

NEOLIBERALISM IN SMALL TOWN ALBERTA: A LOOK AT PERSONHOOD,
GENDER, RACE AND POVERTY.

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Bachelor of Arts and Sciences, University of Lethbridge, 2002

A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
of the University of Lethbridge
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Anthropology
University of Lethbridge
LETHBRIDGE, ALBERTA, CANADA

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To my family

Abstract

An in-school feeding project, Kids In Need or KIN, was introduced in the fall of 2001 to a rural community located between two First Nation's Reserves, in southern Alberta. I analyze the KIN project and its ensuing controversy as the site of struggle over the meaning of parenting. Given the predominance of neoliberalism as a discursive practice, centered on *individual* responsibility, the controversy generated by the KIN project reflects the central question of how to implement a program devised to assist children living with adults presumably "responsible" for their well-being. Implicitly the debate centered on particular class-based, neoconservative constructions of families, which support a gendered division of labor and were deployed in this community to re-engage long standing notions about the parental deficits of Natives. This thesis explores the possible dangers, then, of the KIN project's focus on *child* poverty, in relation to neoliberal constructions of personhood, gender and race.

Acknowledgments

It is my pleasure to formally thank some of those who shared their time and knowledge with me. I feel indebted to Catherine Kingfisher, my mentor and supporter over the years. Her endless guidance, sincere compassion and faith in my abilities will be forever appreciated. I also owe thanks to Jan Newberry, Bill Ramp and Judith Goode who contributed additional intellectual feedback. Fieldwork and writing were made possible by financial support provided by a Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Master's grant.

I wish to acknowledge the community members of Fort Macleod, including parents, teachers, volunteers, and personnel from the Chinook Health Region whose participation in my research made this thesis possible. A special thanks to all the KIN committee members who generously offered their time and experience.

I also want to thank my family, especially those living with me during the intense months of fieldwork and then writing. Mom and Patrick, in addition to your love and support I thank you for the personal lessons and growth you have both brought into my life. Last but not least, Jeremy, my rock taught me not only to have faith in others, but also in myself.

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Ch.1 Overview and Background

This study was begun as an investigation as to why community members in Fort Macleod, a small-town of approximately 3,000 in southern Alberta, stood divided on the topic of an in-school feeding program entitled Kids In Need, or KIN. My interest was to utilize the Kids In Need project and the debate it generated as a lens through which to explore community members' ideas of poverty in relation to context-appropriate notions of personhood that were in circulation in this prairie town.

My first journey into the field was more mental than spatial, as my commute to my research site on Highway 3 West was only a half an hour's drive from home. Given that I worked on a farm for a number of summers northwest of Lethbridge, my home city, I was quite familiar with the vast ranching and farmland that surrounded the community of Fort Macleod. Yet, the nervousness I experienced in leaving the nurturing shelter of my supervisor's side was overwhelming. I doubted my ability to be the driving force behind this project, questioning whether I could make the appropriate decisions, ask the relevant questions, and observe and record the pertinent events. Over the course of the drive, I rehearsed the introductions of my research interest that I would soon be required to recite to community members determining my access to their community.

This was not the first time I drove out to Fort Macleod, as I had often driven through this town on my way to my Grandfather's place in the Crowsnest Pass, which is a mountain range extending into the neighbouring province of British Columbia. But on this early fall morning when the sun began to light up the prairie sky and the majestic mountains emerged from the west, it was the first time I had made an effort to actually see the community of Fort Macleod. Just on the outskirts of this prairie town, I passed

the “horse factory,” *Bouvery Exports*, which is one of the town’s major employers. I recalled a time when, as a little girl, I wanted to free all the horses from their dreaded fates. However, without the same innocence, and with a general research focus on poverty in rural Alberta, I recognized the importance of this factory to this community’s economic well-being.

As I curved around the bend that entered the town, I noticed that on the right hand side there was the town’s bulk grocery store, also known as *Extra Foods*, where car line-ups for gas were a common occurrence, even though the parking lot for the grocery store was never full. On the left hand side there was a turn off to a residential area, which also led to the schools in town. Further down from this turn off there was another gas station, *Max*, which marks the junction to Center Street. As I approached the first 4-way stop on Center Street I noticed that the street signs were at a permanent tilt from the strong west wind common to this area. There were a number of motels and gas stations I passed before reaching the town’s designated historical area, which has several sandstone and brick buildings from the early 1900’s. In these buildings there were a number of privately owned restaurants, coffee and retail shops, and the Empress Theatre (providing not only the major motion pictures, but also the entertainment for the “artsy” crowd), which is the province’s oldest theatre in operation.

The town is divided into 3 main sections by two one-way streets on either side of Center Street, which indicates the heavy traffic through as opposed to in town. The street headed west passes the North West Mounted Police Fort, which is one of the town’s major tourist attractions. Further North of the Fort, bordering the town’s most northern residential area, was the Oldman River and the River Valley Wilderness Park that marks

the town limits. The street headed east passes the courthouse and the largest residential area. There was also a turn off on this highway headed east that led to the Blood reserve, which is one of the two First Nation's reserves located near town.

Aunty Linda's

I spent many of my days (in between volunteer shifts that I discuss below) at Aunty Linda's, a restaurant and coffee shop. Like clockwork, 3 retired seniors, Joe, Edna, and Charlie¹ would arrive at nine O'clock a.m. for coffee. They regularly sat at a table in front of the restaurant window that was variously decorated in accordance with the seasons. Their discussions often focused on the town's current events, which they read about in the local newspaper, the *Gazette*. Given the relevance of weather to this farming community, it was also a frequent topic of conversation. Joe would often comment, "here comes the girls," when women from the shop next door would arrive to have their smoke break. The employees from the bank would also occasionally stop by for a coffee break or to enjoy the baking; cinnamon buns, cheese cake, apple and rhubarb pie were on the list of "homemade" desserts. Conversation at Aunty Linda's was typically lively and occurred sometimes privately between the members at the individual tables or more publicly between individuals seated across the room. Everyone was well acquainted, with the exception of myself.

It did not take long for people to notice my presence on that first day. Perhaps it was the fact that I was the only one under the age of thirty, or my initial awkwardness when I stepped inside, unsure if I was to wait to be seated, standing at the door looking at everyone looking back at me. I eventually decided to seat myself at a corner table because it was a better place to 1) observe and 2) hide from interactions I was guilty of

¹ All of the names used in this thesis are pseudonyms.

over-thinking as a naive researcher wanting access to this community. However, this table proved not to be an adequate hiding place, as it also happened to be one of the regular's, (Clarence's) usual seat. After I had already ordered a coffee, Clarence, a senior wearing a cowboy hat with his coffee in hand walked over to my table and in his husky voice commented, "stole my seat have you". Everyone in the restaurant began to giggle. I went red, apologized, and told him I would move. But he insisted on me taking the table after I explained why I was in their little prairie town. The room was silent with eager listeners of our conversation and thus my research interests were introduced to the locals who were the usual frequenters of Aunty Linda's. In our conversation, Clarence shared with me the stories of his hardship, the difficulties of farming, his wife's death and his subsequent single fathering of his two children. The lines on his face and on those surrounding me suggested that these people survived the adversity and hardships that ensued from living in this small rural community. Members of this farming community, once referred to as the "land of milk and honey" (Community member 12/11/02), have endured personal struggle, unpredictable weather and financial uncertainty as a community of individuals.

Town Characteristics

Many community members were originally from Fort Macleod and had stayed in the community their entire lives. In 2001, close to one third of the town's population was fifty-five and older (AlbertaFirst.com 2001). In other words, there was a significant percentage of the community retired or nearing their retirement. Other younger segments of the community went away for school to then return home and were presently working within the community. Teachers in the community laughed light-heartedly as they

informed me that not only do they teach at the elementary school, but it was also the very elementary school they attended years ago. There were also members of the community who travelled great distances and had gone to great lengths to find themselves in Fort Macleod. In one instance I heard a story of a courageous escape from an Eastern European country, where the individual would line up disappointedly for flour day after day. In sharing this story, this proud gentleman expressed in his Romanian accent what he saw to be a contrast to this time and this community, having endless “inexpensive” products on the shelves in both of their grocery stores.

Regardless of the differences in individual stories, community members share in a proud history of self-reliance and resilience. As Hanson suggests, “the West as an empty, frontier landscape that was transformed by brave, independent pioneers into an Eden of fields of plenty to feed the nation has a strong hold on the collective imaginations of many Canadians” (2001:164), including community members from Fort Macleod. The West, however, was never empty. Rather, in addition to the American ranchers and whiskey traders, the land surrounding what is now known as Fort Macleod was inhabited by the Blackfoot confederacy. The North West Mounted Police, commissioned to “establish law and order on what really was a New Frontier just seven years from the Dominion of Canada’s Confederation” (Fort Macleod Historical Association 1958:100), played a central role in the establishment of not only Fort Macleod, but also Treaty 7². Consequently, the Blood and Peigan or Piikani Reserves that are part of the Blackfoot

² Treaty 7 is open to a variety of conflicting interpretations that are outside the scope of this thesis. Suffice it to say that it commenced as a result of the negotiations between the North West Mounted Police and the Blood and Peigan Natives, which resulted in the relegation of the Native population to the reserves in exchange for some financial assistance.

Confederacy were established as the protected Native land next to Fort Macleod, serving as the North West Mounted Police fort.

The relationship between the Reserves and the eventual community of Fort Macleod has been described as one of extremes. On the one hand, the community of Fort Macleod has been dependent on leasing the ranch and farmland abundant on the Reserves. Furthermore, community merchants and business owners have been reliant on the business from the Native community from both Reserves. On the other hand, although business from the Reserves was still significant to community business owners, gradually over time business from the Native community carried negative connotations. This was in part the result of the stereotype about dependency of Native communities on government support following the signing of Treaty 7. Ironically, the government assistance, which was the consequence of Treaty 7, the presence of the North West Mounted Police, and the establishment of Fort Macleod also eventually served as criticism against the Native community in the area. The relationship between the non-Native community of Fort Macleod and the Native community both in town and on the Reserves has been characterized by the tensions that resulted from the assumption of Native dependency on government support. Historical Native/non-Native interactions thus played a significant role in this town, which is as I already mentioned located next to two First Nation's Reserves.

While the Blood Reserve, located southeast of town, has a population of 7,300 and the Piikani or Peigan Reserve, located west of town, has a population of approximately 2,300, the Native population residing in town in 2001 was 230

(Government of Canada 2001)³, or approximately 7.7% of Fort Macleod's population. In addition to the Native population residing in the community itself, there were many Native children bussed in for school from both Reserves. To illustrate the widespread racial tensions of this community, I have chosen to use community members' own words to describe this situation. One mother informed me as we watched her son play hockey at the local ice rink that "we have a lot of Native children and I think there's a lot of prejudice" (03/04/03). She also suggested that I attend a local hockey game in town to observe Native/non-Native segregation, where the Native community sat on one half of the arena and the non-Native community on the other, which I can attest to observing.

As a result of the segregation of the Native community from the non-Native community, there was also intra-group pressure experienced by both Native and non-Native populations to remain segregated. A woman responsible for raising her brother offered the following story in description of the intra-group pressure.

He was crying and he says...how come all the white kids make fun of the Indian kids here and all the Indians kids make fun of the white kids? And if you're an Indian that lives in town and you're friends with all the white kids and all your cousins are from the reserve you're an apple?... Well, I said on the outside, you're dark. Some people call them redskins. I tell him on the inside you're white (Danielle 04/10/03).

Danielle's story demonstrates the tensions not only between Natives and non-Natives, but also among members of each population, indicative of this segregated community. Even though her brother is Native, Danielle explained that their cousins accused him of being "white" on the inside like an apple because he chose to associate with the non-Native community members of Fort Macleod.

³ Given the lack of statistics before 2001 I am unable to comment on whether there has been a change in the percentage of the Native population residing in town.

Although I did not introduce it, race was a frequent topic of discussion. For instance, one employee of the school in town explained that “there is a lot of racism” (11/22/02). The following vignette summarizes the racial tensions where one of the community’s leading volunteers explained the reactions of a community member to a request for donations to Pincher Creek’s (a neighbouring community) women’s shelter.

I had a woman come in and I never forgot her and I never will, a lovely woman, a woman I think the world of, quite a faithful woman and she said, well... that place in Pincher Creek, who uses that place? And I didn’t understand, I was pretty new at this and I said you know, women that have been abused. Well, are they Natives? And I said, well, I don’t know, but does it matter, don’t they bleed the same when their husbands hit them as when our husbands hit us (Cassandra 11/25/02).

Cassandra’s statement is testament to the community’s racial discrimination. Even an issue that presumably would invoke empathy, such as spousal abuse, was still perceived by certain community members in terms of race.

Many community members in Fort Macleod acknowledged the persistence of the divisions that existed between certain sections of the community on the basis of the racial demographics and the prevalent town attribute of rugged individualism, characteristic of the Western frontier landscape. Rugged individualism was a common concept used in the town’s portrayal,⁴ described by Judy, a KIN committee member who was also a young mother, as that “tough it out and pick up your boots approach” (12/16/02). Hsu refers to rugged individualism as an ideology characterized by stringent self-reliance as both a way of life and an ideal striven towards (1983: 4). One retired teacher echoed this notion when she explained the town ethos to me by suggesting that “some people in this

⁴ Some community members simply invoked the concept, while others were more explicit and spoke of the concept of “rugged individualism”.

town believe that you should be self-reliant” (03/20/03). Another woman in her mid-20’s, who has only recently left town, stated in a conversation about the dynamics of Fort Macleod that there is a predominant belief that “society takes care of too many people already and those people should not be taken care of” (11/27/02).

The designation “those people” typically referred to the Native population. For instance, over green tea at one of the more popular Chinese restaurants in town, a mother of two girls explained town perceptions of the Native community on and off the reserves, stating that “there’s a lot of easy hand-outs for them (Natives)” (11/13/02). This mother in her mid 30’s was not originally from this area, but as she explained, “when I moved to Fort Macleod I wasn’t prejudice at all, but I find that there’s a lot of easy hand-outs for them (Natives)” (11/13/02). Racial prejudice against the Native community was justified by appealing to the discourse of rugged individualism, which was used to criticize the Native worldview.

Regardless of the divisions that persist between the Native and non-Native segments of the community, community members share similar concerns about the weather and economic uncertainties that confront their farming and ranching community. Farmers and ranchers are increasingly dependent on the global market and their trading relationships with the U.S in particular since the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). These trading relations are steadily replacing smaller family-owned farms with corporate farms, capable of offering lower prices. Consequently, as one community member suggested “we have to change our way of life” (Tamara/community member 12/12/02). While the threat to surrounding rural towns has been the loss of their schools, Fort Macleod was threatened with the loss of

their hospital, which could result in even greater dependency on larger centers for the necessary health services. This is particularly critical to Fort Macleod, for as already mentioned close to one third of its population is over the age of fifty-five and in greater potential need of medical attention. This rural community is left strategizing over how to maintain their way of life in this crucial economic time. Even amidst these economic hardships, most community members were proud of their little community and preferred the pace of town life to the appeal of a larger center.

Although town members often refer to Fort Macleod as a farming community, the largest percentage of the community living in town, 25.86%, is employed in sales and service occupations (Alberta First.com 2001). These occupations are often reliant on seasonal tourist dollars from the two main tourist attractions, the North West Mounted Police Fort, which is located in town and the Head Smashed-in Buffalo Jump, which is located just outside town. While service occupations constitute the largest employed segment, they follow the community's general trend in the decrease of labor force. For instance, between the years 1996 and 2001 the work force of all occupations calculated together decreased by approximately 3.7% (Alberta First.com 2001). The decreased work force was not the result of a shortage of workers. For, while in 1996 the unemployment rate in Fort Macleod was 5%, by 2001 the unemployment rate had more than tripled, reaching 17% (Alberta First.com 2001). Correspondingly there has been an increase in the number of lower income families in this community. In 1996, 8.33% of Fort Macleod's families were living on less than \$19,900; by 2001 that number had increased to 13.91% (Alberta First.com 2001).

In describing the town's job economy, one community member, Claudia, stated that "it's not very good, there's not a lot of industry here. There's the horse plant thing and there's...just not enough. They're minimum wage and part-time [jobs]" (12/11/02). Most employment opportunities within the service sector are minimum wage. The gap between the "minimum wage and the hourly wage required to reach the poverty line in 2000 (est.)... (was) \$6.70 in Alberta" (Campaign 2000: 2003). In other words, the Alberta minimum wage is insufficient to support an individual, much less a family, which places individuals in Fort Macleod at financial risk.

A number of community members spoke about the 21% child poverty rate that plagued their community. One mother, who also leads the community in volunteerism, informed me that with a child poverty rate of 21%, the community had a "higher incidence of child poverty than surrounding areas" (Jackie 04/01/03). Other community members, however, denied the existence of child poverty within the community, which suggests that there were some discrepancies in town perceptions regarding the community's economy and the financial circumstances of individual families. In order to understand these divergences, in this next section I acknowledge the wider global, provincial and federal context within which this community's economy is embedded.

Wider Context

Despite growing economic hardship locally and globally, Kingfisher observes that global parallels in national welfare reforms have resulted in "reductions in state provisioning for the poor" (2002: 7). This phenomenon (in Canada) is embedded in the economic and cultural relationships between a number of contextual levels under the umbrella of globalization. Global, national, provincial, and municipal contexts are

inextricably connected by policies that restrict particular kinds of government activity in favour of others on the basis of prevalent neoliberal notions of social organization, and of the role of the state and market. Brodie explains that neoliberalism, as a governing philosophy, “represents an amalgam of policy postures including decentralization⁵, privatization, individualization, and the elevation of the market over the public sector” (2002: 96). Brodie speaks of individuation as the “rebirth of abstract individualism,” which “represents the systemic erasure of structural factors in the formation of social policy” (2002: 107). Social costs then become individualized and the responsibility of the individual. While neoliberal reforms to the state “push for some role for state participation in supporting programs to liberate and reform the poor” (Goode 2002: 77), the market is valorized as the efficient mechanism for cost-effective distributions of resources. Brodie argues that as a result of these policy postures the “gap between the rich and the poor has widened while the poor have become poorer” (2002:105).

In the Canadian context the shift in favor of a neoliberal approach to policy is demonstrated by the implementation of the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST), which “off-loaded the cost of social programs onto the provinces” (Brodie 2002:103).

Kingfisher states,

CHST eliminates all but the vaguest national standards, reduces the amount of federal dollars available to the provinces for social programs, and provides whatever funding is available in the form of block grants, which are intended to provide coverage for health and education as well as for poverty related assistance (2002:7).

⁵ “In its simplest terms, decentralization is a governing instrument that transfers power; responsibility; and accountability from a single center to smaller units” (Brodie 2002:103). I speak of decentralization in greater depth in chapter two.

The result here is that provinces have jurisdiction over social programs within their province as well as “incentives to shift money away from social welfare to programs and practices which are more popular with their backers and voters” (Brodie 2002:105). These neoliberal attacks on social policies previously devised to assist the poor are “based, at least in part, on...claims regarding “proper” (masculine) personhood” (Kingfisher 2002:16), where individuals are ideally characterized by independence, responsibility and autonomy. Consequently, neoliberal policy postures support the cancellation of a number of Keynesian social programs previously devised to provide assistance on the basis of need, as they are thought to interfere in an individual’s independence and autonomy. In this post-Keynesian era, then, there is little support of social programs that “disempower” neoliberalism’s ideal individual through fostering their “dependency”. In contrast to recipients of assistance, Kingfisher suggests that:

The ideal neoliberal individual...is not just the individual of early liberal philosophy, but a specifically post-Keynesian (neo)liberal individual- one who can transcend the “dependency” engendered by a Keynesian welfare state that was designed to cushion individuals from the vagaries of the market (Kingfisher 2002:28).

The personhood or identity of an individual requesting assistance is devalued because of their association with a social program, which symbolizes their dependency. This depreciation ensues because conceptions of personhood prevalent in this western context distinguish between the individual and his/her social role (La Fontaine 1985). In other words, individuals are judged on the basis of what is perceived to be their personality

qualities and “dependency” is disesteemed⁶ as it is in stark contrast with individual responsibility.

Kingfisher suggests that “just as policy is devolved from central government to the state, provincial, or municipal level, so responsibility for poverty is increasingly devolved to the level of the individual” (2002:16). Poverty-stricken individuals and families confront greater financial insecurity, where responsibility is consequently further shifted in the direction of individuals or as a last resort back to the frontlines of community-based organizations as part of the process of decentralization. (The onus of poverty seems to be the ‘hot potato’ that eventually lands in the hands of individual communities when the music stops.) In relation to these last few points, this thesis explores contradictions in neoliberalism as it plays out at the various levels of government, between neoliberal cutbacks of social programs at the provincial and federal levels and the initiations of “community-driven” projects at the municipal level. How do welfare reforms that take place at the federal and provincial levels impact constructions of the poor in communities such as Fort Macleod? I now introduce the Kids In Need project as Fort Macleod’s response to their community’s economic situation, already mentioned above.

Kids In Need (KIN)

The elimination of child poverty has been on the House of Commons’ agenda for more than a decade (Campaign 2000), prompting not only national attention, but also the attention of individual communities. Certain members of Fort Macleod who were

⁶ See Fraser and Gordon in Fraser’s “Justice Interruptus” (1997) for in depth discussion on the constructions of “dependency” for further discussion.

employed by the Chinook Health Region (CHR)⁷ wanted to take action against child poverty. KIN thus emerged as part of the “child poverty initiative” of the Chinook Health Region (CHR), which “was trying to mobilize community action with Fort Macleod being a pilot/demonstration site” for the rest of the region (KIN Committee Facilitator 02/19/04). Personnel from the Population Health, a branch of CHR focused on community development, initiated the project in hopes of its sustainability by community involvement. Based on social analysis figures in the region, which suggested that there might be greater child poverty rates in Fort Macleod than in other surrounding communities (Population Health Information, CHR 2002, unpublished document), the CHR facilitator invited community stakeholders to a meeting to review the statistics and to discuss what assets existed in the community. Intentionally, it was a “community-driven”⁸ project that included community health and education professionals and other community members, such as parents, on its volunteer board.

A decision was made to implement a universal⁹ snack program, as food security and social inclusion¹⁰ were thought to be highest priorities. Initial seed funding was received from Health Canada Diabetes Prevention and Promotion Fund. The KIN project received additional donations from community members such as the community grocery store, *IGA*, and seed funding from the Family and Community Support Services

⁷ The Chinook Health Region is a health organization that provides care within South western Alberta for more than 150,000 people in their acute care, continuing care and community-based programs.

⁸ I discuss the possible connotations and meanings of “community-driven” in chapter 2.

⁹ The concept universal refers to the equal access individuals have to a program or service. In contrast, targeted programs - thought by CHR employees involved in the KIN project to result in social exclusion and stigmatization - are offered only to particular members of a group on the basis of specific qualifications.

¹⁰ By providing all the students with the same snacks, those students not adequately provided for by their parents would not be “singled-out” and thus the snack program worked to eliminate some of the barriers separating and distinguishing students from different socio-economic backgrounds.

(FCSS)¹¹. In the November of 2001 the KIN project introduced a universal snack program to the elementary and middle schools of Fort Macleod. The objective of KIN was to offer nutritious snacks that would benefit *all* students' capabilities in school, but especially those from lower income families. The intention behind the universality of the project was to prevent the social marginalization and stigmatization of poor students that would ensue should they be the only ones to receive snacks from the KIN project.

Initially both schools had universal snack programs offered to students who had signed consent from their parents. The snacks were brought to the schools in the morning at which time two students from each class would pick them up and bring them to their classroom. Each class individually decided on the appropriate time for their morning snack. Students could take a snack if they so decided or eat their own snack that they received from home. Although the KIN project was on a limited budget, the committee hired a nutritionist from Chinook Health Region to devise the snacks for a two-week rotation that was in accordance with Health Canada guidelines. There was also an educational element to KIN's food programs. In addition to eating the snacks, classroom members often discussed the different food groups and were taught how to read food labels. Snack items included raisins, muffins, cheese bread, chocolate milk (introduced because some of the children would not drink white milk), juice, vegetables such as carrots, broccoli, and cauliflower, and fruits such as bananas and oranges.

While the universal snack program was KIN's main focus in its initial year, there were other elements of the KIN project which supported community strategies to enhance healthy eating knowledge and skills among low-income children and their families. The

¹¹ The FCSS program is a municipal/provincial partnership through which local people can develop services and perform activities to strengthen the family and community.

first element was a universally accessible breakfast program offered at the elementary school. Students could come to the school lunchroom before classes had begun and receive a bowl of cereal, and/or toast and some juice. Volunteer teams were organized, often through the numerous churches in town, to prepare and distribute breakfast to the children in attendance. The second element was a supplementary lunch program at both schools. Lunches were prepared in advance and available at student request. Teachers could also distribute lunches on a needs-case basis. Finally, KIN also organized “community kitchens”¹² and “Parents-as-Teachers”¹³. All of these programs represent Fort Macleod’s community action against child poverty with a focus on healthy eating that was taught either through example or direct instruction.

KIN Controversy

KIN was a highly controversial program. Controversy centered on whether it was appropriate for schools to feed children or whether this should be not only the responsibility, but also the protected right, of parents. As a result, in the fall of 2002, the KIN project responded to the controversy by downsizing, making all the food distributed by the schools universally accessible, but not universal. In other words, the food was distributed at certain times in specific locations to keep it separate from the other school activities. Both the breakfast and lunch programs were maintained, but the universal project was discontinued.

¹² A community kitchen is a group of individuals who meet regularly to cook healthy, nutritious meals. The emphasis is on creating social networks and teaching valuable life skills to participants.

¹³ Parents-as-Teachers is a program that provides information, support, and guidance to parents of young children that may need help with their parenting.

Community members' beliefs regarding KIN may be summarized as follows. Those who supported the project largely did so because they realized the need within the community. The supporters included teachers, volunteers and other professionals working directly with the community's children, and to a lesser extent, parents of school age children. Those parents opposed¹⁴ to the project argued that there was no real need for the project because their children were already provided for; further, they accused the project of enabling irresponsible parenting, which, in this community, was closely tied to Native status. That is to say, the local stereotypes of Native peoples delineated them as irresponsible parents, as part of a larger stereotype about dependency of Native communities on government support. Although the project was introduced to the community as a universal project intended for all children, given the association of the Native community with diabetes and the funding source, it was perceived by some community members to be a "Native" project. Having provided a general outline of the project and the controversy, I now speak of my research focus before continuing with a discussion of my involvement in the KIN project as an anthropologist, volunteer, and KIN committee member.

Research Focus

The KIN project served as a lens through which to analyse constructions of parents and families in this rural community, in part because it was perceived to challenge these constructions. My central exploration in this thesis is the consequences of social policies devised to assist children for the constructions of parents. More

¹⁴ Although a couple of individuals from the community suggested that there were community members without children who were opposed to the project, everyone I spoke with in opposition to the project was a parent.

specifically, how were notions of parenting affected by an in-school feeding program, which provides this community's children with assistance? Given the wider federal/provincial context, how did KIN challenge or reproduce neoliberal notions of personhood in relation to parenting? A central question related to this last point is, how does a social policy devised by community members to address the effects of neoliberal fallouts and federal/provincial welfare reforms, develop into a mechanism of self-government at the community level? In summary, the focus of my research has been the specific conversation between local meaning systems and neoliberalism as an externality held within this local rural context that centers on parents and constructions of the family.

Methodology

Good ethnography requires reflexive ethnographers. After all, it is assumed that she or he is responsible for devising the questions and selecting the research topic in the first place and thus the reader should be interested in what influences those choices. My decision to study poverty in a rural community was heavily influenced by a number of factors. First, I was introduced to poverty research in my undergraduate work, eventually leading to my involvement in the Southwest Alberta Coalition on Poverty, which is an organization whose members collaborate efforts against the effects of poverty in South Western Alberta. It was through this involvement that I was first informed about the Kids In Need (KIN) project. One of the co-chairs mentioned the controversy over KIN, which prompted my interest. My initial question was, who has problems with feeding children seen as the innocent, thus deserving of assistance, and why?

Every ethnographer must take into consideration the issue of gaining access into the group or community that is to be the center of his or her study. In relation to gaining

access, I should note my own characteristics that influenced my reception in this rural community. First, I am a white single woman in my mid-twenties, from a middle class background. Second, as I already mentioned, I did not live in this rural community; rather I commuted over the course of nine months between three to five times a week from my home center to this prairie town. I received access to this community and the KIN project from a number of individuals. Given that I worked with a couple of community members prior to conducting research, I was grateful to have their association because my access was granted largely by means of informal interactions. For instance, Tori, my key informant,¹⁵ escorted me around town one day introducing me and my research interests to community members. Furthermore, meeting for coffee with another of my informants was usually accompanied by introductions to other community members. These introductions to community members variously positioned were valuable to the snowball sampling I was conducting.

It should be noted, however, that Tori was a rather controversial figure within the community and thus these introductions could have also interfered in my access to certain segments of the community. Yet, I argue that this also played in my favour because given the debate over the KIN project with which this controversial person was associated and supported, community members wanted to ensure I was equally and accurately informed of the negative opinions regarding the KIN project. In not being from this community, I was able to present myself as the ignorant outsider, attempting to make sense of the conflict over the in-school feeding project. Thus, although my

¹⁵ Although I had regular contact with and interviewed most of the KIN committee members, I spoke more frequently with Tori. As a result, I have utilized her insights and feedback continuously throughout this thesis. I also use my interviews with Catherine, a mother opposed to the KIN project as representative of those opposed parents in the community.

association with the controversial figure suggested that I was not entirely “objective,” this made those opposed to KIN that much more eager to express their objections to me as they felt their voices were not being heard, especially by the KIN committee of which I eventually served as a member.

I recognized that at times those I interviewed wanted me to act as something of a mediator between KIN project committee members and those opposed parents of the project. I contended with this situation by intervening in some of the misconceptions either side had, such as the inaccurate wage figures of the coordinators’ positions, because this was public knowledge available to community members through their local paper, the *Gazette*. In other words, I was careful not to intervene or directly influence the opinions of community members, to the extent that I only better informed them of the actualities of the project’s operations, accessible to the public. I often confronted an awkward situation when asked about my involvement in and my observations of the KIN project. For instance, parents often asked rhetorically “it is all Native children, right?”¹⁶. Their suggestions were not compatible with my observations, which I then shared with them. It is at this time that those interviewed could choose how to interpret my observations, either dismissing them, adjusting their opinions, or providing alternative justifications for my observations.

In addition to informal introductions to the community I also received formal introductions. As mentioned above, I became a member of the KIN committee. I was also introduced to the teachers at both relevant schools on their professional development days, and to parents at parent council meetings. This gave my research more credibility as it was recognized as an “official” project associated with the University of Lethbridge,

¹⁶ This is an important perception that will be further discussed in chapters three and four.

not to be associated with any particular community member. Although, I had more access to those in support of the project because of my involvement with the KIN committee, I also contacted individuals who wrote letters to the editor of the *Gazette* expressing their opposition to the project so as to ensure I had a more complete picture of the story.

I did, however, confront some constraints in gaining access to the Native perspective, as this would require that I also gain access to the members of First Nation's Reserves on either side of the town. I was unable to gain access to either Reserve. One individual working on the Reserve explained that the Native community is sensitive about who is conducting research on the Reserve in part because they are tired of being the subjects of non-Native research. In relation to the racial tensions already mentioned and my identity as a Caucasian I suggest that the Native population, resident of either the town or the Reserves, was hesitant to speak about this controversial issue, which was made evident by the few Native parents in contrast to non-Native parents that came forward to be interviewed. This is significant because as I discuss further in chapter three, it illustrates that race was a key component of the controversy generated by the KIN project. However, I worked closely with the Native liaison at the schools, who was a member of the Native community as well as responsible for bridging the communication between the school and the Native community. Thus it was through her that I made contact with the Native community in town. Once my intentions were made clear by the Native liaison and thus trusted by individuals of that community I eventually arranged a focus group and other interviews with individuals from the Native community.

Over the course of my nine months of research, I conducted forty interviews and four focus groups. Only seven members of the Native community were included in those interviewed. The Native community thus made up the smallest segment of those participating in my research. Most of the participants, Native and non-Native, were mothers. There were a few male teachers that participated in the focus groups and a couple fathers who accompanied their wives. While most of the volunteers interviewed were between the ages of 55 and 65, parents who made up the largest portion of those interviewed were between the ages of 20-45. Many of the parents interviewed were parents in traditional heterosexual nuclear families. However, a number of single mothers were also included in those interviewed. Socio-economic backgrounds varied. A number of individuals acknowledged that they were below the poverty line, while other community members were from middle to upper class backgrounds.

Although I was interested specifically in the constructions of parents in this rural community, the composition of the sample interviewed was an outcome of the snowball sampling I was conducting. I chose to conduct snowball sampling, as it is useful in studies of small, difficult to find populations, which was particularly valuable given the potential difficulty of access to parents, more specifically mothers, who are often isolated from the wider community in their roles of responsibility for their children that often relegate them to the private sphere¹⁷.

Participant Observation

My access to community members was facilitated by my participation in the KIN committee as well as my volunteer work in the project. Three days a week I volunteered

¹⁷ The role of mothers as primary caretakers is revisited in more depth in chapter four.

alongside other volunteers from the community with the breakfast and lunch programs. As a result, I was more closely associated with the project and my credibility was also increased among other volunteers and individuals working in the schools, as I became a recognized face. The main outcome of my volunteer work was that it positioned me at the site of the project, allowing me to observe those working with the community's children and the KIN project. Thus I was better positioned to investigate what purpose the project served and whether those individuals working directly with the community's children valued this service. Before continuing with the significance of my positioning among the volunteers at the school site, I will describe both who the volunteers were and what they did.

Volunteers were typically retired community members, more specifically women who were also members of one of the numerous denominations in town. As Tori, a KIN committee member commented, "I think one of the strengths of this project is...involving the churches," which she later described "as an asset" (02/23/03). Many of the town's various denominations would often provide volunteer teams in week rotations that were then organized by one of the KIN project coordinators. Thus for instance, the Holy Cross Roman Catholic Church would agree to volunteer one week and the Christ Church Anglican another week. While some volunteers were also members of the KIN committee, most of them were affiliated with one of the churches and thus their volunteer activities were seen as a "service to the church" (Volunteer 11/05/02). In addition to the volunteers from the various churches, there were a couple of mothers volunteering whose children attended the elementary school and occasionally the breakfast program.

Volunteers would come to the elementary cafeteria an hour before the first class school bell and prepare breakfast food items such as toast, cereal and sliced fruits. There were slight discrepancies between how volunteers distributed food to the students. Some volunteers would toast the bread and pre-pour the cereal before students arrived so as to be prepared for the bus rush of students; others prepared the food items on a needs-case basis in prevention of wasted excess food. Students, some energetic and others lethargic would line up in front of long table and wait to be served by the volunteers. While some volunteers encouraged students to come back for seconds and thirds, others tried to limit students to one or two servings of toast and/or cereal.

My participant observation conducted alongside other volunteers was significant for a number of reasons. First, my interest in this particular rural community was peaked by the controversy generated by KIN in general but more specifically by the negative opinions within the community. Those opposed to the project were also the most vocal with their opinions. What were often missing, from the local newspaper etc., were the opinions supportive of the project, presumably, the opinions of those working with the project and those frontline workers who were working directly with the community's children at the schools. Even though they were less vocal, I had access to their opinions through my interactions with them and this led to a greater understanding of their support for the project.

Second, volunteer work left me better positioned to contextualize my data, which enabled me to observe whether people's beliefs were reflected in their actions.

Interestingly, while most of the volunteers supported the project, there were other volunteers whose actions contradicted their expressed opinions. A couple of community

members, variously positioned, who seemingly demonstrated their support of the KIN project by volunteering were nevertheless sceptical of whether certain children were actually in need and expressed judgments against the parents of the children attending the program. The discrepancy between the opinions of some of the volunteers and their actions is the result of the prevalence of neoliberalism in this prairie town, which as the dominant discourse has become naturalized. Even those who are possibly positioned as its resistance, i.e. volunteers in an in-school feeding program, are not immune to the pervasiveness of neoliberalism. Thus, while the actions of volunteers in this rural context may be interpreted to challenge the predominance of neoliberalism, some of their expressed opinions may simultaneously work to reinforce it.

Although I speak for simplicity sake in terms of two sides of the debate surrounding KIN, I recognize in actuality that community opinions are not so dichotomous. Nevertheless, the distinction between the two oppositional groups in this small town is worthy to maintain in order to explore the predominance of the discourse of neoliberalism and its points of resistance.

Discourse Analysis

In analysing my data I relied heavily on discourse analysis. My intention was to utilize discourse analysis to further an understanding of the notions of personhood that are prevalent to this rural context. Although I acknowledge that discourse has many overlapping and conflicting definitions formulated from various theoretical standpoints (Fairclough 1992:3), my use of discourse is consistent with a social theory perspective, where the emphasis is on social practice. Discourse refers to the language use made available to individuals that then become their tool to construct their social identities,

social relations and systems of knowledge (Fairclough 1992: 64). Discursive practice is an element of discourse where the emphasis is on the interactional view of discourse in its production and interpretation of meaning. I wish to recognize my own participation in the process of constructing meaning both in my interactions with community members at the time of interviewing and in my analysis of those interviews documented in this thesis. In other words, through my own selections of the issues to analyze I have also contributed to the local meaning systems of this rural community. My interviews and resulting analysis, as examples of particular social interactions, are themselves processes of constructing the meaning of “reality” as experienced in the community of Fort Macleod at a particular time in history.

Fairclough suggests that discourse “is a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning” (1992:64). Meaning, according to Kingfisher, “is not imposed on individuals but also bestowed by them” (1996:4). In accordance with both of these suggestions and in acknowledgement of my own participation in the processes of constructing meaning, I recognize that individuals have agency in their use of the dominant discourse even amidst its constraints. Similarly, Fairclough suggests that the “positioning of subjectivity and discourse is a dialectical one, which sees social subjects as shaped by discursive practices, yet also capable of reshaping and restructuring them” (1992:48).

While I explored the conversation between the local meaning systems of this rural community and neoliberalism, I also investigated how community members used language to construct and affect the positionality of parents, both in their community and in their own families. KIN was the center of town controversy and thus by debating the

policies of KIN, community members could indirectly or in some cases directly voice their opinions. Consequently, it is not only policies in general and the KIN project in particular, but also the processes of policy development and deployment that are culturally important. If the constitutive nature of language is acknowledged (Fairclough 1992: 64), then community members were not only voicing their opinions but they were also contributing to the production, reproduction and transformation of social identities correlated with particular discourses. It is here that we can see the significance of language for subjectivity. For, in his analysis of Foucault, Fairclough suggests that “statements position subjects” (1992: 43). Rose further suggests that language:

...is understood as a complex of narratives of the self that our culture makes available and that individuals use to account for events in their own lives, to accord themselves an identity within a particular story, to attribute significance to their own and others’ conduct in terms of aggression, love, rivalry, intention, and so forth (1998: 175).

In consideration of Rose’s suggestion, this thesis explores how community members in general and parents in particular utilized the debate generated by KIN as a narrative of the self. Having outlined my methodological tools, this next section addresses my theoretical orientation.

Orientation

I have already mentioned some of the attributes associated with neoliberal’s ideal person; I now move to a more in depth discussion of autonomy as it plays out in this rural context because it is particularly relevant to western conceptions of society, which claim that “society is constituted of autonomous equal units” (MacFarlane cited in La Fontaine 1985:137). In keeping with Foucault’s suggestion that we use the term “government” as a “portmanteau notion to encompass the multiple strategies, tactics, calculations and

reflections that have sought to ‘conduct the conduct’ of human beings,” Rose suggests that we “examine the ways in which these ideals of self (autonomy, fulfillment, responsibility) are bound up with a profoundly ambiguous set of relations between human subjects and political power” (1998:152). This thesis explores the ambiguity between autonomy as a natural right/liberty, or as a responsibility and artefact of “a variety of governmental practices” (Hindess 1992: 73), which in some interpretations the KIN project served.

As the positive constructed inverse of “dependency,” and the common thread running from liberal to neoliberal philosophies of government, autonomy is connected with a number of issues this thesis explores. These include neoliberal notions of personhood in relation to constructions of parents and families, and the implicit gendered and racial notions of autonomy, which impact the claims to resources that different individuals, variously positioned, have. To underscore the dissimilarities in claims to resources, I turn to Yeatman’s discussion of the key features of classical liberal contractualism that are based on masculine notions of individualization (1997).

Yeatman suggests that “contract connotes three related dimensions of individualised personhood” (1997: 45): individual freedom from patrimonial authority, individual freedom to choose with whom one associates, and autonomy:

Individual autonomy as a unit of social action is determined by his status as an independent head of household. Because the household is still associated with the classical conception of economy, the household or *oikos* as a self-sufficient economic unit, individual autonomy is conflated with the idea of household self-sufficiency (1997: 46).

There are two implications here. First, Yeatman’s account of autonomy acknowledges the masculine favouritism in its construction, as her use of “his status” is deliberate in

illustration of the dissimilar contractual status of men and women. (The significance of this will be revisited in Chapter 4). Secondly, Yeatman illustrates the connection between the nuclear family and conceptions of autonomy. Similarly, the meaning of autonomy in a neoliberal framework in general and this rural context in particular is self-sufficiency, or self-governance, which becomes conflated with “the idea of household self-sufficiency” where “parents,” consisting ideally of a mother and father, each having gender-appropriate roles, are its key social practitioners. In attempts to explain why some parents were opposed to the universal element of the KIN project, one mother stated:

I think people feel that they give their kids what they need and that, that isn't part of what schools should do for a well-fed child...Just don't feed my kid. That's my role as a parent” (Jane/mother 12/12/02).

By suggesting that she provided for her own children, who were “well-fed,” Jane implied that she is autonomous on her behalf and on the behalf of her own children. In other words, her household was self-sufficient. Implicitly suggested in Jane's comment is that autonomy is a defining characteristic of parenting that she defended. Jane also suggested that the role of the family is distinct from the role of the school, where the family is thought to be located in the private sphere separate from the school located in the public sphere. In some interpretations, Jane may be defending her family's privacy and her role within that family unit on the basis of their self-sufficiency, which is thought not to warrant public involvement or intervention from the school. Jane's line of defence was prompted by the social policies of the KIN project, which potentially exposed the insufficiency of individual households, which in turn was seen to correspond with “irresponsible” individuals held accountable for managing them (a point of view I further

discuss in chapter 3). In consideration of autonomy as a defining characteristic of the category “parent,” a central question explored in this thesis is how did KIN challenge or reproduce neoliberal notions of personhood in relation to parenting?

To begin, in Chapter 2, I explore the connection between wider federal/provincial reforms and “community-driven” projects such as KIN to investigate in what sense the KIN project was “community-driven”. This discussion inevitably turns to center on the KIN committee’s use of social marketing that influenced their focus on child poverty. Child poverty is a common orientation in current developments of poverty policy. Policy, according to Kingfisher, is “inherently *cultural*, insofar as it is based on culturally and historically specific discourses of gender, the division of labor, public and private, and whatever other phenomena happen to be locally relevant” (original emphasis 2002:5). In other words, the discourses that serve as the foundation and justification of particular policies over others not only signify but also construct the world in meaning. While KIN’s focus was on children, parents were implied. In keeping with Kingfisher’s suggestion it follows that these particular constructions of both children and parents were cultural, as they were utilized in the development of the KIN project and also the site of contested meanings. Chapter 2 then, examines the Kids In Need project as a site of struggle over the meaning of parenting.

Shore and Wright suggest that “policy increasingly shapes the way individuals construct themselves as subjects” (1997: 4). Accordingly, I investigate the relationship between the KIN project and the community’s constructions of parents as particular kinds of subjects. To begin, I analyse constructions of parents from the perspective of the KIN committee and its supporters. While policy does create certain subject positions, policies

are also used as tools to contest subject positions, which is why Kingfisher suggests that policies “must be recognized as cultural constructions, reflecting and instantiating locally received and contested views that are always already in conversation with other...constructions” (2002:5). Depending on a subject’s positionality, policies can be used either to challenge or reinforce the status quo. Thus by analysing the project itself, the perspective of the KIN committee and the ensuing debate, I suggest that power relations and individual struggles also become exposed, revealing the “multiplicity of force relations” (Foucault 1990:92) that are to be found in this small town’s historical and cultural specificity. In accordance with Foucault’s conception of power, it becomes clear that the power relations particular to this rural community are always unstable (1990).

In Chapter 3, I focus on parents’ responses to the KIN project. Specifically, I explore how parents from this community constructed and thus mediated the category “parent,” informed by neoliberal discursive practice, the discourse of rugged individualism and conflictual racial tensions. The categories “parent” and especially “responsible parent” were key identities in this community that were then used by community members to constitute themselves in relation to notions of personhood and more specifically to individualism. Given the context of my research the notions of personhood that are dominant are particularly Western in orientation, both geographically and philosophically. Thus I explore how individualism, both in its rugged and possessive constructions, played a significant role in this community. Characteristics of independence, autonomy, and self-responsibility, prevalent to both variants of individualism, were most pertinent to my research focused on constructions of parents in this rural setting. As Kingfisher suggests “conceptions of personhood entail conceptions

of nonpersonhood” (Kingfisher 2002:20). In this rural context, conceptions of “good,” or “responsible” parents entailed conceptions of “bad,” or “irresponsible” parents. These distinctions made between the categories were articulated in terms of neoliberal notions of personhood and were facilitated, in part, by the KIN project.

In Chapter 4, I analyse the controversy generated by KIN as a form of governance, as parents in general and mothers in particular monitored their actions in accordance with neoliberal notions of personhood, which emphasized their autonomy and a gendered division of labor that is connected with particular neoconservative constructions of the family. Given the centrality of the discourses of neoliberalism and neoconservatism to this thesis, I will briefly explain their relationship, and their points of both convergence and divergence.

As Brodie states, “at the heart of the new governing philosophy (of neoliberalism) is a tidal shift away from notions of collective values and shared fates to those of family and individual responsibility” (2002:107). In the instance of Brodie’s work centered on the Canadian context (2002), neoconservative constructions of the family are spoken of in terms of neoliberalism. However, given the closer political affiliation historically between western Canada, especially Alberta, and the U.S. (Rovinsky 1998; Hanson 2001), I draw on Goode’s work (2002) on neoconservative constructions of the family to suggest that neoconservative “family values” are U.S. imports that overlap with and are incorporated into neoliberalism in the western Canadian context. Although the family values originating in the U.S context as neoconservatism have been incorporated into the Canadian context under neoliberalism it is appropriate to acknowledge the genesis and

resulting amalgamation of both of these historically specific family values in recognition of Fort Macleod's geographic location.

Both neoconservatism and neoliberalism, as post-Keynesian governing philosophies, converge on the ideal of autonomous, self-sufficient households. However, their earlier historical counter-parts, conservatism and liberalism have diverged in their orientation to this ideal. In relation to their historical distinction, neoconservatism places greater emphasis on the *tradition* of patriarchal family values supported by a gendered division of labor (Rovinsky 1998). Families within the neoconservative model are "seen as repositories of morality" (Goode 2002:80) where parents (plural), care for their children through the traditional gendered division of labor in which males act as primary breadwinners and females act as the primary homemakers. It is also a class-based notion. As Goode acknowledges, there is "a major contradiction between the (neoconservative) discursive constructions of the ideal family with a male provider and female caretaker and the material realities of two income households" (2002: 74).

In contrast with the neoconservative rigid, gendered division of labor, neoliberalism emphasizes de-gendered able-bodied workers, *liberated* by their work, as the means to achieving autonomous households. In other words, neoliberalism is characterized by making workers instead of supporting mothers (Goode 2002:65). Single mothers who are increasingly required to work because "only paid labor which produces market commodities is valued" (Goode 2002: 74), expose the contradiction between neoconservative constructions of the traditional family and neoliberal notions of the de-gendered able-bodied worker. For, the employment of single mothers' outside the home can interfere in the care given and time had with their children. As a result, single or lone

mothers are often perceived and presented as a threat to the stability falsely associated with traditional gender roles and the traditional family (Lister 2002).

In consideration of the neoconservative constructions of the family and the potential benefits of the KIN project experienced by lone parent households, more vulnerable to poverty, this thesis explores whether the KIN project contributed to or challenged these constructions. In relation to this last point, my central question is how did KIN dispose of and arrange parents and their families?

My focus here is on the different ways community members deployed the universal snack program. In this discussion I explore why parents were opposed to the initial universality of the KIN project in relation to issues of race, class and gender to suggest that universal programs challenge the boundaries dividing certain groups of people. In contrast, targeted programs are thought to protect the liberties that are connected with and persist within the private sphere. For, certain persons are protected from intervention, while those targeted are so because they lack specific aforementioned traits and characteristics i.e., independence, self-responsibility, and autonomy.

I draw on Fraser and Gordon's (1992) discussion of charity versus contract to acknowledge the different statuses of the persons constituted by either exchange. This discussion is significant insofar as universal programs can display aspects of both contract and charity, which was reflected in the various ways community members deployed the project. In large part community members differently positioned deployed the program either by defining their own children's participation in terms of contract exchange through donating or volunteering, or opting their children out of the project to define the participation of others in the project as charity. In this discussion, I explore the

ways that mothers, acting as the community's "moral guardians," protected and reinforced notions of the autonomy that are historically rooted in social contract theory, and the public/private divide.

Given that neoliberalism is the dominant discourse and thus central to my analysis, in chapter 5 I conclude by acknowledging the grip it has on this rural community. However, in this discussion I also recognize the possibility of alternatives, and explore how these alternatives were able to co-exist with neoliberalism. There has been a history of the "preservation of children," which is connected with constituting the family as a mechanism of governmentality (Donzelot 1979: 9), and neoliberalism is no exception in this history, but rather its restoration and refinement. I argue that neoliberalism and the alternative that KIN offered overlapped on the issue of the family. In both frameworks the family was significant even if it was conceived of differently. Neoliberalism emphasizes neoconservative constructions of the family and correspondingly its responsibility, while the KIN approach emphasized relations of kinship that extend beyond the nuclear family.

Thus, while in large part this thesis explores the possible dangers and drawbacks of the KINship alternative, which focused on child poverty, I also want to acknowledge that neoliberalism is not uncontested. There are a number of contradictory spaces, which act as entry points for intervention where neoliberalism could be challenged and contested.

Ch. 2 Kids In Need (KIN): A Community-Driven Project?

While policy does create certain subject positions, policies are also used as tools to contest subject positions. In this chapter, I investigate the subject positions created by the KIN project by outlining KIN's objectives and how those objectives were achieved by their use of social marketing. To begin I explore how KIN, a "community-driven" project, was initiated, which I argue was correlated with the wider federal and provincial context in general and with the policy of decentralization in particular. When analysed from a position of externality, "community-driven" projects are examples of neoliberal governmentality, in accordance with Foucault's suggestion that:

It is a question not of imposing law on men, but of disposing things: that is to say, of employing tactics rather than laws, and even of using laws themselves as tactics- to arrange things in such a way that, through a certain number of means, such and such ends may be achieved (Foucault 1991:95).

By not directly infringing on individual rights, but by arranging individuals non-intrusively, individual freedom and liberty is thought to be protected. A related question to Foucault's suggestion is, how did KIN dispose of and arrange parents in relation to their families and their communities? Even if children were the focus of the KIN project, their parents were implied by association. What are the implications of this project for parents variously positioned in this community? Before exploring the consequences of this approach to poverty in their community, I speak first of how the KIN project commenced.

Chinook Health Region (CHR)

As already mentioned, in the fall of 2001 employees from population health or community development from CHR spearhead a child poverty initiative in the

community of Fort Macleod. To begin, I provide an overview of CHR and its vision for health service in the region. CHR outlines its vision as follows:

Vision- one which residents of the Region have adopted healthy behaviours and appropriately utilized the health resources of the Region, where individuals, families and communities are valued for their contribution to improving the health of the population and environment, and where equity in health status exists between communities (Chinook Health Region annual report 2001:6).

Implied in CHR's vision statement is a partnership between CHR and individuals, families, and communities, whose contributions to healthy behaviours are valued. A CHR employee described this partnership with this following analogy: "we get the train on the rails and work to get it moving. Ideally more and more people get on the train and it keeps going to a point where eventually we can get off and it proceeds without us" (03/09/04). Another CHR representative added that "we believe that in the long-run community-driven approaches are sustainable and promote real change, whereas top-down approaches are not sustainable and changes are only short term" (03/09/04). The objective of CHR, then, is to mobilize people and communities.

The CHR supports community-driven projects both in philosophy and monetarily. In reporting about the success of the programs devised to increase access to physical activity and nutritious foods to students, the CHR annual report states that "many of the schools who received funding last year, found so much benefit that they found ways to keep their projects going and some developed new projects and applied for new grants" (Chinook Health Region 2001:12). In what follows, I argue that while the KIN project was "the train" in the community of Fort Macleod, the KIN committee was perceived to be partners in CHR's endeavour to promote healthy behaviours, especially among low-income families.

In the fall of 2001 KIN came into being following a number of meetings held between key community stakeholders such as education and health professionals, as well as volunteers. They discussed and prioritized issues relating to their community, such as the community's 21% child poverty rate. Once issues confronting their community were prioritized, food security became noted as the most pressing issue in relation to healthy child development. As a result, community members involved decided to put together a project. The team of community members eventually formed a committee and referred to the project as Kids In Need (KIN). Before speaking of the objectives of the project, I will distinguish between KIN committee members, supporters, volunteers and participants.

Membership to the KIN committee was open to community members and other interested individuals who "support action on child poverty and wish to contribute positively to the project" (original emphasis, KIN newsletter September 2002, unpublished document). The KIN committee included the team of community members that attended the monthly meetings to make decisions pertaining to the project. As with any committee, membership fluctuated, but there was a core of about ten individuals consistently working with the project; all of them were women. KIN supporters included in general community members who expressed their approval of the KIN project's universal snack program. Presumably, included in this category was the core KIN committee, but not necessarily all those in attendance for the KIN meetings, as a few mothers in attendance vocalized their disapproval of the project. While some volunteers also sat on the KIN committee, many of the volunteers, who were affiliated with one of the denominations in town, chose to limit their involvement to the volunteer activities of the breakfast program (outlined in chapter one). Even though many of the volunteers

expressed their support of the project, there were nevertheless a couple who did not entirely support the project's universality as they questioned the necessity of in-school feeding programs (as already mentioned in chapter one). The KIN participants refer to the children and their families who participated in the programs the KIN project offered, such as the universal snack program and/or the breakfast and lunch programs. It is these programs and the KIN agenda that serve as my next focus.

First on the KIN committee's agenda was the issue of how best to implement a feeding program in their community and as already mentioned the in-school universal snack program was decided on. KIN's mission and vision statements were as follows:

Mission- The Fort Macleod KIN Project is a group of individuals, groups, and agencies working to promote the healthy growth and development of all children in Fort Macleod and Area including addressing the effects of child poverty. Through collaboration and partnership, KIN members work to initiate programs and activities that address the needs of children affected as well as advocate for public policy that will positively impact child poverty and its effects. KIN will work with/or enhance existing community resources and capacities wherever possible (KIN newsletter September 2002, unpublished document).

Vision- ALL children in Fort Macleod and area have equal access to programs, services and conditions necessary for healthy growth and development (KIN newsletter September 2002, original emphasis, unpublished document).

A central tension that runs through the project itself and the debate concerns the KIN project's targeted group. On the one hand, KIN seemed to be a project that was for the benefit of "ALL children," which corresponded with their universal snack program. On the other hand KIN addressed the specific needs of children affected by child poverty, and was thus targeted as opposed to universal. (I revisit this issue in chapters 3 and 4.) Suffice it to say that a reading of the vision and mission statement taken together indicates that the KIN committee was aware of the inequalities that persist in the community, which may also affect access to health resources. An element of KIN's

mission, then, is activism, as they “advocate for public policy that will positively impact child poverty and its effects”.

Many of the teachers and school staff were among those who strongly felt that the universal snack program was the most appropriate means of implementing this project. At this time, the KIN committee began fundraising in the community; Health Canada funding was also applied for. Although the onus was on the municipality to organize and sustain this project, there was some financial support from other levels of government. The application to Health Canada was successful and the KIN project received federal support from Health Canada Diabetes Prevention and Promotion Fund with, however, the stipulations that monies were to be spent on the KIN coordinators’ salaries, and kitchen supplies such as Tupperware and utensils, as opposed to food.

This last point illustrates two important points. First, it is testament of neoliberal philosophies of government that do not want to get into the business of providing for the basic needs of individuals, i.e. food provisioning, as such assistance is thought to disempower individuals, thus interfering in their autonomy. Rather, neoliberal philosophies of government approve of providing the financial support for positions of employment responsible for a program that provides food provisioning. In other words, responsibility is shifted down from the single center at the federal level to smaller units such as the community and the KIN committee. Second, the financial stipulations nevertheless demonstrate the direct influence the federal government has on “community-driven” project in general and the KIN project in particular. As it is community members applying for such grants, they represent the link between their community and the government-funding agency, which is significant because in order to be considered for

funding, the proposed project must be compatible with the conditions of the funding organization. Although the government-funding agency is not necessarily policing the community, to secure funding the community organization must govern themselves accordingly, i.e., in this case focus on prevention, and demonstrate the project's accountability through quarterly reports.

While community-driven projects respond to community needs, such as Fort Macleod's 21% child poverty rate, it is also the case that "community-driven" projects serve an external function, centered on community responsibility. The title "community-driven" thus disguises the relationship between individual communities and the various levels of government. In consideration of the devolution of responsibility that is characteristic of decentralization, "community-driven" projects conceal the increased pressure on communities to address their own needs derived from other levels of government, making it questionable whether the community generated these projects in the first place.

While policy in general is important to local power relations, it is also always embedded in and makes reference to wider relations of power. In 2001, CHR experienced some financial shortfalls because the Region is funded on the basis of population numbers. Population numbers within the Region were growing slower than the population numbers outside of the Region. Consequently, the CHR board made recommendations to "support the inclusion of health promotion and preventative strategies as areas of emphasis in the development of all services and programs that improve health" (Chinook Health Region 2002:50). Prevention is one of CHR's approaches to the sustainability of health care in this Region because it is correlated with

a reduction in costs to the health care system. The KIN project was in accordance with CHR's recommendation, as its focus was the healthy development of children, especially those from low-income families. Low-income families potentially place more burdens on a health care system that was also being threatened by neoliberal provincial policies and cutbacks in social spending. It is these wider relations of power that I now address. How are "community-driven" projects such as KIN a response to the wider federal/provincial context and the policies such as CHST?

Neoliberalism

Given the neoliberal economic trends that result in the privatization of needs, community-driven projects reflect what Brodie terms "decentralization," characterized by a transfer of "power, responsibility, and accountability from a single center to smaller units" (Brodie 2002:103). Communities, the site of community-driven projects, can constitute one such smaller unit. Neoliberal forms of governance privatize needs where individuals and communities are perceived to act independently of (but in response to) the other levels of government. Therefore, community-driven projects serve an external function because they manifest the devolution of responsibility to the community that relies heavily on volunteerism. By addressing needs within the community, presumably both the federal and provincial governments have less responsibility. It is thus important to recognize the external context that has in part brought about community-driven projects, such as federal and provincial neoliberal reforms that leave communities fending for themselves and health regions deploying tactics to keep their populace healthy and out of their care. In this sense the KIN project was simultaneously a

development at the instigation of indirect government (CHR) and a response to the fallouts of neoliberalism that threatened to make the poor poorer.

Yet, this decentralization is not without friction at the community level, for reasons related to notions of responsibility. While social cutbacks at the level of federal and provincial government devolve more responsibility to individual communities, members of the community engage in a similar conversation debating whether these responsibilities belong to the government, community, or the individual (Kingfisher 2002:16). Thus tensions persist at the community level as to whether community-driven projects are the right approach. First, there is the question of whether this is the sole responsibility of the community or whether the federal and provincial governments should aid them. Second, as a result of the predominance of neoliberalism, community members also question whether they should be addressing the *individual* needs of other community members. In other words, in accordance with this line of thinking, individuals and not their communities are to be responsible for their own needs.

I focus on the KIN project, then, as a mechanism facilitating self-governance at the individual level. It is useful in this regard to think of KIN in terms of its “contractual implications,” which “involve offering individuals and collectivities active involvement in action to resolve the kind of issues hitherto held to be the responsibility of authorized governmental agencies” (Burchell 1996:29). Although KIN, perceived as a community-driven project, arguably gives the community members a greater voice in the policies regarding their own community, this greater voice is accompanied by greater responsibility at both the community and thus (as becomes apparent in the following chapter) at the individual level. Neoliberalism in the federal and provincial contexts thus

informs popular belief and local practices, especially notions about responsibility at the municipal and community levels. I am suggesting that the federal and provincial ends aimed for by community-driven projects would be more autonomous communities,¹ which presumably correlates internally with more autonomous community members.

However, although I have acknowledged the external function of “community-driven” project, KIN committee members were not necessarily conscious of the implicit relationship between the internal and external function of their community projects. In other words, they were not aware that while they were resisting certain power relations, they were unknowingly stepping into others (Abu-Lughod 1990). In this instance, although KIN, which also included individuals employed in neither health nor education professions, was largely motivated to address poverty and inequalities, they simultaneously served as part of the neoliberal project to privatize needs. I do not intend to imply that the objectives of KIN committee members were to specifically impact the level of self-governance or to permit the federal and provincial government to neglect its populace; rather, their concerns were the immediate social issue of poverty and the resulting social exclusion. Nevertheless, as becomes clearer in Chapter 3, community members utilized the project to facilitate the purpose of self-government to involve greater self-responsibility, which supports the relationship between the various levels of the “art of government” (Foucault 1991:91).

A central question to ask is how does a social policy devised by community members to address the effects of neoliberal fallouts and federal/provincial welfare

¹ KIN committee members informed me that when a “Canada Feed the Children Campaign” came canvassing in Fort Macleod, community members responded by not donating because “we have our own programs here in Fort Macleod” (02/19/04), illustrating the pride community members have for their town’s autonomy.

reforms, develop into a mechanism of self-governance at the community level? Before addressing this question directly, I make a few observations about the peculiarity of poverty activism. Tactics deployed by activists are, to a degree, constrained by their cultural milieu, which may in part explain why self-government, an inherent element of neoliberalism, was one of the outcomes of KIN.

Child Poverty

We are determined to help families break out of the poverty trap. To reverse the cycle of dependency. To help parents realize their hopes and their dreams for their children. We cannot afford the cost, moral, human and economic, of child poverty” (Prime Minister’s response to Speech from the Throne, September 2001 cited in Campaign 2000 2003).

It is significant that the Prime Minister suggested that we end the “cycle of dependency” when speaking about assisting families in breaking out of the poverty trap. Fraser and Gordon note that following the emergence of post-industrial society “dependency” became “contested if not simply negative” (1997:135). Individual irresponsibility, weakness and immaturity, become the sources of “dependency” that incriminate an individual’s character as opposed to the social relations in which they are embedded (Fraser and Gordon 1997). Children, however, are the exception, as their dependency does not carry negative connotations. While the Prime Minister suggests we help families break out of the poverty trap, the resolutions to this problem are left open to interpretation. Brodie suggests that the “dependency metaphor recommends particular policy responses and not others” (2002:107). In this local context, not dissimilar from the national context, policy devised to assist low-income families focused on child poverty in those attempts. I now look at the reasons why in relation to the use of social marketing.

Social Marketing

Weinreich suggests that community-based organizations and “street level” practitioners are increasingly becoming familiar with social marketing (1999:3). Indeed, “social marketing”² were buzzwords among KIN committee members. In relation to social marketing, KIN committee members often spoke of community “buy-in,” which refers to those element of a social policy or program that community members would be supportive of that are then highlighted by social marketers. In a conversation focused on the future of the KIN project, one KIN committee member stated that “in terms of community, where is where you really want your impact, you’ve got to have community buy-in” (Carla 12/16/02). During the last week of my research this concern for community buy-in influenced the committee to change the title to Kids First, which is more positive and hopeful than Kids In Need, having negative connotations of neediness.

A number of KIN committee members stated that successful social marketing requires a personal story or a particular face behind the policy³. When asked why the focus of KIN was on children one of the committee members stated that it is an instance of:

People wanting to blame the victim and so if we just say poverty they will equate it with Bernie on the street and just shut down emotionally. However, if you present it in a context of a child, assumingly... we all have responsibility for nurturing and seeing that our children or child population grows and develops well (Tori 02/23/03).

² Weinreich suggests that a successful “social marketing program focuses on the consumer; all of its elements are based on the wants and needs of its target audience rather than on what the organization happens to be ‘selling,’” such as a community-driven program (1999:8). KIN committee members suggested that “child poverty” was their community’s buy-in.

³ There were differences of opinion among KIN members whether the message given should be one that was hopeful, or one that suggested the harsh reality of child poverty. Most of them, however, recognized that both messages were valuable in their appropriate contexts.

Tori's comment implies that stories of children were more successful in pulling at the heartstrings of their audiences, and as a result were more successfully defined to be the community's responsibility, and hence, worthy of a community-driven project⁴.

Members of town expressed similar sentiments. For instance, one father stated that "it's the community's responsibility to be vigilant and to be able to assess situations and see children that need whatever kind of support, cause it's the community that raises the child" (John 03/26/03). There were segments of this community, then, that were "sold" on the idea that the community raises a child, as proposed in the social marketing devices of KIN.

In dealing with the issue of poverty, "child poverty" is, as Tori suggested, "where they're at" (02/23/03). She was referring to the community at large and then questioned, "How can you berate helping children get out of a rut and become functional adults?" (02/23/03). Tori's comments highlight an assumption that children hold the potential to become functioning adults even though they are currently in "need" and dependent. The Kids In Need title was, then, in some interpretations, appropriate. Constructions of children as innocent and in need are increasingly popular within poverty activism and work, demonstrated by the initial project title, Kids In Need and the eventual title Kids First. Both titles illustrate that discourse makes it permissible to speak of certain issues to the neglect of others, such as family or adult poverty. Social marketing operates by encouraging particular audiences to "buy-in" on the issue that is being marketed and thus

⁴ Interestingly, however, as I discuss in the next two chapters, there is a power struggle between parents and drivers of the KIN project for the authority to determine what the needs of children are and for the position to address those needs defined as legitimate.

also appeals to the dominant discourse, which in this instance leaves room, nevertheless limited, to discuss child poverty.

While children are conceivably innocent, parents become responsible for their children and their children's manifested potential. For as Carla, a mother and KIN committee member stated, family circumstances are "not of the making of children" (12/16/02). Rather, as often remarked by community members, "children are victims". In some interpretations children's dependency and neediness were perceived to be the outcome of "poor parenting," or "bad" choices made by parents.

Therefore, there are problematic implications of approaching poverty with an orientation focused on children in implementing social programs. KIN educated the community on child poverty. However, given the prevalence of neoliberalism and the discourse of rugged individualism, illustrated by statements that individuals are responsible for their individual circumstances, KIN committee members could not openly discuss the structural causes of poverty⁵ inflicted upon the parents of these children, as such discussions would not be compatible with the community's buy-in. As a result, "children," in isolation from their family circumstances and communities, became one of the few categories still legitimately identified as the "deserving" poor. Thus while the social marketing tactics used by KIN served to inform and educate the community on the reality that there are those community members without equal access to the resources crucial to their children's healthy development, I believe that their use of social marketing also accommodated pre-existing notions of poverty and parenting within their

⁵ Among KIN committee members Alberta's insufficient minimum wage was a topic of discussion, but it was kept separate from their presentation of child poverty, as they did not want to further the discussion on parents, who were all too often the center of debate.

local meaning system. In order to better understand this, this next section focuses on how those supportive of the KIN project and the KIN committee constructed the category “parent” in the community.

“Children Are Having Children” (John 03/26/03)

Procacci notes that there is a history in the West of “infantilization of the poor and valorization of childhood as a vehicle for socialization: the two operations go together as technical supports for an immense enterprise of permanent educability” (1991:166).

Although the focus of KIN was on the children of the community, indirectly parents were often made reference to as lacking the appropriate life skills and education. Many of those supportive of the KIN project spoke of parents failing to exhibit these life skills as themselves children. In his account of poverty in general and hungry children in particular, one father stated that “children are having children”. He further explained that:

I’m not talking only physical children, but emotionally, ah, in terms of responsibility and maturity they are only children and they are raising another generation and subsequently they become dependent on one or more of the government assistance (John 03/26/03).

While this father was supportive of the KIN project’s attempts to feed children, his comment highlighted a number of interesting points concerning perceptions of parents. First, he suggested that parents, unable to support their children on their own, are children themselves. He also implied that parents and adults are defined in relation to their maturity and responsibilities. If children are irresponsible and immature, parents are to be responsible and mature. Without evidence of either characteristic the individual is constituted as being a child, which is why this father suggested that “people should have

to take a test before they, for some you can make them qualify to have children” (John 03/26/03). In other words, if individuals fail to demonstrate the adult-appropriate characteristics such as responsibility, closely connected to autonomy, then ideally they should not be permitted to have children because they could not manage a household sufficiently. If they are not autonomous on their own behalf then they are less likely to be autonomous on their child’s behalf, which would increase the burden on “taxpayers”.

Autonomy, as the management of a self-sufficient household, plays a significant role in neoliberal and rugged individual constructions of personhood. The full, or adult personhood of parents unable to support their own children is questioned, making it convenient to speak of them as children. From the perspective of KIN supporters, constructions of “irresponsible parents” as “children” then permitted those parents to assistance with their parental responsibilities. But given the juxtaposition of adult-child, their personhood is devalued insofar as it is perceived to be underdeveloped.

Some of those supportive of the KIN project suggested that poor parenting or lack of parenting was the cause of poverty and specifically generational poverty. For instance, one mother explained her support of the project in terms of it ending generational poverty.

I really, I agree that it would probably be the majority of them (meaning Natives). But they’re the ones that need the help. That’s where that cycle needs to stop. A lot of these Native children are just going to grow to be like their parents if they don’t have any help. And then you are going to sit there and say well, they’re just Indians. Well, they can’t do anything about it. There’s just Indians. Well, excuse me. If I grew up like that, I would be like that too if I didn’t have any opportunity to change myself (04/01/03).

In addition to acknowledging some of the racial tensions and stereotypes, Sherry's comment highlighted a number of interesting points. While Sherry implied that individuals are works in progress, requiring the right opportunity to "change" themselves, she was sympathetic to elements of this child's situation that restricted his or her development. However, she saw this restriction in terms of the parental guidance or rather lack of guidance they have received. The root problem of the situation is the poor parenting of "innocent" children, which then diminishes children's abilities to develop into good citizens. The title, Kids In Need, highlights the neediness of children coming from irresponsible or childlike parents, where generational poverty and neediness are caused by idiosyncratic behavioural patterns. As one mother who occasionally sat on the KIN committee explained, "half the battle would be to educate these parents" (Sherry 04/01/03). If parents are constructed as children themselves, they may still have the potential to become functioning and contributing members of society.

KIN supporters thus have not lost hope in the children and their parents living in poverty. Rather, there is optimism to varying degrees that parents in this community will reform their previous idiosyncratic behaviours to behaviours more favourable to the well-being of their children and families. "Healthy choices" were one the central predicted outcomes of the KIN project as they were also thought to be lessons extended to the parents of children participating in the project. In a conversation about the possible outcomes of the KIN project, one KIN supporter who also worked in the schools had this prediction to offer:

I think kids become more aware and I think kids go shopping with their parents and they see carrots and say "oh, can we get some carrots and can you buy some dip". I mean they'll ask for things. You know, they will say "oh we get that at school"... I imagine they (parents), if kids really

want something the parents will buy it. You know and that's a positive thing even though the parents wouldn't think of buying it... I think kids sometimes can teach parents too for those who don't know any better and some parents just don't know any better... They don't realize the reason that their health isn't good is because of what they eat (Bonnie 02/18/03).

The implication here is that low-income families are lacking the education and proper nutrition but not adequate resources, as it is assumed parents in these families have enough money to fulfill their children's requests. Furthermore, it is thought that children can impart the nutritional lesson learnt from the KIN project on their parents.

While healthy living is the central outcome of the KIN project it is directly correlated with a perceived social outcomes of the project. In a discussion about the changing dynamics of families and communities, one volunteer, Amanda stated:

It's (the KIN project) is more or less a response to the problems that they're (families of Kids-In-Need) having and everybody hopes that you'll get through this bad phase and then everything will be better and of course it's never all better, but when you look at the situation of some of these families, it's never going to be better. The only way it's going to be better is when those kids are able to make their life better and then maybe they can go back and help mom and dad... and the only way to help those kids, at least one of the ways is to feed them, so that they get their education and the rest (03/20/03).

This volunteer was more reserved in her optimism than the previous supporter, as she states, "it's never all better". However, she implied that one of the project's social outcomes is that dependency is kept within the family unit where children eventually become capable of taking care of and responsibility for their "irresponsible" parents. Implicitly Amanda's suggests that while kids-in-need are full of the potential to become functioning, responsible adults, their parents are thought to be the eventual dependents of these children. These children carry the potential to become the responsible citizens their parents failed to be, as a result of the assistance they received that reverse the improper

lessons they learnt from their parents who “don’t know any better” (Bonnie 02/18/03).

Assistance to children becomes warranted because of the anticipated social outcomes that eventually keep dependency contained within the family.

“Irresponsible” parents are not seen as autonomous, as a result of their need for guidance, and hence they are lesser persons than responsible parents. Neoliberal notions of personhood define a person as independent and autonomous, which renders offering assistance to an adult nearly impossible unless this assistance is accompanied by a devaluation of his/her personhood or a returned obligation⁶. Assistance within the neoliberal framework negatively constitutes the personhood of those individual recipients. The recipient is indebted or perceived to be “irresponsible” and thus not an adult-person. (In the next chapter I further explore the depreciated status of “irresponsible parents,” whose actions were, by some of those opposed to the project, referred to as criminal). In some interpretations, this project underscored the lessened personhood of these parents. Apparent to community members both for and against the KIN project was the parental devaluation that accompanies assistance. In the following vignette, Danielle describes her and her husband’s reactions to the discovery of their children’s participation in the KIN breakfast program.

My brother came. He says “I volunteered at the school today. Chris and Jamie (this mother’s children) came and had breakfast”. I looked at him, they what? SHIT! And my husband, Kevin looks at me and he says, “oh for shit sake” and this is what I mean... right off the top the first thing we thought was what are so-and-so, and so-and-so, and so-and-so, and so-and-so going to think (04/10/03).

⁶ Within the neoliberal framework, assistance previously defined as charity, has been redesigned to function as a contract, where recipients are required to fulfill dictated obligations in return for their assistance (Fraser and Gordon 1992; Goode 2002; Kingfisher 2002; Lister 2002). I revisit this issue in chapter 4.

Even though Danielle also commented that her children ate well at home, she expressed her concerns that it may appear to the wider community that her children were not provided for. Her anxiety indicated that children were seen as representatives of their families and more specifically their parents, which made the category “parent,” if done properly, a legitimate form of personhood. Even though Danielle was supportive of the project and was a KIN committee member, she realized that children seen to be “in need,” or children who participated in a project for kids in need, reflected badly upon the parents of those children.

Parents whose children participated in the project often commented that although initially embarrassed or worried, they accepted it because they knew their children were not in need of this program because those needs were already sufficiently met. For instance, Janice, one mother supportive of the project stated, “I knew I could afford snacks...I thought, well, what a great idea” (04/30/03). If Janice’s children were not in need then she could not be accused of “parental irresponsibility” even if her children participated in the program. In other words, it was possible for parents to suggest that they were still being responsible despite their support of and their children’s participation in the project because they were financially independent. Thus, while supportive parents suggested the project might serve a valuable function for the children of other parents, they simultaneously downplayed their own dependency on the program. Instead, a number of parents acknowledged the stigma associated with poverty and suggested the importance of their children’s participation that would otherwise result in greater stigmatization and the “singling out” of those children in need. These parents would often add to their supportive comments, “my kids aren’t in need,” (Louise 04/10/03) enabling

them to manage their identities in relation to community norms and their child's participation within the project.

While the tactics used by KIN acknowledged the "inappropriateness" of discussing adult poverty, I suggest that KIN activists, including committee members and other town supporters, also attempted to suppress negative judgements against the parents of the children in need. Their comments either focused on the community's children, or KIN supporters would make remarks concerning parents as follows, "They (parents) have their hearts in the right places" (Sherry 04/01/03). Furthermore, in offering possible causes of hungry children at school one teacher supportive of KIN stated that:

I just think that a lot of parents don't, they just don't understand that and it's not like they're doing something wrong on purpose...you know they really are a good parent, but they just, I think there is a lot of parents out in that situation but they really don't understand that their child is hungry and I think if they did have a better understanding then, you know, it wouldn't be a problem" (Elizabeth 03/25/03).

Even though KIN's approach attempted to challenge the dominant discourse, it unintentionally reproduced it because although Elizabeth suggested they are "good parents," she still implied that their lack of understanding is the cause of the problem of hungry children. However, Elizabeth further suppressed her own negative judgement of parents of hungry children as well when she explained that she, too, had been uninformed as to what was the adequate amount of food to send to school. She stated that "I know when my son first started coming to school I was guilty of it. I would pack him a nice little lunch, he'd come home at 4 clock and he'd be just absolutely starving because he didn't have enough food" (Elizabeth 03/25/03). Her story, however, illustrates that she did learn to adequately provide for her son and, furthermore, that she had sufficient

resources to do so. In other words, Elizabeth seemed unaware or at least failed to acknowledge that structural poverty might contribute to hungry children. This point illustrates that poverty is thought to be produced at the individual level as a “choice,” even if it is an honest mistake and the result of a lack of education. Community members do not perceive poverty, in large part, to be a systemic problem, but an individual one.

As a result, addressing children’s needs holds a degree of consequences for their parents. According to one mother supportive of KIN, the solution to hungry children was to teach parents “life skills,” “like (walking them) to the grocery store and (teaching them) how to buy... a lot of bread for a dollar” (Sherry 04/01/03). Sherry implied that parents of hungry children mismanage their money, which was often suggested even by those in favour of the project. Thus where a lack of education, as opposed to insufficient income, was seen as the cause of hungry children, the solution was to offer those inadequately providing for their children more education. However, by teaching them skills and how to manage their money, these parents were also confined to make choices that demonstrate these appropriate behaviours. In other words, “educated” individuals are no longer permitted an excuse for buying their children convenience store food, as opposed to bread that is more cost-efficient. Even though education is perceived to be liberating, it also serves to restrict individual choices to be more closely aligned with the standards of “rationality”.

I am not suggesting that the sole objective of KIN’s in-school feeding programs was the education of families on the healthy behaviours which potentially served CHR’s vision, as outlined above. However, the project in part focused on proper nutrition and was thus marketed to the community as an educational program. Furthermore, in

speaking with one of the central KIN committee members, Tori, I was informed that “school feeding programs, I don’t think that’s where we’re staying. We’ll do that as intervention but then we complement that with skill building, community kitchens and that’s where I see that going” (02/23/03). Tori’s comment illustrates that feeding children at school was only the first intervention, but there would be others to follow. In other words, by also addressing skill building and community kitchens she envisaged a holistic approach to addressing child poverty that also incorporated their parents in “skill building,” even if this was not headlined.

Conclusion

My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So, my position leads not to apathy but to hyper-and pessimistic activism. (Foucault cited in Dean 1999: 40).

Understandably, Tori, a KIN committee member, was excited with the prospect of addressing poverty from every angle possible in hopes of positively affecting the issue. However, if we take into consideration autonomy as a key characteristic of neoliberal notions of personhood, there appears to be tension and thus a fine line between assistance and intervention. I think this is the result in part of the social marketing strategies employed by the KIN committee. For if you devalue the personhood of parents either directly or indirectly then protecting their liberties by offering assistance as opposed to intrusive intervention cannot be upheld. Thus policy makers and subjects of policy can easily be confused as to whether efforts to address any social issue are forms of assistance or one’s of intervention. In either event, there is a relationship between policy

language, in this case social marketing with a focus on child poverty, and its constructed subjects.

Interestingly, although the focus of the project was the community's children, indirectly their parents were implied. While "good" parents within this rural context played a central role in the lives of their children, social programs such as KIN made the role of parents unable to adequately provide for their children less significant to the outcomes of their futures and thus inadvertently de-legitimated their status as autonomous heads of their households. In this rural community there is a tension between "good" parenting and parenting by physically or emotionally defined "children". Given the relational nature of both of these constructions, "parent" is a significant category either affirming or negating an individual's fully adult personhood. Assistance with one's parenting roles can be thought to be a negative intervention because it challenges autonomy, disempowering the individual, and eventually leading to greater policing. As becomes more apparent in the following chapter, individuals struggle to make the category "parent" their legitimate form of personhood by constructing themselves as autonomous and thus "good" parents in contrast to the constructed notions of "bad" parents.

Ch.3 Parents and Contested Identities

As autonomous heads of households, parents are the gatekeepers to their children and thus to the extent allowed by law mediate government intervention into their children's lives. Given that the KIN project was a response to poverty - one of the social toxins thought to compromise healthy social and emotional development- and an attempt to recognize the rights of children, it is of no surprise that it served as a site of struggle over the meaning of parenting. In this chapter I take a closer look at the power struggles between the parents of this community and the KIN committee who represented education and health professionals and other concerned community members. Foucault suggests that power is creative and not simply repressive (1990). It follows that discourse not only prohibits certain activities, but also makes other activities possible. This chapter thus explores how "responsible" parenting was made possible by the KIN project and community members' deployment of it.

The two discourses that serve as the background to this discussion are those of neoliberalism and rugged individualism. Both discourses converge on notions of autonomy, or self-reliance. Notions of autonomy within both frameworks are appealed to in attempts to deny the need for personal assistance, as well as to justify cut backs in social spending. The central question of this chapter is, what kinds of subject possibilities are created or suppressed by a program such as KIN that was implemented in a rural town where rugged individualism is prevalent, at this time in history, which is characterized by neoliberal reforms? After outlining the central power struggle of this particular town, I explore the responses of parents that largely focused on constructions

of “good” versus “bad” parents, which were most often articulated in terms of racial distinctions.

I begin with a reiteration of the controversy surrounding KIN. At one level, the title of the program, Kids In Need, informs the community of their children’s needs. In positive accounts of the project, these needs were thought to be connected with the inabilities of parents. But in negative accounts of the project these needs were thought to be connected with the (ir)responsibilities of parents and thus the project simultaneously carried the negative connotations of parents needing assistance in fulfilling their duties. In suggesting that kids are in need, the project seemed to respond to the needs that parents failed or were unable to fulfill for whatever reason. On the other hand, the acronym “KIN” works to mask previous indicators of “irresponsibility” by emphasizing kinship relations, which may in a limited sense challenge the exclusive significance of parents to their own children and instead suggest close, mutually supportive social relations wider than those of the nuclear family. KIN partly took on the nurturing role traditionally associated with parents but interestingly, at the public site of the schools. One possible interpretation of the controversy surrounding KIN could be that parents felt their parental authority in defining their children’s needs, which are thought to be ideally fulfilled in the privacy of the home, might be challenged.

Given that the program took place at the schools, there was no intervention into the home and thus families were still private and kept intact. (The significance of this will be further discussed in chapter 5). Yet, because the KIN project represented a shift in location of the provision of food from the home to the school, some parents felt their supervision over their children’s socialization was threatened. There was foundation to

this fear because from the perspective of the KIN committee, one of the positive outcomes of KIN was that it served a secondary function focused on socializing children to become contributing members of society. Tori, a KIN committee member, explained that “the school-feeding program is itself associated with kids coming to school even if it’s to survive and to have something to eat... If they learn, they’re going to graduate. If they graduate, heck, they might have a job” (02/03/03). Therefore, KIN represents a potential power struggle between parents and both education and health professionals for authority over the community’s children, specifically, over their rights and futures.

Many parents opposed to the KIN project expressed their disapproval in terms that reflected their awareness of, and participation in the power struggle against KIN committee members. The essential argument of parents was centered on their contested relationship with the government. In her description of the motives behind the KIN project, one mother, Jan, had this explanation to offer:

Part of the underlining thing...I see that the government and the health care bureaucracy wanting to...weasel their way into position, more responsibility over people (02/23/03).

It is significant that Jan mentions responsibility *over* as opposed to responsibility *for*. Jan claimed that the project’s underlining motive was not assistance, but intervention. While assistance or care is given to someone you have responsibility *for*, such as your children and family, intervention is the appropriate response to a situation you have responsibility *over*. Her use of “weasel” as a verb is also noteworthy because it carries connotations of deception, and slyness. In other words, Jan perceived the underlining actions of KIN to be a government ploy, potentially exposing not only irresponsible community members, but even those “responsible” parents through their association with a universal project,

nevertheless entitled Kids In Need. In other words, Jan expressed sentiments of neoliberal aversion to government. Another parent made similar complaints against the KIN project when he stated that:

I don't think it's the government's place to be meddling, feeding kids at school because... I think people (parents)... when they have kids, need to take responsibility to feed them (children) their selves (Barry 02/23/03).

This father implied that there was a connection between the KIN committee and "government". Although Barry's use of "government" was in relation to the state, later in this conversation he also spoke of the health care bureaucracy wanting "their bureaucracy to grow and their chiefdom to increase in size" (02/23/03). The connection he made between government and the KIN project illustrates a similar point made by Burchell that there may be:

Interconnections and continuities between different forms of government and, in particular, between local and diverse forms of government existing at the level of interpersonal relations or institutions dispersed throughout society on the one hand, and political government as the exercise of a central, unified form of State sovereignty (1996:19).

The implication here is that there may be some foundation to the suspicion of parents, like Barry, opposed to the KIN project as a form of government intervention. It is noteworthy that Barry also spoke of the responsibility parents must exhibit by feeding their children "their selves"; a responsibility that he embraced in his attempts to prevent government interventions, such as KIN. His use of "government" then also illustrated the applicability of "government" in the Foucauldian sense of the concept in so far as government is a "contact point," where:

Technologies of domination of individuals over one another have recourse to processes by which the individual acts upon himself and, conversely, ...

where techniques of the self are integrated into structures of coercion (Foucault 1989 cited in Burchell 1996: 20).

By opposing the KIN project and what he perceived to be government intervention, this parent acted upon himself and took responsibility for his own children and further suggested that every parent should take the same responsibility. In so doing, he embraced his self-governance as the autonomous head of his household, which then defined his role as a “good” parent. Self-responsibility was a means of protecting one’s autonomy of which parenthood, in this rural community, became a central expression. Community members could also protect their autonomy by denying any personal need for the project, which was common from both those opposed to and those supporters of the KIN project. In the denial of the project’s worth, Barry offered these observations: “I just can’t believe that there are kids that are so malnourished when they go to school in the morning they... can’t do their school work” (02/23/03). In addition to denying that poverty was an issue for his family and their community, Barry also suggested that this project was neither beneficial nor efficient.

There were others who vocalized concern about the “waste” that was generated by the universal element of the project, which provided snacks to all students with parental consent. Accusations of waste centered on two related points. First, it was claimed that there was an increase in the level of garbage on school property. Related to this was the claim that the KIN project duplicated a service that most parents should, or already took responsibility for. In one of the town’s family restaurants over a plate of nachos, one mother explained:

There’s a lot of food that’s just not needed...There’s a lot that’s just thrown in the garbage. There’s a lot of kids who bring snacks from home

that their parents want them to eat and they maybe say, oh gee there's better snacks there so they throw their own snacks in the garbage and eat the KIN snacks (Jan 02/23/03).

Implied by Jan's comment is the struggle for the right to provide snacks to her children that will be used and not thrown away. Waste goes against the logic of self-sufficiency. If children were throwing away their snacks from home to consume the snacks provided by the KIN project, then the self-sufficiency of parents and their household was not visible, but undermined. In response to the self-sufficiency she felt was challenged, Jan, then, distanced herself from the project by referring to KIN's snack program as wasteful.

Parents could also opt out of the project, which then demonstrated their self-sufficiency in contrast to those families participating in the project. Interestingly, many of the parents opting out of the project suggested that they were also near or below the poverty line. In her "casual anecdotal observations," one of the KIN committee members suggested that "the ones that seem to oppose it are the class right above because they seem threatened that these underlings might rise to their level," (Tori 02/23/03) which would diminish the observable outcomes of their individual self-reliance. Thus, parents opting their children out of the project have used the KIN project to emphasize their self-discipline, self-sufficiency and class that the project was seen to challenge in the first place.

As already noted, it was commonly stated that feeding children is the responsibility of parents. While we drank coffee at her kitchen table, one mother, Tamara, stated "just don't feed my kid. That's my role as a parent" (12/12/02). This mother implied that self-sufficiency is strongly correlated with constructions of parenting in this rural community. In other words, to be a parent means sufficiently providing for

and being responsible for one's children. Many of the parents opposed to KIN's universal operations perceived their children's participation in the KIN project as a hindrance to their parental responsibilities. For instance, in explanation of her concerns, one mother stated that:

I know it's best that they (hungry children) do get something, that the children get something, but that's why I pulled my kids because it was teaching my kids different eating habits than I wanted them to be taught. I wanted to teach them the healthy snack choices to make (Catherine 11/13/02).

This mother, Catherine, was concerned with the loss of authority over her children's eating habits that correlate with class distinction (Elias 1978). The KIN project challenged class distinctions insofar as it attempted to standardize eating habits among the students participating in the project. If eating habits were standardized among students, regardless of their class, then eating habits could no longer sufficiently serve as a class distinction. Catherine also expressed her desire to take exclusive responsibility for the lessons her children learnt and she argued her case based on criticism of the food that the KIN project was distributing to the students. In protecting her authority by criticizing the food content of the KIN project, Catherine also re-invoked specific eating behaviours as class distinctions. She commented earlier in this conversation that "it's not cheap to eat healthy" (11/13/02). Healthy eating is used in distinguishing classes insofar as it requires ample incomes that act as an obstacle confronting low-income families.

Instead of facilitating Catherine's responsibilities, the KIN project represented a hindrance because it undid the healthy lessons she had taught her children about "healthy snack choices". I suggest that parents relate to their children as extensions of themselves and as their private projects to be worked on. In some interpretations, the KIN project

interfered in parents' self-production, which correlated with their children's reproduction and well-being.

The criticisms of the snacks distributed by the KIN project were embedded in a struggle for parental authority. On another occasion, while making homemade antipasto, one mother recalled an instance when her son came home from school and requested a snack.

My son came home and wanted to know if he could have chocolate pudding as a snack and I said, "no you always have something nutritious when you get home from school like yoghurt or an apple"... and he said, "but we had chocolate pudding at school". That's nutritious? Like hell it is. It's full of fat and no it's not nutritious. There's an itsy bit of calcium in there. So, if you want to teach nutrition, teach nutrition (Sylvia 12/09/02).

This incident illustrates that although the KIN project was not directly intervening into the privacy of the home, indirectly KIN was experienced as intervention by parents whose children were coming home with different demands that had been influenced by the snacks provided by the KIN project. While Sylvia asserted her authority in her house, she also challenged the expertise of the education and health professionals by rhetorically questioning the nutritional value of the food offered through KIN. This struggle for authority was further fought by parents who also challenged the generalizations made about low-income families, which also served as markers of class distinctions. How parents interpreted and responded to the "educational" information concerning poverty in their community will now serve to illustrate my point.

Kids In Need: A Blanket Statement?

In a discussion about the title, Kids In Need, Jan stated that "they (the KIN committee) broad brushed all the children that's what really bothered me... we live in

poverty and we don't have these problems feeding our children" (02/23/03). Jan's statement is testament that her opposition to the KIN project is rooted in concerns with being associated with the negative connotations of poverty, particularly irresponsibility. Despite her financial poverty, then, Jan asserted her responsibility.

Also of interest is her accusation that the KIN committee members "broad brushed" the population living in poverty. This was an issue raised by a number of other parents opposed to KIN. For instance, one mother, Sylvia, stated that "there's a lot of assumptions that are made from studies that are read on children that live in poverty" (12/09/02). Some of the assumptions she referred to were that children living in poverty do not "do as well at school...(and) tend to be overweight because the poor quality of the food they eat...(and) tend not to go onto higher education" (12/09/02). Given that Sylvia also stated that she was living in poverty, it is understandable that she might take offence at these "blanket statements". In response, she urged the KIN committee to "look at the individual case as opposed to a group in society and just automatically assume that everybody that's below a certain poverty level is therefore destined not to graduate from high school" (12/09/02).

As Sylvia's comments indicated, although potentially educational, creating greater sensitivity and awareness of the issue of poverty, studies on poverty could be guilty of invoking generalizations that negatively reflect on those experiencing poverty. One possible outcome of these generalizations is the increased difficulty low-income families confront in remaining prideful while accepting assistance. One mother, despite the recent loss of her farm, explained that, "I would be ashamed to have my kid going to school hungry and eating there. I would feel like I'm not doing my job" (12/12/03).

While the acceptance of assistance negated the ideology of rugged individualism, there was pride in refusing assistance, especially when an individual was desperate.

Correspondingly, there was dishonour in not doing one's job, an element of which was the denial of the need for assistance.

Other community members also denied the need for assistance as well as the generalizations regarding the behaviours of the poor, which may have been seen to be reflective of poor choices and irresponsible behaviour. A mother of two sons, Sylvia, asserted her own responsibility, defying poverty generalizations by stating that:

We're putting away fifty dollars a month for each of them (her children). We started when they were babies. It isn't much, but by the time they're eighteen years old it should be enough to help them through school (12/09/02).

By saving money for her children's education, Sylvia worked to ensure that her children would not be included in the generalizations made by poverty studies, such as those discussed above. Parents opposed to the KIN project and its underlining generalizations most often responded with their own generalizations regarding those families who used the services of the KIN project. While some parents were opposed to blanket statements, which they feared led to stereotypes, many of them ironically invoked these stereotypes in their own constructions of "bad" parents.

"Good" versus "Bad" parents

Positive and negative constructions of parenthood were clearly mutually constitutive in this community, whose members utilized these constructions in debating their opinions of KIN. Parents, in particular, made reference to them to manage their identities in this rural community. In the previous discussion I outlined how parents

opposed to the project constructed themselves as authorities or experts of their children's well-being and healthy development by asserting their responsibility. These constructions were often in conversation and contrasted with constructions of "bad" parents, used to highlight the achievement of "good" parenting. The achievements of "good" parents hinged on their responsibility for their children and their denial of the need for assistance, which was described by a number of parents as a "choice" or "commitment". For instance, one mother stated that "once you make the commitment to being a parent you've got to make sure that you've got all the right priorities" (12/09/02). Parenting is a commitment in the sense that it is seen to be a choice accompanied by obligations and responsibilities connected with managing a self-sufficient household. Consequently, hungry children were not seen to be indicative of financial insecurity, but rather, as one mother observed, "it's poverty in the sense of poor parenting. In the sense of poor choices of how you spend your money. So, it's not because there's not money" (Tamara 12/12/02). Tamara's comment emphasized the economic choices that "bad" parents were presumed to make. In direct contrast with the achievements of "good" parents, the failures of "bad" parents were their chosen "dependencies".

Counter to the KIN committee's objectives for social inclusion, the project became associated, in particular, with the Native community. For instance, in explaining why some parents (including herself) were not supportive of the project, one mother, Tamara, stated that:

I was told it (the KIN project) was because there were so many Native students and a lot of them come hungry, but you have to think of how people in town feel about Native people (12/12/02).

Implied by Tamara's comment is the recognition that people such as herself in town, have negative feelings about "Native people". Tamara clearly highlighted the racial tensions that have influenced many of the opposed parents. She also suggested that it is hungry Native children who use the KIN project and that it is their parents who are responsible for its necessity. In this small town, community members thought behaviours particularly associated with Natives interfered in individuals' potential to be "good" parents.

Stereotypes associated with the Native community, such as addictions, dependencies, and idiosyncratic family arrangements served as the model of "bad parenting". The topic of "good" parenting thus disguised the issue of race, making it not only politically correct but legitimate to criticize the Native community on the basis of their parenting approaches. Neoliberalism as a hegemonic project has allowed for the displacement of local discourse on race by seemingly neutral concepts of responsibility and good parenting. Even some of those supportive of the project's philosophy suggested that, "a lot of these Native children are just going to grow to be like their parents if they don't have any help" (04/01/03). Not surprisingly, Native children were thought to need assistance for stereotypical reasons. In explaining that there is no excuse for not feeding one's children, one parent suggested that:

Sure they might want to bitch about not having enough money for the kids for breakfast but they will be smoking cigarettes and everything else and drinking, and playing bingo and playing the machines (Barry 02/20/03).

Just prior to this comment, Barry had suggested that the KIN project was really directed at the Native community. In this rural community, then, bingo-playing addicts and Native are conflated, and constitute "bad parents," who in turn constitute the "undeserving"

poor. While Barry constructed “bad parents” as Native bingo playing addicts, he also implied that he was a responsible parent because he does not drink, smoke or play the machines. In other words, while Barry has control over his whimsical desires and sufficiently manages his household, stereotypical Native parents do not embody self-control, which then challenges neoliberal notions of autonomy, and their parenting capabilities. If individuals lack control over their lives, or have addictions, then the assumption was that those individuals could not be in control of their household.

The kind of behaviour described above was seen to interfere in or diminish Native parenting capabilities. Although as one mother, Catherine, suggested, “some of them (Natives) are just wonderful people or a lot of them are just wonderful people,” she goes on to say that “but they (Natives)...possibly aren’t... [the] quality care-givers that they could be” (11/13/02). In addition to her attempts not to appear racist, Catherine highlighted a prevalent assumption that children from Native families did not receive adequate care from their caregivers. However, in suggesting Native parents “could be” quality caregivers she acknowledged the individual choice involved in the matter. By alluding to the *potential* of Native parents, Catherine also implied, similar to notions of the modern individual (Weber 1958), that Natives are projects to be worked on. In contrast to the modern individual, however, it was assumed that Native parents were not taking an active role in their self-production for one central reason that is particularly relevant to perceptions of the KIN project as well as reflective of neoliberal and rugged individual notions of assistance: disempowerment.

Empowerment, as the inverse of disempowerment plays a central role in justifications of welfare reform (Rose 1996), where welfare is criticized for

disempowering as opposed to empowering recipients. In his discussion on the array of measures neoliberal political regimes enacted to reduce benefits, Rose acknowledges the dependency culture that constructs recipients of assistance as:

... people whose self-responsibility and self-fulfilling aspirations have been deformed by the dependency culture, whose efforts at self-advancement have been frustrated for so long that they suffer from “learned helplessness,” whose self-esteem has been destroyed. And, it thus follows, that they are to be assisted not through the ministrations of solicitous experts proffering support and benefit cheques, but through their engagement in a whole arrange of programs for their ethical reconstruction as active citizens... ” (1996:59).

Similarly in the rural context of Fort Macleod, recipients of assistance- stereotypically the Native community - were thought to be deformed by their culture of dependency and thus in need of programs that were empowering in contrast to the KIN project. In a discussion focused on alternative ways to assist the poor of the community, one community member had this suggestion to offer:

One of the keys to eliminating poverty is empowering people and working with them to do it themselves...but trying to provide some of the tools... they have to decide themselves what they are going to do with it and how they are going to discipline themselves (Kristy 04/10/03).

Kristy’s emphasis was on self-work and the choices individuals must make themselves. She gave less credence to social assistance and more weight to individual effort, or “discipline”. Although directed at the KIN project and the community’s responses to poverty, Kristy’s comments were also generally embedded in a neoliberal and rugged individual critique of assistance. Within both neoliberal and rugged individual frameworks, assistance in general (and the KIN project in particular), were seen to disempower, or foster Native dependency. Many of the parents opposed to KIN felt that providing food for children at school further enabled the dysfunctional behaviours

associated with the Native community that were thought to generate the community's twenty-one percent child poverty rate in the first place. The KIN project was not only seen to buttress irresponsibility, but some community members feared KIN would create greater irresponsibility and dependency on government. In discussing causes of poverty and this community's dynamics, one mother had these observations to offer:

The easier it is to get welfare, the easier it is to...not have a job. You know, there's so many more handouts now instead of people trying to try (Catherine 11/13/02).

Catherine implied there is a correlation between assistance or welfare and people's lack of effort or irresponsibility for their financial well-being. In this community "hand-outs" were often seen to be counter-productive to responsibility. Later in this conversation, Catherine qualified more specifically the recipients of assistance by stating that "there's a lot of easy hand-outs for them" (Sylvia 11/13/02), in reference to the Native community. The reference to "easy hand-outs" is significant because, as already mentioned, within neoliberal discourse, assistance is seen to foster "dependency" (Goode 2002; Kingfisher 2002; Rose 1996).

Accordingly, those who accepted assistance were irresponsible, and responsible parents would deny the need for assistance because it also demonstrated their self-control. Implicitly Sylvia's comment suggested that self-discipline was jeopardized by the acceptance of "easy-hand-outs" because the individual cheated him or herself out of the lessons of discipline and hard work. Easy "hand-outs" were thought to nullify individual effort, and inhibit the competition that is inherent to both neoliberalism and rugged individualism. If assistance was offered and accepted in pursuit of greater equality then the value of self-reliance and its resulting competition would be threatened.

But as Hsu suggests, “the rugged individual must advance or regress according to his own efforts” (1983: 4-5), explaining therefore why in a community where rugged individualism was prevalent community members were strongly opposed to KIN’s assistance and also criticized the Native community presumed to be the intended recipients of that assistance. What is interesting is that without making assistance optional, the parents could not demonstrate their self-control and their responsibility by opting out of the project. Thus the project, as optional as opposed to universal, facilitated their constructions of parenting as an exercise in self-reliance (and teaching self-discipline).

Many of those parents who opted their children out of the project did not believe that this exercise in self-reliance was enough to teach other parents the lessons of responsibility. Rather, they demanded the greater policing of those parents seen to be “irresponsible”. Tamara disagreed with the universal element of the KIN project because as she stated “I wish social services would step in because I see not feeding your child as a form of child abuse” (02/23/02). Tamara called for intervention because in contrast with “good parents,” “bad parents” have neglected their responsibilities and thus were perceived to be criminals lacking the right to protected liberties. In a conversation we had in her home, Sylvia offered these following suggestions to the KIN project:

There has to be some connection between the KIN program and people with social services. They should have a working relationship so that if there are children who are turning up all the time they can turn over a list of names and phone numbers and social services can investigate why (12/9/02).

Sylvia’s comments revealed why the KIN committee wanted their programs to be universal. Parents whose children were the potential recipients of the assistance offered

by the KIN project took it upon themselves to police participants and non-participants through their vocal opposition, which worked to stigmatize the project and its participants. Yet, these parents were largely unsatisfied and thus suggested that there should be even greater policing of parents insufficiently providing for their children. In other words, these “irresponsible parents” should lose their liberal rights in addition to their rights as gatekeepers or as autonomous heads of their households.

Correspondingly, many opposed parents to the KIN project suggested that the money could be better spent and asked “if this is really poverty and these children are being neglected then why isn’t social services involved?” (Jan 02/26/03). These discussions centered on the policing of “irresponsible parents” illustrated that in reality neoliberalism fails to grant every individual liberal rights and many individuals, failing to fulfill the ideal characteristics, are stripped of their liberties. By Jan’s account the KIN project was neither effective nor warranted because it did not strictly target those “irresponsible parents” whose liberties should not be protected. As a result, the KIN project did not reinforce the barrier separating this community’s “persons” from “non-persons,” which in this rural context paralleled the categories “non-Natives” and “Natives”.

“Responsible” parents, calling for greater policing of those “irresponsible” parents, have defined the government’s role as taking away the rights from “bad” parents, which was thought to be correlated with their protected rights as “good” parents. There is a tension between perceptions of the project infringing on the liberties of individual “persons” and not adequately targeting those individuals the community deems to be “non-persons,” often in relation to race. It would appear that there is a common pattern

where “responsible” individuals perceive their liberties to be protected on the condition that others are policed. In this particular context, the liberties of parents as heads of households were reliant on the identification of parents thought to be unfit heads of households.

Conclusion

While “bad” parents were stigmatized and subject to community policing, constructions of responsibility also restricted the actions and behaviours of “good parents” to what was constructed as responsible behaviour, i.e., feeding and socializing children and having the discipline to put one’s children first regardless of one’s personal financial circumstances. In other words, “good” parents accommodate neoliberal discourse by exercising autonomy even if they are financially struggling, because “even those in poverty, the parents can afford to feed their kids breakfast” (Barry 02/20/03). Thus if one practices “good parenting” by first and foremost denying any need for assistance, then the structural elements that increasingly make parenting difficult, such as the greater demands made by work, a poor community job market, or fewer social programs, are overlooked and tolerated.

It is useful to draw on Nikolas Rose here who suggests that, in a neoliberal framework, “Family life, parenting, even work itself are no longer to be constraints upon freedom and autonomy: they are to be essential elements in the path to self-fulfillment” (Rose 1998:79). “Good” parenting and work, in general, are forms of existence and expressions of autonomy that allow individuals to experience personal fulfillment that is simultaneously beneficial to their communities. Having interfered at least in perception in the autonomy of parents and well-established notions of responsibility, especially in

relation to children, the KIN project negatively influenced their “path to self-fulfillment” as “good” parents. Hence, the statement, “it’s my responsibility as a parent” highlighted not only the obligations parents had but more importantly the perceived liberties that accompanied those responsibilities to ensure the category “parent” as a legitimate form of personhood.

My argument in this chapter has been that the KIN project provided a focus for articulating for “parents” certain ways of being that are contextualized by neoliberal discourse, traditional Canadian rugged individualism, and the conflictual racial climate of the community. Individuals in this rural community actively created themselves as “good” parents by mediating constructions of parental responsibility, inadvertently underscored through KIN. As a result, the project became part of the evaluative discourse in the community, representing the marriage of neoliberalism to rugged individualism, which thus reinforced local meanings of “good” parenting focused on notions of parental responsibility. In other words, KIN presented an opportunity to illustrate the self-reliance of parents, thus constituting “good” parents as a legitimate form of personhood in accordance with both neoliberalism and rugged individualism. “Good” parents utilized KIN not only to re-engage the longstanding ideas about the parental deficits of Natives, but also as a gauge against which to compare and evaluate their execution of their parental responsibilities because these responsibilities related to their self-fulfillment. While the universalistic nature of the program reflected national and regional policies, associated with organizations such as the CHR (outlined in chapter two), the project had the contradictory effect on strengthening stigma because community members deployed the project for their own self-reaffirmation as “good” or “responsible” parents. Had the

project not been universal, perhaps parents would not have felt the need to protect their parental roles through the stigmatization of other “irresponsible” parents.

In conclusion, I think it is useful to draw on Gordon’s conception of power, being “actions on others’ actions: that is, it presupposes rather than annuls their capacity as agents; it acts upon, and through an open set of practical and ethical possibilities” (1991:5). Parents deployed the KIN project in local conversations about “good” parenting, which specifically “acted on” the possibilities for “Native” parents. Thus, because of the local meaning system, the project “acted” on the actions of parents, who then “acted” on the actions of ‘other’ parents to reinforce the neoliberal framework of responsibility. Ironically, although this small in-school feeding program was started to ameliorate the effects of neoliberal restructuring of welfare, as a consequence of its operation, neoliberal concepts of personhood and appropriate parenting were localized within this small town’s system of racial discrimination, thus not just reproducing the principles of neoliberalism but, in local terms, racial difference. Neoliberalism, like rugged individualism, appears to be neutral, but as the discussion of “good” versus “bad” parenting illustrates, both are used within this rural context as the justification for racial prejudice. Having outlined the constructions of “good” and “bad” parents, in the next chapter I explore how reactions to the KIN project, particularly those of mothers acting as the community’s “moral guardians,” were connected with the discrepancies between charity and contract exchange and the public/private distinction.

Ch.4 Moral Guardians

The provision of food was central to the KIN project's objectives. As I have already argued, this focus represented a privatization of needs, in this instance, food security, in the sense that a greater responsibility for child nutrition was placed on the municipal as opposed to federal or provincial levels of government. However, though food security is privatized in relation to provincial and federal levels, the in-school feeding programs represented a shift from needs being met in the privacy of the home to the public deliverance of these programs at the municipal level. Conceivably, while the wider context, i.e., the federal and provincial levels of government is public, municipalities, in comparison, are private. Yet, municipalities or communities can be seen as public in contrast to their constitutive individual families that society assumes are privately located. How do community members negotiate this ambiguity and what are its impacts on constructions of families? The consequences of privatization, particularly for mothers, accordingly provide the focus of this chapter.

As Brodie suggests:

Privatization involves much more than simply removing things from one sector and placing them in another. It is a profoundly cultural process in which the thing moved is itself transformed into something quite different (2002: 100).

What explains this transformation? This transformation is a response to the social relations the thing transferred constitutes. In other words, the thing transferred and the social relations it mediates are mutually constitutive and simultaneously altered. In privatizing the distribution of food, in particular, the transformation is reflective of the discrepant social relations that are constituted in the public sphere in contrast to the private sphere. Given that the responsibility for the provision of food in the west has

traditionally and ideally been centered in the institution of the family, it is of great value also to discuss the historical and cultural specificity of the home, as the “family’s” assumed societal location, in order to understand how the KIN project became a site of the contested meanings of parenting. While the family and its location in the household are generally associated with the private domain, any discussion that neglects the relationship between the public and private spheres is incomplete insofar as they are mutually dependent and constituted (Moore 1994; Pateman 1988). A brief discussion of Pateman’s analysis of contract will serve to illustrate this point (1988).

Public/Private

My interest is to explore the implications of the public/private divide, which served as the backdrop for and informed opinions regarding the KIN project. Pateman accuses classical contract theorists of repressing a dimension of contract theory, which she refers to as the sexual contract. In Pateman’s own words, “the story of the social contract is treated as an account of the creation of the public sphere of civil freedom. The other, private, sphere is not seen as politically relevant” (1988: 3). Although seen as politically irrelevant, the sexual contract or the story of women’s subjugation has played not just a supportive, but rather a crucial role in the creation of a *public* sphere of civil freedom. The “original contract,” consisting of both the social and sexual contracts, “claims that free social relations take a contractual form” (Pateman 1988:1). The danger is that it is often interpreted (and presented) only as the social contract, which obscures the gendered construction of the public sphere and its contractual activities. Pateman’s discussion of the original contract illustrates that the public/private divide is a historically

constructed hierarchy in which the sexual contract supports the social contract. As

Pateman explains:

Once the original contract is entered into, the relevant dichotomy is between the private sphere and the civil, public sphere- a dichotomy that reflects the order of sexual difference in the natural condition, which is also a political difference. Women have no part in the original contract, but they are not left behind in the state of nature- that would defeat the purpose of the sexual contract! Women are incorporated into a sphere that both is and is not in civil society. The private sphere is part of the civil society but is separated from the 'civil' sphere. The antinomy private/public is another expression of natural/civil and women/men (1988:11).

There are a number of implications here. First, the public/private distinction mediates social relations and social identities in accordance with their context-appropriate activities. Within this framework, men as autonomous individuals participated in the public, or 'civil' sphere through contracts, which reinforced, or constituted, their autonomy. In contrast, women's social identities were principally constituted by their domestic activities and caring relationships that characterize the private sphere. While men were seen to be the autonomous heads of their household, who had the ability to have a "public" life separate from their households, their wives (and children) were publicly conceived of as dependents and thus irrevocably located in the household. In the public sphere, the citizenship of women, in contrast to men, was not recognized.

Sexual difference, according to Pateman, is political difference, which correlates with the socially constructed capacities of either gender (1988:6), where the key distinguishing element is the definition of autonomy. Although often presented and perceived to be an abstract ideal, the Western notion of autonomy, represented in social contract theory, is based on and constituted by relations of contract that are specific to the

gendered construction of the public sphere. In other words, if we acknowledge the historical relationship between men and the public sphere, which is supported by women's exclusion, then this notion of autonomy is gendered in favour of masculinity and the concrete social relations that support definitions of masculinity, rather than being an abstract ideal.

Social contract theory not only has historically "hidden" the gendered construction of the public sphere, but its continued influence still impacts present constructions of the public/private division and the social relations this divide mediates. While greater numbers of women participate in the public sphere, their access to and participation in the public sphere is often still dependent on their ability to exhibit masculine traits, such as autonomy, including autonomy from the household, that are positively valued and define rationality (Young 1997). This avenue to participation in the public sphere neglects the social relations, such as motherhood, which restricted women's participation in the social contract in the first place as well as women's capabilities to exhibit its correlated constructed notion of autonomy.

The central point to take from this discussion is that the public/private divide is hierarchically organized in favour of the public over the private and correspondingly men's claims to resources as a right over women's claims to resources as a need. As Moore suggests, "rights and needs are differentially distributed between different sorts of persons, and the ability to define a social identity is the ability to assign appropriate rights and needs" (1994:93). I have chosen to analyse KIN in terms of "contract versus charity," in order to further explore the relationship between rights, needs and social identities, similar to Fraser's and Gordon's analytic approach to the welfare state

(1992:45). The significance of this discussion on contract and charity is that it further exposes that as distinct socially constructed subjects, men and women have different claims to resources that are identified as contract exchange and charity, respectively. The implication here for the KIN project is that the core of the debate centered on the discrepancies that distinguish women's and men's claims to resources. In other words, the KIN's universal in-school feeding project as well as the paid coordinators' positions that I discuss below challenged these distinctions.

Contract vs. Charity

“Charity” is the idea that “recipients are getting something for nothing” (Fraser and Gordon 1992:50). Charity is hierarchical insofar as it is perceived to be an unequal exchange with an obligation on the part of the recipient to acknowledge their lessened status. On the other hand, “contract” implies equal exchange, and in most cases, such as in relation to welfare, refers to the contributory programs, such as unemployment insurance and workers' compensation, where contributions have been made through participation in the paid labor market (Fraser and Gordon 1992; Kingfisher 2002). The items exchanged in contracts, although different, are thought to be equivalent in value. Appadurai, however, argues that “what creates the link between exchange and value is *politics*” (original emphasis 1986:3). Thus it is a matter of political interpretation that the things exchanged under contract are equal, while the charity given is asymmetrical.

But what informs this political interpretation? Fraser and Gordon (1992) suggest that the distinction between contract and charity is gendered, in accordance with the public/private divide that I discussed above. Contract and the public realm of men constitute one set of relations, while charity and the private realm of women constitute

another. Women are perceived to be dependents because domestic work, with which they are associated, is naturalized, whereas men's 'breadwinning' is recognized to be a valued contribution in part because of its public exposure, specifically in that it can be represented in terms of economic exchange. In general, entitlements of "civil citizens" are based on the masculine model of autonomy. This model is characterized by participation in the public and therefore paid labor market and correspondingly independence from the private sphere. *White* men's claims to resources - as the racially marginalized often have limited access to participation in the public sphere- are often presented in terms of contract exchanges. In contrast, women and the racially marginalized have traditionally not been seen to embody autonomy, and thus are not involved in contract exchanges, but rather are the recipients of "charity". This gendered distinction¹ to claims of resources is reflected in the welfare system described by Fraser as a "two-tiered system" where:

Participants in the 'masculine' subsystem are positioned as rights bearing beneficiaries and purchasing consumers of services. Participants in the 'feminine' subsystem, on the other hand, are positioned as dependent clients (Fraser 1987 cited in Bryson 1992:163).

The "masculine subsystem" has focused on men and their role as individual workers and family breadwinners, where benefits received are in terms of occupational welfare, such as unemployment insurance. In contrast, women in social welfare are dealt with as dependent spouses or as mothers and thus are "over-represented in programs that are family orientated" (Bryson 1992:165-166). "Dependent clients" receive "charity," while "rights bearing beneficiaries" are parties to "contracts". Fraser's observations illustrate

¹ Although this distinction also intersects with race and class, for the purposes of this present discussion my central focus is the gender distinction between different claims to resources. However, I revisit the issues of race and class below.

the prevalence of the public/private divide and its consequences for poverty policy, which adversely impacts and stigmatizes women's claims to resources.

Even though the public is constructed as distinct from the private, in actuality the boundary perceived to separate them is often penetrable and blurred, which makes the distinction between contract exchange and charity arbitrary. Historically, *targeted* approaches, represented in the feminine subsystem of welfare were clearly conceived and generally seen to be instances of charity. Although, mothering historically was perceived to be a return for social assistance granted to poor mothers, it has not been on equal par with men's public and valued contribution to society. Thus in representation of mothers' different claims to resources, the hierarchical discrepancy of the exchange persisted.

However, within the neoliberal framework, targeted assistance, previously defined as "charity," has been reconstituted as a form of "contract". Individuals, men and women must agree to fulfill obligations such as work and training in return for their assistance, "thereby entering the sphere of exchange" (Fraser and Gordon 1992:63). Consequently, the relationships individuals have to state provisioning have been degendered and women's responsibilities as mothers, which potentially interfere in their participation in the public sphere, have been even further overlooked than historically.

As Kingfisher notes:

Neoliberalism works to erase all negative and "undeserving" forms of dependency and invites women as well as men to participate in this erasure. Now women, too, can be counted as separate, autonomous individuals whose very individuality provides them with the means to achieve self-sufficiency (Kingfisher 2002:27).

The implication here is that the structural causes of "dependency," which are both gendered and raced, are overlooked. Instead, attention is focused on the reformation of

individuals to become contracting parties, liberated from their previous “dependencies”. Although the rhetoric of this new form of “contract” is one of equality, it is not characterized by exchange among equals, but, rather, by “the exchange of obedience for protection” (Pateman 1988 cited in Kingfisher 2002:29). Similar to the previous model of “charity,” then, it fails to positively constitute the recipients of assistance, but, rather, reinforces their inequalities. “Charity,” historically associated with targeted approaches, underscored individual characteristics that interfered in contractual capacities, such as physical or mental disabilities, which in turn permitted, to a degree, their protection. Within the neoliberal framework, however, the “contracts” that welfare recipients have access to erase those individual characteristics, but not the structural constraints that made them significant in the first place.

Universal services attempt to lessen the significance of those individual characteristics that may infringe on an individual’s contractual capacities by allowing individuals to enter contracts on the basis of their general membership to a category (in this instance, the community of Fort Macleod). While in theory universal services “take account of individual circumstances only to ascertain that the person is a member of the broad ‘universal’ category for whom the service is intended”(Parker 1975, cited in Bryson 1992:60), in practice the implementation of these services is more complicated, as the stigma associated with “charity” still has a lingering influence on perceptions of assistance. Furthermore, “broad universal” categories are never homogenous, but, rather, contained within them are social inequalities among their members. Given the various ways community members can deploy universal services (in this instance, KIN’s universal in-school feeding programs), these services may become difficult to define

because they potentially come to display aspects of both contract and what has historically been defined as charity, which leads to community confusion.

Such confusion was in part the response to the mixed messages parents received in relation to the issue of donations towards KIN's universal in-school feeding program. The request for donations was the response to one of the drawbacks of universal services, which is their financial burden. Donations to the KIN project were encouraged, although optional. Envelopes for donations were sent home with the students from both schools and parents could decide whether the envelopes were returned with a donation. A number of parents complained about the "inappropriateness" of donations going to feed someone else's children, when the responsibility for food provision is seen to be a private matter of the family. As such, the children of other parents have been defined outside the kinship relations that have been sequestered to the privacy of individual homes. For instance, one mother, Danielle, attended a parent council meeting where another mother stated, "I don't think it's fair for anybody to come along and tell me or even... begin to say that...I'm not feeding my kids or I have to pay ten dollars a month so I can feed somebody else's kid" (04/10/02).

Given that donations were non-obligatory, they consequently served as a reminder that underprivileged or "irresponsible" (as was often remarked) families were not required to contribute. As a result, parents perceived their own donations as supporting Health Canada in feeding other parents' children and if they did not contribute there was the threat of being perceived as "irresponsible" or underprivileged. The children of those not donating may have been marked, although discreetly, as receiving "charity," insofar as the KIN project required nothing formally from them in exchange. One possible

explanation of community members' opposition to the project could then be that the project did not properly operate as a form of "contract," but, rather, as an instance of "charity" that violated contractual norms reinforced by neoliberal discourses about responsibility.

As noted above, "charity" within the neoliberal framework has increasingly been redesigned to function as "contract," where recipients have obligations that they must fulfill. Although voluntary, by donating, parents extended their private space into the public because they could still argue that they were responsibly providing for their own children as their donations were "private" payments for their children. Some parents inquired what would constitute an adequate donation for their child's participation, as they wanted to define their participation in the project in terms of contract exchange, where the items exchanged were of equivalent value. For instance, one mother explained that her son refused to take the snack at school unless his mother donated money to the KIN project. She mentioned that her son felt that they should pay for his participation (Elizabeth 03/25/03). Another mother's only complaint against the universal program was that "they (KIN) should inform us how much we should donate to cover our child's participation" (Patricia 04/17/03). In addition to budgeting concerns, Patricia's comment implied that she was supportive of her child's participation in the project so long as it was on the basis of an exchange relationship. In other words, some of the parents supportive of the project wanted to define their children's participation in the project in terms of "contract exchange" in contrast to "charity," by being financially responsible for the universal program. These actions demonstrate that notions of "contract exchange" were in conversation with notions of "charity". As a result of this conversation, community

members recognized that “contract” bestowed more prestige and less stigmatization than “charity”.

Given that donations were optional, the universal element of KIN and the title itself also exposed the possibility of incorporating KINship relations into the public realm. The public exposure of these kinship relations could then potentially challenge the public/private divide and women’s relegation to the private sphere. If nothing more, this project could potentially expose the arbitrariness of a public/private divide. Even though the universal program was described as a “kinship time” that benefited all students (Sandra 04/10/03), another common statement made by *mothers* opposed to KIN, was “Don’t feed my kid. That’s my role as a parent” (Jane 12/12/02). This demand works to break down the kinship relations extended through the community and into the public domain, and instead reinforced the public/private divide and their context-appropriate activities. An important question to ask is, what was this mother defending?

Having acknowledged the masculine model of autonomy and its implications for women’s claims or lack of claims to resources, in this next section I discuss how criticisms against parents were centered most specifically on mothers. If we take the mother’s comment, “that’s my role as a parent” from the example above, Jane was more specifically implying that’s her role as a *mother*. Even though “parents” were the general targets of criticism in this community, the debate regarding “parents” mystifies the constructed and restricted access that mothers, as key caregivers, have to the public sphere in connection with their particular responsibility for their children and their association with the private domain. Whereas “citizenship” often conceals its masculine associations, “parent” operates similarly to conceal its feminine associations. I explore

the historically conservative characteristics of motherhood prevalent in this rural setting to illustrate my point. In this context, it is appropriate to refine my initial question posed at the beginning of this thesis and ask how, specifically, were notions of *mothering* affected by the KIN project? Furthermore, why would mothers, central to generating the debate over the KIN project, not want to expose the arbitrariness of the divide, but, rather work to reinforce it?

Wrongdoing Mothers

Historically, mother-blaming suggests that mothers more than fathers are the center of most criticisms of parents (Ladd-Taylor and Umansky 1998:10). Even though the category “mother” is subsumed under the category “parent,” criticism against parents often indicated “mothers” as the wrongdoers. Interestingly however, women in this rural setting, particularly mothers, generated the criticisms against other mothers. Many of the mothers from Fort Macleod, similar to many women cross-culturally, acted as their community’s “moral guardians” or “domestic angels” who evaluated other women, particularly mothers (Newberry 1999:310). I discuss the significance of this in greater detail below. Suffice it to say that this discussion explores the reasons why mothers, who were the central generating force behind the KIN debate, did not want to expose the arbitrariness of the public/private divide. Rather, mothers enlisted one another in defence of the divide and their relegated roles it constitutes. I wish to discuss some of the criticisms against mothers, veiled as criticism of parents, to gain an understanding of which elements of mothering were being contested or reinforced by the KIN project and the debate it generated.

In speaking of the causes of child hunger, which some mothers distinguished from the issue of child poverty, a frequent topic of conversation was mothers working in paid labor as opposed to staying home. For example, in addition to suggesting that women's employment is reflective of changing family dynamics, Teresa stated that:

For one thing we know that the majority of mothers work now and years ago when we were growing up for the most part mothers were home with the kids and they had time to make bread and do different things. Now both of them are working and quite often divorced and single and they have to work to take care of their children (Teresa 03/26/03).

The implication here is that children are neglected to varying degrees because of women's outside employment. Even though many of the women acknowledged the various reasons, including financial necessity, for women working, women's outside employment was a common denominator in explanations of child hunger and neglect. If more mothers were employed, then it was often assumed that it was less likely that those mothers were being adequate caregivers to their children as a result of their competing obligations. In a conversation discussing the needs of children in Fort Macleod, a mother of two daughters, Catherine, offered these following observations:

How many kids have their mom actually get up an hour before breakfast to prepare them a good meal? Some kids, you know, and it's sad, but it's true some of the kids probably even get themselves off to school (11/13/02).

In addition to suggesting that changing family dynamics were not necessarily favourable to children, Catherine's comment illustrated that mothers were seen to be the central caregivers, responsible for their children's nurturing. Interestingly, there were no complaints about fathers' employment obligations interfering in their equal contribution

to their children's needs in this or other conversations I had over the course of research. Catherine also positively constructed her identity as a mother by implying that she was one of the mothers who took good care of her children in contrast to the "other mothers" referred to earlier who have outside employment. Catherine later confirmed her positive identity as a good mother when she explained the great lengths she would go through to ensure her daughters ate healthy food.

Although some of the women thought that assistance from the wider community, such as that provided through the KIN project, was a possible solution to the competing demands made on mothers' time, others defined the care-giving activities as the sole responsibility of mothers. Judgments were made of mothers who did not defend their role within the family, by requesting assistance with those roles. For instance, in the following vignette one mother recounts a news update on T.V.

I saw a thing on T.V. where there was this big hoopla about daycare and how government wasn't going to give out all this money to daycares and, or to... parents. They weren't going to give it out to parents...I can't remember what they call it...supplement for them to help get their kids to daycare. Anyways, this one woman stepped up to the mike and she says to these officials, and she goes who is going to take care of our children? And I thought you are not a very smart woman. You are supposed to take care of your children. Parents are supposed to take care of their children (Gerry 03/26/03).

It is no coincidence that the parent in this news story, concerned with the issue of childcare, was a mother, as was her critic, because, as I already mentioned, mothers are most often seen as the primary caregivers. Although the woman spoken of in the news story was a "parent," Gerry's above comment implied that, particularly as a mother, this woman must be responsible for the care of her own children. By insulting the intelligence of this mother, Gerry's comment also implied the naturalness and

obviousness of care giving, which is associated with mothering and the private sphere. Implied by Gerry's comment is that childcare is a private, as opposed to a public issue. Pateman and Shanley suggest that a mother's obligation for the care of her children is naturalized and accordingly seen to take little to no effort (1991:3), i.e. not defined as "work" and thus taken out of the contract exchange economy. Mothers' public claims to resources are adversely impacted by this naturalization. There were a number of other instances in which women's privatized care-giving was naturalized, but one in particular nicely demonstrates this point and is particularly relevant to the debate generated by the KIN project.

Filling Snack Trays: A Paid Position?

An element of parents' criticisms of the KIN project centered on the coordinators' incomes. (Although there were two positions, they were often spoken of as one.) Despite the KIN committee's attempts to better inform the community, some community members were misinformed about the coordinators' wages, believing that they surpassed the annual income of a first year teacher. One mother, Jan, who had earlier in our conversation asked, "why is it my responsibility to feed those children?" later stated sarcastically, "I guess...when we found out that it was feeding the kids, ok, cool, it took a \$60,000 grant and ok, you're employing one person out of the local community" (02/23/03). Jan implied that \$60,000 would be better spent on feeding the community's children than employing a community member. As well as opposing feeding the children of other parents, she also disagreed with spending \$60,000 to employ people to do the work necessary to run a universal in-school feeding program. Given that the project received funding from Health Canada, there was a general consensus among parents

opposed to the project that their tax dollars should not be spent on the project in general and on the coordinators' positions in particular.

In offering his account of the controversy, one teacher explained that "the other argument was... it was a 50 or 60 thousand dollar grant or something like that and why can't you just, you know...that's a position, why are you paying someone to do this?"(11/29/02). Even though a number of community members acknowledged that the changing dynamics of families left some children neglected, both the above comments illustrate that a number of community members disapproved of the paid positions responsible for organizing and coordinating the care given to the community's children. Their disapproval relates to the idea that provisioning of food by women "should" be outside the wage/contract economy. Another mother's comments further confirmed this disapproval. Tamara offered these following observations:

There are a range of problems with the delivery of the program. I mean the coordinator got paid more than a first year teacher and people didn't like how much (she) was getting paid to fill snack trays. That was a huge part of the grant from Health Canada (12/12/02).

Similar to schoolteachers, the coordinators, both of whom were women, had university degrees. But their salaries were dissimilar. As one of the coordinators explained, "I got 31,000 (dollars) annually and a teacher, I think gets 40-something" (11/27/02). Although the coordinators did not receive the same salary as schoolteachers, Tamara expressed disapproval of the coordinators being paid a similar wage. She implied that "fill(ing) snack trays" was not a significant contribution to warrant their (or some may argue, any) income. Even though the coordinators did more than "fill snack trays," as they applied for grants and orchestrated the volunteers, some community members nevertheless

focused on those activities that replicated most closely the care and nurturance that is associated with the private sphere and its kinship relationships.

If we take into consideration the public/private divide that characterizes different sets of relations, then there seems to be a contradiction between the title of the project, KIN, and how the project was implemented. KINship relations, or the nurturing and care relationships that characterize the private domain or home were, in some interpretations, in tension with the contract exchange or paid positions of the coordinators. To further support this argument, I draw on a conversation I had with two parents, Jan and Barry, who contrasted the operations of the KIN project with a similar project in the neighbouring town of Pincher Creek.

- B: There was a...program in Pincher Creek that was still running and what did it cost them, I think it cost \$500 a year.
- A: Oh wow.
- J: It didn't take a \$60,000 grant to figure that out.
- B: And it was the same program.
- J: The only thing was, it was done without a, without a publicly paid um administrator or facilitator or whatever you want to call it.
- A: So it was done with all volunteers?
- J: Parents, teachers.
- B: If you really want to help kids that need the help, then don't waste the money (02/23/03).

The implication here is that spending money on an administrator, "or whatever you want to call it," to facilitate a project that shared in the responsibilities of caring for the community's children was a "waste". Jan implied puzzlement with nurturance and care being identified with *paid* positions instead of with the *unpaid* work of mothers or volunteers. Jan's sentiments are also correlated with the reproduction of neoliberal discourses of efficiency, characterized by downsizing. Volunteer work is increasingly relied on, and in this setting reinforced the gendered distinction between "real work"

(economic or contractual) and non-work (the “natural” act of mothering). It is interesting to note that I did not encounter any male volunteers in the KIN project. One could reasonably speculate that the situation was similar in Pincher Creek with their in-school feeding project. In some interpretations, by volunteering, women defended their economically unrecognized work. By stating that “it didn’t take a \$60,000 grant to figure that out,” Jan suggested there is no necessity or obligation to pay work of this nature, as there are volunteers willing to do the work without economic return. From a community perspective and in accordance with the CHR objective, one of the positive outcomes of volunteerism is that volunteers may challenge the social exclusion of certain community members by offering them assistance- in this case the children of low-income families. Volunteering permits kinship relations to extend throughout the community, while still remaining a *private* matter. In other words, the domestic activities of the volunteers involved in the project never enter the public realm of market relations.

In contrast to the different sets of social relations and social identities that the public/private divide constitutes (Moore 1994), however, the KIN project paid its coordinators for the care and nurturance that mothers “ought” to be providing their children. The arguments of those opposed to the coordinators’ incomes naturalized the caring roles of mothers because they often represented the caring for, nurturance and feeding of children as a personal and private responsibility. The wider processes that devalue women’s domestic work and reinforce their association with the private domain, often perceived to be less significant than the public domain (Lister 1997; Pateman 1988), influenced the opposition to the coordinators’ salaries.

However, even though women's contributions have historically been devalued, this is not the same as saying they are not valued at all. Rather, as one mother commented:

When you are a mother, a good mother... you are a productive member of society. You are teaching your children values that help them to be good citizens in the world (Gerry 03/26/03).

But what specifically are the values taught? Rose suggests that families instill the "techniques of responsible citizenship" (1996:49). Thus, along with providing and caring for their children, "good mothers" in this community also implanted the value of family responsibility and the public/private divide with which it is correlated. As a result, family responsibility also supported different gendered identities and a gendered construction of economic life. Moore argues that

What makes households distinctive is not that they produce people and thereby reproduce society, but that they – along with many other institutions – produce specific social identities, and particular rights and needs (1994:93).

It would seem that in this rural community, one element of "good mothering" is *privately* meeting the needs of one's children. "Good mothers" consequently contribute to the confinement of caring kinship relations to the private realm, for those needs are privately met and thus do not require any public assistance. In other words, women's familial relations and obligations remain narrowly defined and restricted within a nuclear family, which in turn reproduces gendered social identities. Within this framework, "good mothers" reinforce the status quo and the public/private divide by concealing women's gendered *work* as mothers. Consequently, women's contributions, particularly as "good mothers" or as volunteers, have not often resulted in women's recognition as "civil

citizens” with entitlements. Rather, the distinction between “contract exchange” and “charity” is supported by their efforts to protect the privacy of their work. Newberry suggests that

Part of the resiliency of the “housewife” and “good mother” is her association with what appears to be essentially feminine qualities such as nurturance, care, loving sacrifice, all of which were understood to be the surface manifestations of her biologically determined role as mother” (1997: 373).

The arguments of those mothers opposed to the coordinators’ salaries reinforced these notions of “good mother” and volunteer. Yet, the paid position of the coordinator, as well as the universal in-school feeding program that would presumably be beneficial to all mothers - who are otherwise largely responsible for these duties - challenged the meaning of motherhood and the public/private divide in this community. Consequently, the meanings of “good mothering” are not entirely naturalized but contested. The fact that notions of “good mother” are contested in this rural community is testament that “housewife” and “good mother” are identities socially constructed. This struggle was in large part facilitated by the KIN project. Some of the community’s mothers, often those most vocal, did not welcome the KIN project’s efforts to alleviate some of the financial burden and responsibility of their mothering obligations.

To gain a better understanding of those mothers opposed to the KIN project, it is important to explore the role that mothers played in this community as moral guardians. In this next section, I investigate further what mothers, acting as the community’s moral guardians, were defending, and possible explanations for their defence.

Moral Guardians

The separation of women away from the world created the moral space of the home which became the dominant model for domestic life, even for those women who earned their wage inside the domestic haven of others (Newberry 1999:306).

Although Newberry is describing the historical emergence of the ideology of home as “domestic haven,” her description is equally well suited for this specific rural community at this particular time, given the prevalent neoliberal notions associated with neoconservative family values relevant there. Cross-culturally, as demonstrated by Newberry, women become moral guardians or arbitrators in the community, given their association with the “moral space of the home” (1999:306). Some women in Fort Macleod deployed discussion of the KIN project in particular to assert their authority as the town’s moral guardians. In what follows I focus in particular on those mothers opposed to the project, who opted out of the project to demonstrate their moral authority and its content. My argument is that those mothers opting their children out of the project were protecting particular class-based, neoconservative notions of the family, as nuclear, autonomous and thus self-sufficient. In their protection of the neoconservative family model, some mothers, acting as moral guardians, centered on what was seen to be its contrast, the Native alternative.

The option of opting out of the project was crucial to these women because the universal program would otherwise not operate as an effective barrier separating certain “responsible” parents from “irresponsible” parents, as a universal project would not necessarily identify those recipients unable to contribute to the project. But by opting out of the project, mothers could make others accountable for their behaviours. In response,

demonstrating their concern for their accountability, parents either donated or opted out of the project, while others risked being associated with “charity”. Opting out of the project publicly disclosed other’s “irresponsibility”. While the threat to the parents of KIN participants was their devalued identities, in distancing themselves from the project, the moral guardians of the community positively constituted their own identities by asserting their class distinctions.

Their positive identities as “good mothers,” financially responsible for their own children, were further constituted by their conversations centered on “irresponsible parents” that I discussed in chapter 3. In these discussions non-Native parents were largely measured against Native parents who were thought to lack autonomy. If we acknowledge that autonomy is in part manifested in the self-sufficiency of the household or family (Yeatman 1997), then the criticisms against Native parents can be construed as referring, at least in part, to their alternative family arrangements, which also intersect with class. Conceivably, the mothers acting as the community’s moral guardians criticized KIN because its universal programs permitted alternative models of social arrangement, associated with the Native community. Native families were perceived to be permitted alternatives to the nuclear family model because they were supported by the KIN project and hence they were not required to be autonomous on behalf of their own children. In other words, community assistance to families in general and Native families in particular that did not enforce return obligations associated with “contract,” served as the unwelcome reminders in this rural community that the “modern family” was a construction as opposed to a natural reality (Donzelot 1979).

As the project did not properly function in terms of contract, where recipients were also taught the responsibility of exchange, the community's moral guardians responded either by protecting the "naturalness" of the family or arguing against the dangers of its alternatives. One mother asked, "Why is it my responsibility to feed those children?" (Jan 02/23/03). By referring to "those children" she was declining to assist any children that are not her own, for she does not perceive them to be her responsibility. Her statement implies the "naturalness" of the nuclear family bound only to its members and the unnaturalness of outside support, once again invoking the public/private divide. More specifically, "those children" represented the "Native population surrounding Fort Macleod," who, this mother stated, were the real targets of this project. In other words, as already discussed in previous chapters, the Native community was subsumed under the category of "undeserving dependents," and thought to have been the hidden targets of the universal program. A stay at home mother of two daughters, Catherine, who was opposed to KIN project's universality, stated that:

Its not just Native, there are white people too, but it (the KIN project) makes it too easy for them (Native parents) to take the money and do whatever with it besides buy them a good meal for their kids or whatever (11/13/02).

Even though the KIN project was not distributing money, by providing food to the children of the community, the KIN project was believed to "enable" parents who were not setting examples of responsibility for their own children. There are a number of implications here. Catherine opted her two daughters out of the project because she was concerned with the lessons they were being taught. In so doing she was also teaching her children, in particular her daughters, specific social identities and roles as caregivers and

as “autonomous” agents by reinforcing the public/private divide. Furthermore, although Catherine acknowledged that the project would provide assistance for “white people too,” it is significant that she then said “but,” for it implies that it was not the white people, “but” the Native community who would neglect their families by spending their money on the wrong priorities instead of feeding their children. Their dependency was criticized because, as this mother suggested, the Native community in general and especially those participating in the project did not uphold traditional nuclear family values, such as private responsibility. Further implied by Catherine’s comment is the assumption that the Native community has money to spend on those wrong priorities. Her comment thus illustrates the racialized views of poverty that emphasize idiosyncratic behavioural patterns as opposed to the structural causes of poverty and class distinction.

Later in this conversation Catherine further explained to me some of the discrepancies between the Native and non-Native families and their children in town:

- C: There are lots, you know, don’t get me wrong about labelling them Native and non-Native.
- A: Right, no, I know.
- C: It’s just that’s (Native families) where you see a lot of the problems that kids come from, but that’s what those children put up with at home.
- A: Right.
- C: So, I know, (the principal) said, that might be the best six hours of their day, going to school.
- A: Right.
- C: So, you’ve got to do the best thing you can for them. So, I think the best thing for them is, is teaching them the proper things.
- A: Right.
- C: Because what they’re being taught at home might not be the best thing and if we don’t try to interject or step in, it’s going to be a vicious cycle. It’s going to continue. Um, I think we should be teaching them the proper nutrition, the proper way of handling say even a problem.
- A: Right.
- C: You know, cause it’s not just the nutrition problem. It’s the nutrition problem, you can see them acting up in school, you know, there becomes behavioural problems that you see.

In addition to suggesting that the project should be implemented as a form of government intervention, Catherine's comments implied that the project was necessary for the Native children of the community who would otherwise not be taught the "proper things" at home, which included being taught how to properly manage a home. The lessons of nutrition as well as proper behaviour could be instilled at the school to counter the improper lessons, Catherine implied, they were learning in their supposedly horrendous family circumstances. Another community member made the following reference to dysfunctional family circumstances:

I don't think a lot of responsible parents, um, can imagine what it's like for kids to live in the types of homes that we're talking about because they take care of their kids the way a child should be. They have no idea that parents don't really care about their kids. They don't make sure they (their children) have a lunch is their hand every morning (Terra 11/22/02).

Both of the comments above alluded to this community's general perception of the horrific lives hungry and presumably Native children must be exposed to. By speaking of the appalling family conditions of certain populations in the community, and blaming it on individual as opposed to structural failings, moral guardians confirmed the honourable status of their own nuclear families.

In response, there were other descriptions of the Native community's family arrangements, generated by members of the Native community itself. While we sat in the front room of her house, Danielle recalled a discussion she had with her son explaining how lucky he was to have extended kin in addition to his parents.

I tell him school time comes around, all the aunties, and grandmas, even the uncles buy um, school equipment, or buy t-shirts or runners. It's all split. You (her son) have this many uncles and grandmas, this is what you

(her son) need and this is what you (her daughter) need, so let's just take the whole thing and split it up between all of them and that's how we afford it...If you look at the Indian people, First Nations whatever you want to call it, a lot of it goes back to the way we were raised... We have a lot of pride, but within our own clan, we are very generous and always think of each other (04/10/03).

While Native children were often perceived to be the “victims” of dysfunctional family arrangements that white parents, acting as the moral guardians of the community, were partly responsible for exposing, some members of the Native community defended their family arrangements and its own form of self-sufficiency on the basis of collective principles. In some interpretations, Danielle appealed to the dominant discourse that was invoked by the mothers who acted as the community's moral guardians in order to challenge the stereotypes of neglect that were associated with the Native community. The implication here is that even though Danielle challenged the Native stereotypes of “irresponsibility” by appealing to her clan's pride and shared responsibility, she also reinforced a notion of family or clan responsibility for their own. Consequently, Danielle reinforced neoliberal notions of autonomy by stating that she received assistance within her family (even if she defined “family” differently from the nuclear model) and thus was not dependent on other levels of government. Danielle's argument to support her family's autonomy was also physically demonstrated to the wider community as she explained that:

It's just that if you (her children) go to school, you (her children) come home for lunch everyday, cause I want to make sure that you're fed and that way if you're fed, everybody else knows that you're fed and you're not starving (04/10/03).

Although Danielle was supportive of the project, she also acknowledged that she was at times “a hypocrite” and felt uncomfortable with the idea of her children receiving public assistance. Similarly, another member of the Native community, Tracy commented on her concern that others in the community might think that her son, who had participated in the project a couple of times, “hasn’t been taken care of” (04/17/03). Tracy then expressed her concern that “we have to be keeping up to everybody” (04/17/03).

Appearances played a central role in family efforts to “[keep] up with everybody”. For instance, Danielle also spoke about her efforts to keep up her family’s appearance by making sure everyone had a regular haircut, clean and ironed clothes, and new shoes every month. As she stated, “it costs money to be that way (in reference to her family’s maintenance)” (04/10/03). Danielle illustrated her awareness that parental standards are based on particular class notions, not easily attained by all community members.

Consequently, parental standards work to uphold social divisions within the community.

Cathy, also a member of the Native community made these observations:

Even with my kids, at school, sometimes I tell them...[to] make friends and stuff like that, but it seems like their parents (of other children) don’t want them (other children) to be associating with my kids. Because they’re high class my kids can’t go to their house (04/12/03).

The implication here is that parental standards have mediated and reinforced social hierarchies in this community. While other mothers, both supportive and opposed to the project, expressed feelings of embarrassment should their children participate in the KIN project, conceivably the Native community experienced a heightened sensitivity in their children’s participation in the KIN project. Given the stereotypes of the Native “drunk” and the various reported instances of their “panhandling,” the Native community was not

only the presumed target of the project, but community members also made reference to their perceived idiosyncratic behaviours in the denial of the structural causes of poverty. Consequently, the pressure exerted by the mothers, acting as the community's moral guardians, was successful in reinforcing class distinctions thought to be correlated with individual choices and race.

Conclusion

The category "mothers," like "parents," is not homogenous. Rather, the category "mothers" intersects with other categories, which include different classes and racial or ethnic groups. Consequently, the meanings behind motherhood are not only contested, but "mothers," variously positioned, may voice different needs and rights. In some interpretations, the debate generated by the KIN project illustrated women's "struggle over needs interpretations" (Fraser 1989), specifically as mothers whose social identities were also being contested.

It is important to note that *mothers* opposed to the KIN project and the coordinators' salaries were protecting the gendered public/private distinction, which was also disadvantageous to their participation in the public sphere. Mothers, acting as the community's moral guardians, had a vested interest in the gendered construction of the public/private divide because by reinforcing it they could positively construct themselves as "good mothers," while defending their autonomy as "middle class" citizens. While some parents felt that the KIN project threatened their autonomy, KIN facilitated the conversation that distinguished "good mothers" from "bad mothers". The distinction would not have been so clear without the *public* opportunity for "good mothers" to show their *private* autonomy by opting out of the universal snack project.

Although “good mothers” attacked the “poor parenting” practices of the community’s “dependent” households, “good mothers” were also defending the autonomy and class status of their household. While we sipped our green tea in a local Chinese restaurant, Catherine, commented, “sure it may be providing nutrition to those kids that need it, but what is it teaching my children? Like it’s reversing the effect on my children...teaching my children it’s ok to eat this” (11/13/02). While Catherine suggested that the snacks provided other children in need with nutrition, she was concerned about the nutritional lessons it taught her children. Catherine’s concern extends beyond nutritional consideration. The implication here is that a universal in-school feeding project fails to differentiate classes on the basis of their dissimilar nutritional standards. In other words, there is a social value to food consumption that correlates class differences with food preferences and “healthy” food standards (Sahlins 1976).

In this prairie town, “good” parents were constituted by their efforts to maintain the boundaries and distinctions made between classes. It is here that the struggles over class distinctions become the most apparent. Race was mobilized in these struggles for class distinctions, as Native mothers in particular were not seen to be the “quality caregivers they could be” (11/13/02). By criticizing Native parents for their “irresponsibility,” “good mothers” shifted their vulnerability to class fears onto the Native community.

One of the perceivable downfalls of the universal snack project is that while “universality encompasses the notion of equality of opportunity,” it “does not guarantee equality of outcomes” (Bryson 1992:61). Even within universal programs, social

inequalities, such as racial distinctions, can be invoked, which in turn contaminates the equality of outcomes. By opting out of the project, some mothers invoked class distinctions that were also presented as racial distinctions. While trying to eradicate the prevalent inequalities in the community, KIN's universal project worked to mask these inequalities, permitting a targeted project to exist under the umbrella of a universal approach. In her discussion on deliberative democracy, Young suggests that "its assumption that unity is either a starting point or goal of democratic discussion, moreover, may also have exclusionary consequences" (1997:62). Although Young is speaking about deliberative democracy, her statement is applicable to local interpretations of this rural community's universal snack program. The exclusionary consequences were in part the result of mothers' moral authority, which they exerted over the community in general and over the Native population in particular. In my concluding chapter, I address the implications that the KIN project and the debate it generated had on constructions of the family.

Ch. 5 The Family that Eats Together Stays Together?

In my research I utilized the KIN project as a window onto the opinions members of this rural community had in relation to poverty and personhood. The focus on the KIN project was useful in exploring ideas of poverty in circulation in the community, which centered, in large part, on notions of individual or parental responsibility used to either deny the existence of poverty in the community, or as criticisms against the poor choices made by “irresponsible” parents. As I sought to demonstrate, however, the controversy generated by KIN is more complicated than community members simply being opposed to feeding children. To different extents and for diverse reasons, community members did not want to see hungry children in their community. Some parents were concerned with crime rates; others feared that hungry children in the classroom would adversely affect their own children’s education, while others felt it takes a village to raise a child. Yet, no one wanted to deny “hungry” children assistance. In other words, those opposed to the universality of the KIN project should not mistakenly be perceived as unsupportive of feeding children. Children still constitute one of the last categories of the “deserving poor” (Brodie 2002; Kingfisher 2002), and the issue is not simply whether children deserve assistance. Rather, the question becomes how to implement a program devised to assist children living with adults presumably “responsible” for their well-being.

The debate generated by KIN is thus informed by a number of issues related to constructions of the family that reflect the “transition from a government of families to a government through the family” (Donzelot 1979:92). Although Donzelot was working within a liberal framework, his analysis is also appropriate within a neoliberal framework, given their convergence on notions of autonomy. *Government of*, as opposed

to *through* families, conceivably challenges the autonomy of the household that is the very objective of neoliberal philosophies of government. *Government of* indicates power exerted over families, while *government through* illustrates the partnership between government and families.

As I discussed in chapter 2, there is the issue of the wider context; “community-driven” projects, such as KIN, endorsed at this particular stage of neoliberal history, generate debate largely focused on the tension between privatizing needs by imposing greater responsibility on “communities” to address their own needs and the less accessible option of federal/provincial responsibility. Federal and provincial governments devolve more responsibility to individual communities, by calling for “better public participation” and improved accountability (Echenberg 1997: 3). Members of the community engage in a similar conversation debating how community members could be better accountable for their community’s resources. Given that the family unit is the “smallest political organization possible” (Donzelot 1979:48), there is a debate whether these responsibilities belong to the community or to the private individual families that compose it. Consequently, this discussion focuses on the different approaches, whether through assistance or greater policing, to assemble “functional” families to make a healthy community. In this particular community the “struggle over needs interpretation” (Fraser 1989) was embedded and reproduced in the community’s racial tensions. In other words, there was some dispute whether all community members needed in-school feeding programs or whether a targeted project was needed in response to a certain population’s needs. This certain population consisted of those not adequately

providing for their children independently of social support and thus not conforming to the nuclear family model.

To contend with these issues the KIN committee utilized social marketing because, as Kingfisher notes, “the most useful and productive discourses for opponents of dominant discourses are the dominant discourses themselves, simply by virtue of their dominant (and therefore appealing) status” (2002:175). The tactics used by KIN committee members focused on the issue of child poverty as opposed to family poverty. In varying degrees, this child poverty strategy disregards the wider family and community context. KIN did not weaken dominant constructions of the nuclear family. Rather, it replaced state custody with intervention into the family that did not allow parents to shed *all* responsibility for their children. As one KIN committee member commented, “by helping children, you are helping families” (Tori 02/23/03). KIN’s efforts permitted families to remain together, as opposed to torn apart and consequently families remained the essential site of responsibility.

Contrary to some community members’ fears, the KIN project did not relieve parents of all their responsibilities by focusing on child poverty. Nevertheless, the critical gaze of this particular rural community was fixed on the issue of “parental responsibility,” which illustrates that by utilizing the dominant discourse to challenge its outcomes, to take a step forward, social marketing risks reinforcing the prevalence of the dominant discourse in the community, often taking two steps back. For, as I discussed in chapter 3, the critical gaze of the community was translated into constructions of “good” versus “bad” parents, articulating neoliberal notions of personhood in general with criticisms of the Native community in particular. These discursive constructions are

relevant because there is a relationship between discursive and material consequences. For example, the universal snack program was not sustainable due to the lack of financial support for the project; in its place there was the universally accessible breakfast project that I outlined in chapter 1. Community members thus disapproved of those universal social programs not acting as sufficient barriers, not only discursively, but also physically, separating families whose liberties are protected from government intervention from those families subject to government intervention on the basis of “parental irresponsibility”.

Given the prevalence of the public/private divide, assistance to women with their familial responsibilities - associated with the private or domestic sphere - has historically been perceived to be “charity”. However, within the neoliberal framework, “contracts” have been extended into the realm of “charity”. Community members responded to the initial universal element of the KIN project by either constituting the participation of others as a form of “charity” by underscoring the contractual violations of the project, or constituting their own participation as an instance of “contract exchange”. In not marking the assistance given to children from “needy” families as a form of “charity,” violating contractual norms, the KIN project was perceived by some to enable the “irresponsibility” characteristic of “bad” or “Native” parents. By deduction, then, the function and value of the family was jeopardized because the family as the site of socialized responsibility and autonomy was challenged. Consequently, some community members feared the family would cease being the site of production of responsible citizen.

Correspondingly, some of the community members opposed to KIN argued that “bad” parents were being paradoxically rewarded with assistance to fulfill obligations they were otherwise neglecting, while greater responsibility was perceived to be imposed on the responsible and thus “good” parents already fulfilling their parental obligations. Once again criticisms against “irresponsible” parents were geared towards the Native community, largely perceived in this community to be “undeserving dependents”. Their dependency was not legitimate because they did not uphold the values associated with the nuclear family. Rather, Native families were perceived to be permitted “illegitimate” alternatives to the nuclear family model because they were supported by the KIN project, and hence, they were not autonomous on behalf of their own children. In other words, assistance to families in general and Native families in particular, served as the reminders in this rural community that the bourgeois, modern family was a construction as opposed to a natural reality. As a result, some community members responded to the KIN project by asserting their parental responsibility in their attempts to preserve not only their authority over their own family, but “The Family,”¹ constructed as heterosexual, nuclear, independent, autonomous, and private.

Mothers, acting as the community’s moral guardians, were key actors in this response. In large part, they were responsible for opting their children out of the universal snack program, which altered its universality. Furthermore, they also generated the social criticisms against parents whose children were participating in the project, which reinforced notions of the nuclear family and its responsibility. Mothers, as the

¹ I have chosen to designate the nuclear family model as “The Family” so as not to confuse it with the diverse family arrangements, i.e., single headed homes, homosexual headed homes, which family formations may take.

central defenders of the public/private distinction that supported “The Family,” mobilized race to secure the autonomy and class status of their household.

Through the acknowledgment of the various factors influencing the judgments of KIN, it should be apparent, again, that opinions regarding the KIN project should not be oversimplified as an issue of whether to feed or not to feed the community’s children. Rather, the key concern in this rural community was the construction of the family and those issues with which it is correlated. I argue that in consideration of the controversy generated by the KIN project, the family has been constructed in this rural setting in reference to neoliberal notions of responsibility and autonomy, which are connected with older liberal ideas about the public/private divide and the appropriate gendered division of labor. To summarize the various factors that influenced the community and their beliefs about the KIN project it is useful to outline a list of binaries that were invoked in my analysis of the conversation regarding the KIN project.

Community Members Opposed to KIN

Supporters of the KIN Project

Kids In Need

KIN

Individual (In terms of responsibility)

Community

“Bad” Parents

“Hungry” Children

Native

Native and Non-Native

Targeted

Universal

Intervention

Assistance

Dependency

Interdependency

Irresponsibility

Shared Responsibility

I suggest, on the one hand, that there is a pattern of those opposed to the KIN project largely interpreting the project in terms of the left column. In contrast, those in support of KIN emphasize the right column. There is a relationship between the concepts in either column, which made it useful to speak of the controversy in terms of those in support of versus those in opposition to KIN. For instance, if the project is related to Kids In Need, then it is associated with “dependency” and the assistance offered is perceived to be “charity,” which often “targets” those “irresponsible” or “bad” parents, warranting “intervention” into their lives. Typically these irresponsible parents were identified as being “Native parents”.

Although supporters of the project were not unaware of the racial issues, their objectives were to 1) feed “hungry” children and 2) increase social inclusion, and thus they incorporated Native and non-Native alike. Correspondingly, if the project is associated with relations of KINship, then there is an emphasis on “community shared responsibility” for all of the community’s needy children, leaving room for universal approaches to assistance that, although not entirely successful, illustrate an awareness of and challenge to the stigma associated with targeted approaches and “charity”.

Assistance to children has consequences for the construction of the family because it alters how relationships both internal and external to the family are interpreted and consequently mediated. But how do the discrepancies between arguments from opposed and supportive community members of KIN translate into interpretations and constructions of the family? It is this inquiry that now serves as my focus.

“The Family” or KIN

I suggest that dichotomous perceptions regarding the KIN project correlate with specific discrepancies in interpretations and constructions of the family. Although these interpretations of the family are discrepant, they are in conversation, and they are not in direct opposition to one another. Rather, there are points of both convergence and disjuncture. Consequently, there appears to be space simultaneously created which both preserves “The Family” as well as its alternative, the KIN model. The first indication that these two models co-existed in this community was the title of the project itself. Perhaps it was simply a coincidence that the project was given two names, Kids In Need and KIN. Their different connotations (already discussed in chapter 3) nevertheless correlate with the different approaches to feeding hungry children in this community that are embedded in different interpretations of the family.

Those opposed to the KIN project constructed a model of “The Family” which appears similar to Donzelot’s description of the bourgeois family as resembling “a hothouse insulated against outside influences” (1979:20). There is trepidation that outside influences corrupt and stunt the proper development of all family members in general and children in particular, explaining in part why parents, more specifically mothers, opposed to the KIN project voiced concern about KIN’s influence on their children.

“The Family” is constructed as autonomous, independent and private in relation to a rigid public/private divide. By inference, interference into “The Family” is perceived as intrusion into the private domain and thus an infringement on liberties. For, a “fondness for the family is associated with a feeling of liberty, or how the defense of the

family can be effectively undertaken in the name of safeguarding people's sphere of autonomy" (Donzelot 1979:52). In other words, "The Family" and the private sphere become mutually constituted, unless a family is identified as dysfunctional. In the latter instance, policing and government intervention becomes warranted, as a means of securing the liberties of "responsible" families conforming to "The Family" model. To an increasingly limited extent, "charity" can be granted, but it integrates the receiver into a particular hierarchy insofar as it is a mark of an asymmetrical exchange (Mauss 1970; Kingfisher 1996). The recipient of assistance, or the "irresponsible," "Native" parent was then seen to be less than fully autonomous.

In contrast, however, the efforts of supporters of KIN suggest that the boundary between the public and the private is more permeable. There is greater emphasis on the community's responsibility for one another, responded to by "community-driven" projects, supporting the ideology that "it takes a village to raise a child" (John 03/26/03). In other words, although families are still significant units within this framework, their interdependency is openly acknowledged, rather than denied. As with all kinship relations, individuals have responsibilities to one another, but these are not defined so narrowly or exclusively. Parents within the KIN model are still supposed to be responsible in a familial sense. Many of the parents or mothers supportive of KIN still acted "responsibly" for their children by donating or volunteering. In taking responsibility for their children, they also took responsibility for the project, which represents the project's community-drivenness as well as the greater effort made by the community to share in the responsibility for children regardless of parents' action or

inaction. In other words, universal assistance to children is permitted, which does not result in social exclusion, but rather embraces children into the wider community.

This KINship approach, demonstrated principally by the KIN project's universal program, represents a form of intervention into the family also responsible for keeping families intact, which may explain why it co-exists with "The Family" model. For, in discreetly providing food to children, these children, otherwise potentially taken into custody by social services, remain with their families (a category which does not exclude alternative composites, such as single mother headed homes). Therefore, in either model individual families are still significant to the community even if there is disagreement over intervention approaches taken and the proper composition of the family. In other words, individual family units still largely organize this community. Their independence, however, is contested.

I have already indicated that "The Family" is central to neoliberal theory, as it is a mechanism of governmentality and a focal point in the devolution of responsibility. The debate generated by KIN demonstrates that parents who deployed the KIN project to reinforce neoliberal notions of individual responsibility, localized within this town's system of racial discrimination, have preserved "The Family" model. However, the KIN project's attempts to universalize assistance created space, although limited, to imagine and expose other alternatives. Even those opposed parents of the KIN project spoke of collective efforts towards food security such as "government funded equipped food farms" (Barry 02/23/03), albeit mockingly. Nevertheless, one possible interpretation is that this community's imagination has been awakened by a partial realization that "The Family" is a construction. This is not to say that "The Family" has entirely been

deconstructed, but that there are other competing interpretations. At the center of the debate, KIN was a catchphrase around town. Although it carried some negative connotations, it may have invoked for some community members a positive alternative interpretation of “The Family” that extends beyond the nuclear family.

Since the conclusion of my research there have been provincial and national developments in food security. For instance, not only families, but also communities are joining together in such organizations as Growing Food Security In Alberta to develop food security across the region. One of the volunteers stated that “a family that eats together stays together” (Samantha 03/20/03). It cannot, however, be assumed by deduction that if family members do not eat together, then family units will collapse. This has not been the case in this rural community, since the introduction of KIN in November of 2001. Rather, even in light of opposition to KIN, it is possible for communities addressing the issue of food security to strengthen bonds between community members by their “community-driven” projects, which thus support individual family units. In other words, stronger communities may lead to healthier families. However, this requires greater attention to the issues of class competition and mothers’ experienced vulnerability to class fears, which leads them to denigrate alternative constructions of families and parenting.

Conclusion: Child Poverty

Although I have largely focused on the perceived dangers that the KIN project presents through its representation and the ensuing conversation on the topic of poverty and parenting, I suggest that there are not only lessons to be learned but hope to be gained by “community-driven” projects such as KIN. At times, perhaps overwhelmingly,

neoliberal discursive practices focused and became fixed on individual and family responsibility in this rural community. Yet, alternative family or KINship models also co-existed in this small town with limited resources, indicated by the survival of the KIN project.

While the discursive effects of a focus on child poverty are potentially hazardous, it is nevertheless significant that school-aged children were and continue to be provided for. Previously, individual teachers personally purchasing food for students dealt with these matters privately. However, KIN has secured a place for in-school feeding programs in the schools of this community. Even if the universal element has been downsized, a coordinator's position has been continued indefinitely. The KIN committee, who are now referred to as The Fort Macleod Society for Kids First, have also incorporated community snack boxes in each of the schools, in addition to the universally accessible breakfast and lunch programs.

For future research objectives, I would thus not simply focus on the impacts and predominance of neoliberalism. Rather, I would explore more intently community resistance to neoliberalism. Even if neoliberalism is prevalent in this community, consequently utilizing "The Family" as a mechanism of governmentality, KINship models do suggest alternatives even if they are not fully realized. Therefore, I think it is appropriate to end with one of the volunteer's words of encouragement, "don't despair, there are people who care" (Cassandra 11/25/02).

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