds that addiction itself inclines sex trade work to feed a habit. Finally, the risk that those abused will later abuse others in their care is something Nancy, an aboriginal mother of four, struggles with. She shares that "I do not smack my kids and it's difficult because my Mom was very abusive... My Mom came out of me once and that's why I got the Ministry on my back. Which is helpful because my daughter went to school and she told her teacher and I'm glad that she's not scared of me and that she was able to tell. Because I was like so scared of my Mom; I couldn't tell anybody."

Sex trade work, substance abuse and violence by mothers represent behaviour which is easily, and sometimes appropriately, condemned with the language of incompetence that Mead popularized in his defence of paternalism (Mead 1997b). However, against a backdrop of regular abuse and financial need, one can more charitably understand why some turn to self-medication through liquor and drugs, or prostitution to make ends meet.

Male Irresponsibility Fuels the Income Assistance Caseload

The same narratives that affirm the significance of Orloff's insight about the relationship between women's social citizenship and the capacity for autonomous household formation also call on us to problematize the treatment of this dimension of gendered welfare regime scholarship. For it risks uncritically excusing men of responsibility for their violence, intercourse and parenting. A focus on autonomous female households implores the state to compensate for male irresponsibility by providing income support and child caregiving services *without* obliging men to change their behaviour. I respond in this section by drawing on the narratives of our sample of lone mothers to illuminate the shortcomings of gender analyses that focus primarily on the avenues (un)available to women. The transcripts, I argue, signal the need for gender citizenship and welfare regime scholarship to expand the subject so that we query the extent to which policy diverts men from patriarchal behaviour to minimize violence, accept responsibility for fertility, and share in caregiving. Active citizenship is insufficient as a policy vision so long as it neglects measures that will demand some men to *act differently*.

The narratives shared by women in our study confirm that violence is not the only patriarchal activity that contributes directly to income assistance caseloads among the women in the province. Many men's

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neglect of the consequences of their sexual exploits and child rearing responsibilities is also causally implicated. Regardless of city of residence, ethnicity or citizenship status, mothers in our study regularly linked their entrance into the welfare system specifically to abandonment of caregiving work by the biological fathers of their children. Natasha, for instance, a white twenty-six-year-old mother of one toddler, explains that she had a relatively happy relationship with her partner for about three years before getting pregnant. But shortly after the pregnancy, his commitment to the relationship changed dramatically:

it was very strange, because we were like glue for 3 years, and then, well, I mean, I was - - I'm a lot younger than him, and everybody - all of his friends - advised me, "Oh, this guy's never going to settle down, he's not the type to settle down." Well, I should have known better, but I also did know him to be a very caring guy, and he was so proud at the fact that - - and yet, it - -one of the things that I remember most about his statements prior to the demise of the relationship was, "Well, my life isn't going to change at all. Why should it?" And I said, "But - -". My reply would always be, "Well, it has to. We have a new baby. You can't just do everything we used to do, right?" Well, the fact of the matter is, his life hasn't changed at all, but he doesn't - - mine has. I'm a mom, it's a whole different ballgame, and I'm not sorry for it at all... But his statement stands - he was very adamant about his life never changing now that he's had a child, and it hasn't.

Anna, the mother of two in rural northern BC who is considering moving in order to avoid interaction with her ex-, claims that he is equally disinterested in caring for his offspring. While "the only thing that's keeping me here, is the sake of the kids seeing him... It's a fight to get him to have the kids once a week, and he lives right around the corner from me." His unwillingness to accept any genuine responsibility for caring limits significantly the opportunity that Anna has for her studies. "My school work, it's hard to study when they're at home because I find by the time they're in bed I need time for myself to unwind, and I do that, and then it's usually laying in bed and I'll read a textbook and it's like, oh I'm tired. But I like my days when they're [at child care] then I study. And they go to their dad's usually on Saturday overnight so I have all day Sundays... I mean sometimes he takes them, sometimes he doesn't. It's never set. Like sometimes it's overnight, or sometimes it's just Sunday. Yeah, he's got a girlfriend now."

Nuk, an aboriginal mother of two elementary school-age children in Vancouver, also expresses frustration that the unreliability of her children's biological father to provide even episodic child care interferes with her volunteer and paid work at a local resort where she leads dance classes and cross-cultural exchanges.

Q: Yeah. So, when you go to (local resort) tomorrow, what are you going to do for child care?

N: The children's father... he said he's going to help me out tomorrow. He's - - he might be leaving on the weekend, don't know, so - keep my ear open, kind of thing... I don't like doing that. I hate doing that... I've got to put everything else of mine, like, you know?... I've got, like, a slate of things happening here. You know? And he said he could take the girls tomorrow... I said, "Are you going to be able to?" And he said he can try. I said, "Well, if I have to, I will try and get bus tickets somehow." But this is really pushing it... "But, can you provide?"... He said he can, 'maybe'. So that says maybe not... he said he could get [bus fare] from his counsellor. He's got a counsellor he knows, his counsellor friend... I don't know, I'm not going not going to rely on it. I'm going to get them anyway... I'm going to provide, just in case he's not reliable. You know?

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The constraint on employment and training that is imposed on Nuk, Anna and Natasha by the biological fathers of their children when they distance themselves from responsibility for child care must be factored into critical analysis of the active citizenship discourse. If we do not broaden the subject of analysis to acknowledge explicitly masculine anti-social norms, then we risk rendering women who fail to live up to the ideal of the working mother as the whipping girl of workfare discourse because we do not grapple with the problem of male irresponsibility. Social policy that is attuned to an ethic of care, Hankivsky (2004, 38) reminds us, underscores the responsibility that individuals incur to be attentive to the *consequences of personal choice*: to be “concerned expressly with the actual outcomes and practical and material effects on people’s lives of making certain choices and decisions;” “to make connections regarding how those around us are affected by our actions.” This concern for the consequences of personal choice applies directly to the issue of income assistance and active citizenship since the narratives of women in the IA31 study highlight the consequences of male inattention to care obligations that evolve from their sexual encounters and biological offspring. Not only are many men not performing enough care activity, their disposition exudes a failure to care about the consequences for others that result from their inactivity.

Mary Jane’s narrative underscores the isolation and heavy workload that male neglect inflicts on many responsible women citizens who actively shoulder more than their fair share of care. She reflects on the “chaos” of the birth of her twins, the first of four children:

I was pretty isolated because I started out right away having twins. And you know, there’s a way if you have one kid you can gradually manage that and get more connected to other moms. And because I had so many kids and there - - it was just so crazy because even up until I was seven months pregnant their dad didn’t want to live with me. And then he decided he would, and I moved in with him in the end of February...

I had a lot of resources behind me, like I was working full time right up to the last minute. And they were born with a certain amount of health problems, but not to go to the hospital, but just health problems that I dealt with at home. And that was like, I was awake night and day. And it was so weird because I was with this guy and not only did he not help me but he’d get mad if the kids cried and woke him up...

I remember when he left me in that time. And then I remember when I was on savings, living on basically nothing for two months, and finally toward the end of the two months I realized I had no more money... [T]hat was in February, late February of ‘96, and I was pregnant with [third child]. I was like two months pregnant. And basically in January of 1996, you know, I was left like really, boom.

This text reveals that Mary Jane’s eventual claim on welfare does not primarily reflect inadequate employment background or insufficient commitment to paid work. Nor did she have any interest in immediately claiming welfare rather than draw on her existing savings or surrounding social capital. Her problem, instead, was her heterosexual partner’s care inactivity, and the added stress his distaste for child rearing infused in the home environment. The neglect and anxiety he imposed through his irresponsibility for the consequences of his fertility severely limited Mary Jane’s energy and time to be active in employment, particularly in the absence of a system of child care services for her and other families. Social policy that fails to prevent such male irresponsibility or compensate women for its costs further restricts the

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context of choice for women like Mary Jane, while the dependent-nature of her children mean that prioritizing childrearing over other citizenship activity becomes necessity more so than selection.

In '98 I started working again, and just part time. And that was pretty cool because the government at that time did allow that \$200 [of earnings could be kept on top of welfare] so that was pretty significant actually and that kept me in the workforce. Because it's ridiculous. You can't expect someone with four kids whose kids need like dental work, you know, that's even a big one, to go jumping off of welfare totally into a work force where you're at the mercy - - Like, that's what ended me from working, because I had subsidy for childcare. And so I had this in-home caregiver, but she started getting tired of it and just wouldn't show up... I had to phone my job and then it was like they struck against me for stuff like that to the point where I was on call, and then they weren't going to call me because they can't deal with that... [T]he only thing that I have that's really secure is just to stay on welfare.

Active Citizenship Must Re-envision the Active Father

The narratives considered so far suggest the need to further refine the welfare regime literature from a perspective that is explicitly attuned to the harmful consequences of decisions that many men make, and which many women are implicitly expected to cope with and recompense by the current discourse of active citizenship. Since the white, straight, male breadwinner has been, and remains, the subject of so much mainstream citizenship and social policy literature, it is understandable and essential for feminist scholarship to change the subject so that we explore the needs of the working mother or battered wife. The challenge, however, is to change the focus without allowing feminist literature to reinforce inadvertently the current socio-political context which is reticent to demand that men accept responsibility for male violence and rescind the privileged irresponsibility for care that inheres in the legacy of patriarchy – a privilege that manifests itself differently and to varying degrees depending on where men are located within the intersection of sexuality, class and race hierarchies.

The solution, I recommend, is to couple analytic interest in women's capacity to form autonomous households with another analytic dimension that explicitly evaluates the extent to which social policy combats patriarchal norms by obliging men to transcend dysfunctional or irresponsible gender norms and behaviour. To some extent, Orloff concedes this point when she revises her initial explanation of the autonomous household dimension of gendered welfare regime scholarship. In a subsequent publication with Monson (2002), she argues that her initial formulation "focused on the ways in which welfare benefits, provision of services and employment regulations affect the capacity to form and maintain an autonomous household, a dimension which indicates an individual's ability to survive and support their children without being forced to marry or enter into other family relationships. This is of clear relevance for women... But this dimension should be generalized to ask how different sorts of supports for households, including those of men—affect the balance of power between men and women within marriages and families, *and men's as well as women's capacities to support families* (67-8; italics added).

I interpret Orloff's reformulation to signal the value of focusing on men's ability to support families financially, by caring enough not to abuse, as well as through care provision and other unpaid activity. But, unlike Orloff, I suggest that this ability would be more adequately examined by a separate analytic focus that illuminates the extent to which policy aims to prevent domestic and other male violence before it

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happens, and insists that men share with women equal responsibility for child care both among straight couples and between biological parents living apart.

Outside of feminist scholarship, and with insufficient sensitivity to the gendered implications of their policy assumptions and proposals, Popenoe (1996) and Blankenhorn (1995) have been among the leaders within academic circles calling for policy makers to link social problems to the state of contemporary fatherhood and marriage. Haney and March (2003) have since documented the substantial degree to which US policy legislation and discourse has appropriated this line of thinking. The absence of much Canadian political discourse about fatherhood is quite conspicuous relative to its southern neighbour. This absence is arguably a double-edged sword: potentially harmful because it diverts attention from the pervasiveness of the dysfunction of much male citizenship activity in Canada; but favourable because it signals a lack of political resonance for some of the most problematic aspects of the American fatherhood discourse. It is useful to summarize these problems briefly in order to define up front what I am *not* arguing for in this article when advocating to change the subject to include male dysfunction.

Haney and March report that Congress began to design new legislation targeted toward low-income fathers in 1998, two years after it enacted the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act which set forth revised policy expectations for poor mothers parenting alone. Their discourse analysis of Congress debates reveals bi-partisan convergence around three themes. First, Republicans and Democrats generally agree that a trend toward fatherlessness in African American families poses a significant policy problem for children because it is associated with “dramatic increases in being homeless or runaway, behavioural disorders, drug use, and filling prisons” (U.S. Congress, House 1999a in Haney and March 2003, 466). Second, the two parties share general ideas about the shape that a policy solution must assume to address this alleged problem: policy must restore in poor families a key role for biological fathers. And third, rather than coercing men into paying child support, the new role envisioned by policy must “transform men into solid family members.” Haney and March indicate that such transformation implies “formalizing the relationship between children’s biological fathers and mothers through marriage;” “strengthening the structural relation between biological fathers and their offspring;” and “solidifying normative paternal roles and responsibilities.” In short, the U.S. Congress aims to reinforce “a married, nuclear family form,” albeit with some ongoing inter-party debate about whether the ideal father should be a sole breadwinner, or part of a dual-earner couple (466-67).

The political discourse about fatherhood in the U.S. is problematic for a number of reasons because it reinforces patriarchy by returning men to the centre of policy debate through the back door of a narrow racialized critique of masculinity that is relatively silent about violence and care inactivity. Its focus on marriage stands in stark conflict with the pervasiveness of violence in the narratives shared by women in our study at the hands of spouses. Their lived experiences add further evidence for the argument that policy must strengthen, not weaken, women’s ability to escape abuse by forming autonomous households apart from men. Any adequate discourse about reconfiguring fatherhood must therefore resist the presumption that a marriage license is some panacea to male dysfunction, in large part by acknowledging that marriage often licenses male access to a private enclave in which they can exercise their dysfunction with relatively impunity. This more pernicious quality of marriage is manifest overtly in some of our participants’ description of the domestic violence they have endured, and also more subtly in accounts of how male partners have required them to distance themselves from other friends and family. Laura, an aboriginal mother of four and custodial caregiver for her granddaughter, recalls how the biological father of her children had pressured her to minimize ties with kin for four years. “I said [to him],” she remarks, that “I notice that you were pulling me away, further and further away from my family.” But following their

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separation, she explains that “I’m getting into my family calling me again and my family coming over to visit me. And... it feels good, you know... I come from a big family and I love it when family’s around because it gives me more security, it gives me more strength in the day.” The importance of this added security and strength that her spousal relationship eroded must be interpreted against the risk of vulnerability to male abuse that any isolation imposed by a male companion is likely to exacerbate.

The challenge posed by the experiences of women in our study is to renew attention to contemporary failings of fatherhood, which include violence and the patriarchal division of labour, without conflating these systemic issues with the actual help individual men may or may not provide to women or their offspring. Citizenship scholarship is not improved if a new analytic dimension concerned with mitigating the harm of male citizenship dysfunction boils down to the argument that father absence is abnormal, or that connection to a male is the solution to women’s and children’s poverty, especially so long as male abuse is ubiquitous.

The need to resist the view that father absence is abnormal, however, should not come at the cost of absolving men of responsibility for the consequences of their actions, nor of supporting men to develop the will and skills to enjoy more fulfilling relationships with lovers and children alike, both for their own personal benefit and for the enjoyment of potential loved-ones. Reconfiguring masculine norms around partnership is a critical issue for policy mechanisms that have potential to influence gender socialization. Unfortunately, the American political discourse goes awry because it presumes that reforming men’s partnership potential is tantamount to improving their revenue-raising capacity. The fatherhood debate in the U.S. is thus intimately implicated in active citizenship because it too focuses predominantly on employment activity.

Any resulting approach to fatherhood that privileges earning is impoverished because it does not explicitly exhort men to shoulder more caregiving activity, or a more caring disposition that would minimize violence. Policy makers thereby forgo the possibility that men become more attractive partners when they are more attentive to caring responsibilities and/or less violent. Recall the isolation that Mary Jane reported following the birth of her twins when their biological father elected not to provide care, even for the short time he remained under the same roof with them. This experience renders her adamant in her opposition to any policy logic that presumes the breadwinning capacity of men alone should be the primary focus of legislators. Policy makers, she claims “look at that [a man in the home] as some big solution, but if you’re not with somebody who’s helping you it’s not a solution - you’re just more under rules and control and grumpiness, because kids are a very certain way, like, lively. And if the person doesn’t like that, you’re just screwed right up.” Her observation instructs us to evaluate family and income support policy from a lens that is concerned with supporting men to develop skill in caregiving along with recognition of their obligation to care even in respect of some activity that may be distasteful to them. Nancy’s experience accentuates just how much work there is to do on this front. She indicates that she cannot even count on the biological father of her daughter to have food for their child on the occasions he agrees to take her for a weekend. He “didn’t buy groceries and stuff when [he] had her,” she explains, “So I’d bring food for them too.” The implication is that if the mothers in our study cannot even rely on their children’s fathers to figure out food provision, then reconfiguring contemporary fatherhood in some circles will require that we provide a great deal of social support to help some men evolve into effective caregivers.

The emphasis that women in our study give to male care (in)activity intersects closely with findings from Haney and March. They conclude that the low-income African American women in their study challenged the connection policymakers made between fatherhood and money. This is not to say that their paternal blueprints excluded men’s financial responsibility to their children. Most respondents insisted that men’s economic contributions were important.

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Yet claiming entitlement to support was not the same as equating it with good fathering. While policymakers often blurred the two, these women rarely did. Instead, when they discussed fatherhood, our respondents made an important distinction between economic and social support. They think linked economic support to procreation. As 32-year-old Kenisha remarked, "You play, you pay." They also connected social support to fatherhood. Again, there were biological fathers and real fathers; the former paid, the latter cared. Our respondents worried about the effects of conflating the two and of allowing men to view money as fatherhood and paying as caring (2003, 474).

Finally, the focus on poor fathers in the U.S. discourse does injustice to the scope of the problem of male irresponsibility and violence. While the analysis in this article shares the concern that male citizenship patterns are intimately implicated in welfare caseloads, violence and male irresponsibility for care are by no means problems only in low-income households. Adequate policy solutions must tackle these problems of contemporary fatherhood at a societal-wide level, rather than stigmatizing relatively disadvantaged, and disproportionately black, men. Feminist analyses enjoy a head start on this work with contributions by Coltrane (1996), Connell (1995), Hobson (2002) and others. This research can be used, in conjunction with the experiential expertise shared by women in our study and in related research, as well as studies attuned to first-hand accounts by fathers (eg. Barclay and Lupton 1999), to articulate a new policy blueprint that will affirm caregiving as a citizenship activity and disposition that some men want to do, and no man should neglect.

In tackling the problem of contemporary fatherhood, care is not adequately appreciated as a citizenship activity if the expectation that men participate equally in caregiving is perceived only as a punitive measure or a means to lament male agency. The transcripts in our study reveal that, despite all the hardship that patriarchy imposes upon women, caregiving for children nonetheless remains an activity through which women in BC express resistance and discover empowerment. Some mothers even predict that the absent biological fathers of their children will someday regret their lack of involvement. Carrie, an aboriginal mother of two in northern BC, anticipates that her "kids will just end up hating [their biological father] when he gets older, or when they get older. They realize that he never really cared." Laura approaches the issue from the flip side of the coin, remarking that "The way I see things right now, I'm looking pretty good. I'm raising our children... I kiss my children good night every night. I wake up with my children and tell them to have a good day, go learn something... [M]y kids come home... [M]y kids talk to me." Their biological father, in contrast, enjoys no such interaction or fulfillment.

Regretfully, the current vision of active citizenship is so employment focused that it seems far from conceiving how caregiving may contribute positively to healthy identities for male citizens. New activation measures are therefore required that will attend genuinely to the value of caregiving by remaining mindful not only of its essential contribution as social reproduction, but also of the socially integrative aspects of caregiving for all citizens, including men. Any additional analytic dimension attuned to changing male norms and behaviour should not only have women's equality objectives in mind, but should also acknowledge the rewards available to men in more egalitarian caregiving arrangements.

My work in *Carefair* (Kershaw 2005) begins to develop such a blueprint for Canada in respect of parental leave, child care services and employment standards. More work clearly needs to be done in respect of a broad range of policy, including spousal maintenance and child support. The experiences shared by mothers in our study is helpful on this latter front by illuminating the inadequacy of the BC system that continues to link biological fathers and mothers together after the termination of their relationship. In some

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instances, this link is dangerous because it risks fuelling the fury of men who have already abused their ex-spouses and lovers – a risk that the provincial government acknowledges in the case of Olivia who reports that the government has not sought child support from her ex-partners because they are too violent: “they said to me, oh he’s too dangerous, because he... dislocated my leg and he had been drunk and he’s a gambler and all this and he needs to hit me, so they said, we’re not going to go after him. Then my - my son’s dad... he’s too dangerous too because he was, you know, he’s always screaming and what not so they didn’t go after him [either].”

While protecting Olivia’s safety is absolutely critical, one implication of not pursuing the biological fathers of her children is that it risks sending the message to men that violent dispositions saves money. The architects of child support and spousal maintenance policy in Canada would therefore be well advised to consult with their colleagues in Austria, Denmark, Sweden and Iceland, where the state guarantees “spousal” maintenance payments irrespective of men’s actual abilities or willingness to pay. It is worth learning whether the institutional distance that such a system imposes between ex-spouses creates a policy context in which it is safer to garnish wages from formerly abusive husbands without exacerbating the risks of renewed violence for women and their children.

A system of guaranteed maintenance would also avoid the real financial pain that Mary Jane encounters when her ex-partner fails to pay the \$212 monthly support that he is supposed to pay directly to her, and which is factored in her welfare calculation by the Ministry responsible for Employment Assistance. In her view, “it’s the weirdest thing in the whole world, because he doesn’t necessarily even pay every month...

Mary Jane: Like, it just gets really odd, because they have it on my welfare that I’m getting this money... like, they say, well, we’re going to help these moms by going after the deadbeat dad, but they take the money directly off of the mom’s welfare, so how does it help the mom at all? It doesn’t. It’s their own scene to return the money to the government coffers and make the mom in the middle of it.

Q: So what happens if he doesn’t pay one month and they’ve got it on record that - -

Mary Jane: I just lose the money. It doesn’t - - I mean, I could go through the system and blah, blah, blah, and then I should get the money from welfare and then they would charge him, but it’s just another thing for me to keep track of... I should report him every time he doesn’t, and the fact is that it puts me in a hard position because when he doesn’t pay me - - like, because his work is very sporadic, I know that he really doesn’t have the money. It’s like pitting one person who doesn’t have money against another person, so, it is like - - because he doesn’t actually have a drug problem he’s just - - there’s a whole bunch of things that he’s got going on and there’s not a lot I can do about it. And so basically I can tell welfare that I didn’t get the money and then I won’t get it deducted and it - - then they phone me to find out and it just puts - - I just find it - - Well, it puts me through a lot of extra work, and they want me to come down for another appointment with my [social] worker.

Mary Jane’s story is instructive for child support policy on at least two fronts. Not only does it show the financial insecurity that non-payment by fathers can cause for women, it also underscores the charitable attitude that she believes is appropriate given the difficult financial situation in which her ex- finds himself. The reality is that many biological fathers of the children in our study are themselves poor, struggling with issues of addiction or mental illness, and some have been victims of violence in their own right. It is

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therefore far from obvious that spousal maintenance and child support is ever going to be a large part of an effective solution to women and children's poverty, or a major contributor to declining income assistance caseloads. Nor is it obviously cost-effective to expect mothers to report whenever fathers are unable to meet their financial obligations, and for Ministry bureaucrats to take the time to adjust income assistance payments regularly.

In the light of the narratives from the women in our study, however, it is not adequate for society to become less demanding of low-income men who reproduce by weakening child support payment requirements without compensating with alternative expectations. The frequency with which the women in our study report that the biological fathers of their children have also reproduced with other women to whom they provide little, if any, ongoing support is alarming. The biological father of Jeanie's three children, for instance, has never lived regularly with any of them, nor does he interact with his two other biological children in Montreal Quebec. Similarly, Jemima, a mother of two with different men, explains that her son is his father's "fourth [child] and he's had one more since... [Yet] he's not a good father to any of them".

This level of male fertility, when unmatched by any serious commitment to child care, signals that reconfiguration of masculine norms will require the state to signal more overtly that male irresponsibility for sex and childrearing is unacceptable. While the need to protect the safety and respect the autonomy of their ex-lovers will mean it is out of the question for the state to re-insert absent biological fathers into the lives of their own offspring, the state should no longer permit men to escape the caregiving consequences of their fertility. Men may not always have sufficient finances to tap; but time to care is something that is reasonable to expect of active citizens, even if it is not time with their own children.

There are many options that the state could explore to reconfigure contemporary fatherhood in this way. Although more attention to policy design and implementation is necessary, one might creatively experiment, for instance, with a requirement for men who are absent from their own children, and/or who are unable or unwilling to pay child support, to work as a volunteer in licensed child care settings in their local neighbourhoods. This kind of experiment would overtly signal to men that 'loving and leaving' will have consequences for their time schedules regardless of their ability to pay financially for their offspring. The same consequences would also create opportunities for men to hone new caregiving skills and discover the fulfilment that often inheres in care provision. Together, both outcomes would contribute to transforming contemporary citizenship norms by celebrating socially valuable caregiving in addition to the current fixation with employment, while simultaneously drawing explicit attention to the inadequacy of dominant patterns of male citizenship (in)activity. Such policy change will only be envisioned, however, if we expand the subject of citizenship and welfare regime scholarship to include not only the battered wife that Bush recommends in addition to the working mother, but also the dysfunctional male who continues to struggle to act without violence and to rescind the patriarchal privilege of irresponsibility for care.

¹ (Hon s. Brice, February 10, 2005, Legislative Debates, Government of British Columbia, *Hansard*, afternoon sitting, volume 27, number 4, available at: <http://www.leg.bc.ca/hansard/37th6th/h50210p.htm#11811thursday, february 10, 2005>).

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