

Women, Social Policy and Poverty

Nancy Janovicek

Volume 36, numéro 1, autumn 2006

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad36_1re01

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Department of History at the University of New Brunswick

ISSN

0044-5851 (imprimé)

1712-7432 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Janovicek, N. (2006). Women, Social Policy and Poverty. *Acadiensis*, 36(1), 112–122.

REVIEW ESSAYS/NOTES CRITIQUES

Women, Social Policy and Poverty

THE CUTBACKS TO SOCIAL SERVICES IN THE 1990s led to a re-evaluation of the history of the emergence and development of the Canadian social welfare state. The recent government expectation that the voluntary sector should play a more important role in providing for the poor has called into question Whig narratives of social welfare programmes, which argued that government programmes based on entitlement and citizenship replaced charitable services that doled out meager benefits based on a moralistic distinction between the “deserving” and the “undeserving” poor.¹ Closer examination of the cooperation between private organizations and the state in the 20th century (what Mariana Valverde calls “the mixed social economy”) has helped to explain how 19th-century social values were reproduced in government-financed programmes.² Because the cuts to social welfare programmes were particularly harmful to poor and marginalized women, feminists have also reconsidered key tenets in their evaluation of the relationship between women and the welfare state. After the cancellation of equity programmes and cutbacks to grassroots woman-centred services in the 1990s, feminists began to question the consensus of the 1970s and 1980s that government-run social welfare programmes, despite their shortcomings, had generally improved women’s access to the resources that they needed to survive and to raise their children.

The books under review in this essay explore the tension between state policy and the grassroots and domestic politics that have shaped social policy in Canada after World War II: Alvin Finkel’s *Social Policy and Social Practice in Canada: A History* (Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006); Magda Fahrmi’s *Household Politics: Montreal Families and Postwar Reconstruction* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2005); Judith Fingard and Janet Guildford’s *Mothers of the Municipality: Women, Work, and Social Policy in Post-1945 Halifax* (Toronto, University of Calgary Press, 2005); Wendy McKeen’s *Money in Their Own Name: The Feminist Voice in Poverty Debate in Canada, 1970-1995* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2004); Marjorie Griffin Cohen’s *Training the Excluded for Work: Access and Equity for Women, Immigrants, First Nations, Youth, and People with Low Income* (Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 2003); and Margaret Hillyard Little’s *If I had a Hammer: Retraining that Really Works* (Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 2005). In *Social Policy and Practice in Canada: A History*, for instance, Finkel demonstrates that redistributive programmes coincided with conservative demands for laissez-faire economic policies.³ This

1 Dennis Guest, *The Emergence of Social Security in Canada*, 3rd ed. (Vancouver, 1997).

2 Mariana Valverde, “The Mixed Social Economy as a Canadian Tradition”, *Studies in Political Economy*, 47 (Summer 1995), pp. 33-87.

3 The book covers the development of a range of programmes that were introduced to care for the destitute, the ill, the elderly and the young, but this review will focus on the sections of the book that focus on the period after the Second World War and particularly on gender and poverty.

national survey of social policy argues that pressure from the grassroots won piecemeal reforms that ultimately did not meet demands for redistributive social welfare programmes. Both Fahrni's *Household Politics* and Fingard and Guildford's *Mothers of the Municipality* use local studies to examine how national trends played out in local contexts. In *Household Politics*, Fahrni examines Montrealers' expectations for reconstruction by focusing on families and argues that household politics influenced post-war reconstruction as much as state policy. The edited collection *Mothers of the Municipality* by Fingard and Guildford, in contrast, examines women's activism in post-1945 Halifax and analyzes women's responses to the expansion of the state, the increasing secularization of social institutions and the militarization of the Cold War era.

Feminist scholarship about the cutbacks to social welfare programmes seeks to understand why governments are adopting punitive and targeted policies in order to help dispel the myths that garner support for the neo-liberal agenda and to help women's groups develop effective campaigns to improve women's lives. *Mothers of the Municipality*, for example, is the result of a research project that was designed to understand the impact of federal cutbacks and municipal and provincial restructuring on women's lives in Halifax. University researchers partnered with the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women as well as Feminists for Just and Equitable Public Policy in order to help women negotiate the new social order. Another important goal of feminist scholarship is to analyze how government bureaucracies can modify programmes that promote women's equality. In *Money in Her Own Name*, Wendy McKeen explains that in response to federal and provincial cuts to universal programmes in the 1980s and 1990s, the women's movement stopped promoting social policy based on individual entitlement to economic security. Many feminists believed that it was more important to protect the existing services that helped women living in poverty than it was to endorse more radical solutions to women's poverty that the government would not accept. McKeen is critical of this strategic decision and concludes that social programmes that address women's poverty will not be effective if they do not offer women alternatives to marriage and the family. Margaret Hillyard Little and Marjorie Griffin Cohen examine job-training programmes that try to do this: Little's *If I Had a Hammer* examines the Women's Work Training Programme in Regina as an example of programming that works because it is designed to accommodate women's lives while Griffin Cohen's edited collection *Training the Excluded for Work* also asserts that the most effective job-training programmes for women are designed by women.

These books illustrate that the debates about entitlement, the democratization of social policy and the persistence of charitable models have produced a constantly changing relationship between public and private welfare rather than a smooth transition from charity to the social welfare state. Moreover, analysis of these private measures illuminates women's contribution to policy development. Charitable organizations continued to be important after the Second World War, and while some reproduced unequal gender relations others espoused the new sense of entitlement to state-run programmes. Calls for the democratization of policy development created new opportunities for grassroots groups to develop programmes. After the revival of the women's movement in the late 1960s, women's groups were able to access government programmes that promoted women's equality to help develop services

that addressed the structural causes of women's oppression. The neo-liberal economic policies in the mid-1970s argued that individuals had become too dependent on the state and called for voluntary groups to take over responsibility for welfare services. In this context, funding to grassroots groups that provide services for women became even more precarious. Without government programmes that promote equality through social services, private charities and religious groups have tended to develop short-term solutions that do not address the root causes of poverty. Thus, the current renegotiation of the relationship between public and public welfare does not support feminist initiatives that address the systemic reasons for women's inequality.

Alvin Finkel's *Social Policy and Practice in Canada: A History* is a much-needed survey of social policy from the 17th century to the present, though most of the book is dedicated to understanding the reasons for the development of social welfare programmes in the 20th century. Finkel's analysis of social policy is informed by Marxist evaluations of the relationship between social classes and the state as well as the feminist literature on the welfare state and moral regulation. He rejects positivist and functionalist approaches to the history of the welfare state and examines how specific social contexts produced welfare policies. In Section III, which evaluates the post-war welfare state, individual chapters discuss the development of social policy for the elderly, medicare, childcare, housing policy and anti-poverty reform so that his evaluation does not "degenerate into a positivist catalogue of state achievements" (p. 2). One of the book's central arguments is that popular pressure from grassroots groups has influenced social policy. He analyzes social policy as "a response to popular pressures, but in the context of class-divided societies with particular stratifications of class and gender and sometimes ethnicity" (p. 12). Each chapter includes a critical reading of policy-makers' intentions and grassroots pressure for reforms that would redistribute wealth in Canada.

Finkel uses the insights of feminists but, building on arguments that he has made elsewhere,⁴ states that early writing about the relationship between women and the welfare state was "blinkerred" because it did not pay enough attention to class, race and ethnicity (p. 7). In reaction to gender-blind analysis of the welfare state, feminist typologies of social programmes focused on the interconnectedness of patriarchy and the state, the subordination of women in the family and gender control. More useful for Finkel's argument is the recent literature that refutes instrumentalist explanations and that examines how activists, social workers and female welfare recipients could find spaces of resistance within welfare regimes. For example, women in British Columbia in the 1930s opposed relief programmes that assumed that women should rely on male relatives and thus won social assistance for single women. These activists also challenged racial exclusion and convinced local authorities to provide assistance to Japanese and Chinese women. Similarly, in the 1970s in Toronto the Just Society Movement, a local anti-poverty group, allied with social workers to demand more control over developing strategies to end poverty in the Social Planning Council, an organization whose board was dominated by corporate representatives.

Finkel includes women's activism and the impact of welfare policies on women

4 Alvin Finkel, "Welfare for Whom? Class, Gender, and Race in Social Policy", *Labour/Le Travail*, 49 (2002), pp. 247-61.

throughout the book. The chapter on the child care debate focuses directly on women and examines how familial discourses limited women's access to programmes. Mothers were responsible for making private child care provisions until the late 1960s, when the number of working mothers attained a critical mass and the daycare crisis became a public issue. Finkel explores the subtle changes in the arguments against child care and demonstrates how, despite the increase of women's participation in the paid workforce and the gradual acceptance of women's equality, policy-makers still assumed that mothers – not fathers – should be responsible for raising children. Ultimately, it was the cost of implementing national daycare that stalled programmes that would have enabled all women to participate in the labour force. Despite feminists' efforts to dissociate daycare from welfare, more influential reports, such as the 1985 Macdonald Commission, which recommended reduced government spending on social services and endorsed free trade with the United States, continued to label daycare a social service rather than government programme that would foster full employment.

Social Policy and Practice in Canada illustrates effectively the disjuncture between state policy and grassroots demand for social programmes. Comparing government rhetoric, policy-makers' parsimony, activists' proposals for policies that addressed systemic inequities and opposition to reforms that would undermine the personal wealth of elites, Finkel explains how the punitive principle of less eligibility remained the foundation of many social policies that were designed to advance citizenship rights and social justice. Citizen demands for comprehensive, universal schemes were particularly strong during the Depression and the Second World War when Canadians and governments were worried about stability and economic security. Popular support for expensive and inclusive programmes waned in the absence of a looming economic crisis and social unrest. Finkel concludes that one of the key contradictions that prevented sustained support for the social welfare state is the concept of the welfare state as a "community". The welfare state was supposed to replace the care that smaller communities provided for the unfortunate, but it was difficult for people to identify with communities as abstract as "nation" or "province" and to sympathize with the recipients of the programmes who were no longer their neighbours.

Household Politics examines a moment when both citizens and politicians were willing to consider expanding social welfare programmes to protect individuals from economic and social insecurity. Fahrni argues that the late 1940s were distinct from the 1950s because it was a period when many Canadians debated a variety of possibilities about post-war Canada and demanded a role in shaping social policy. For Quebec women, the 1940s offered new political opportunities because they had just won the provincial vote. *Household Politics* is important because it examines what families – the foundation of post-war reconstruction policies – expected from government after the war and how both women and men used the new sense of entitlement to shape social welfare programmes. Fahrni focuses on poor neighbourhoods in Montreal and illustrates how extended family networks continued to matter to young families despite the emphasis on the nuclear model of the family. In negotiations within families as well as between families and social service agencies, Montrealers participated in reconstruction politics and introduced their own expectations and goals into the national discourses about the relationship between citizens and the state. People were as important as mandarins in conceptualizing reconstruction policy.

Local studies bring the mixed social economy into sharper focus, and Fahrni

focuses on the diversity of Montreal to explain how religion, language and ethnicity shaped social welfare after the war. In the 1940s, Montreal was “numerous cities within [a] postwar city” (p. 29); each community developed its own household politics based on social values that varied according to language, religion, class and ethnicity. In post-war Quebec, all three levels of government wanted to assert their responsibility for social welfare to the citizens of the province, but the plans for reconstruction still relied on private provision. Duplessis’s resistance to public welfare gave the federal government space to introduce its nation-building project to Montrealers through social welfare programmes. Veteran’s benefits and family allowances appealed to citizens’ sense of entitlement to economic security, but they did not help the poorest families make ends meet.

Lay organizations continued to rely on religious groups to organize private charities, and denominational barriers and conflicts among religious charitable organizations prevented social workers from understanding the complete array of services that was available in the city. The nature and generosity of the welfare services that were available to families varied according to the resources and ideologies of their religious communities. Due to the affluence of the Anglophone elite, Protestant families in need were generally better provided for than French- and English-speaking Catholics. Anglophone social agencies were also more outspoken in their demand for public welfare programmes than Catholic agencies, which opposed federal intervention for nationalist reasons and, perhaps more importantly, because they believed that the church should be responsible for caring for the poor and needy. Jewish agencies provided services for their community and shared the Protestant view that the government should take more responsibility for families that could not provide for basic needs due to the loss of a breadwinner. Religious values also informed people’s perceptions about which services they were entitled to as citizens and which needs were best served through private arrangements and by charitable groups. For example, French mothers tended to be more wary of government-run nurseries than English-speaking women. Fahrni’s meticulous mapping of Montreal’s complex mixed social economy supports recent calls from historians of religion that it is necessary to pay attention to how religious motivation influenced policy development and social action in the latter half of the 20th century.

Through analysis of programmes for returning veterans, mothers’ consumer politics and fathers’ protests for housing and education for their children, *Household Politics* demonstrates that the renegotiation of family and the gendered roles of family members took place as much in the public realm as it did in private homes. Fahrni argues that both the family and the public spheres were undergoing transformation in the post-war years. By making family needs that had formerly been private matters known, and by demanding that governments respond to them, citizens expanded the idea of the public. Governments and social agencies protected a particular kind of family in reconstruction politics, but families were also agents of change who inserted themselves into “the public” by “voicing their needs in public spaces such as newspapers, supermarkets, and picket lines” (p. 23). Post-war reconstruction policy targeted wives and husbands, but all family members, including extended family, were engaged in a debate about whom the state should recognize as dependents. Soldiers’ parents claimed that they, too, were entitled to veteran’s benefits because a significant number of soldiers were unmarried and returned to their parents’ homes

after the war. Federal reconstruction plans continued to assume that wives would be responsible for the readjustment of veterans despite protests that it was unfair that wives were entitled to benefits while mothers in need were forced to resort to charity. Fahrni is also careful to include in her analysis the protests against the growth of the public and its intervention into private family matters in order to help demonstrate that local studies of social policy illustrate that the post-war consensus was not as united as historians have assumed it to have been.

Fahrni contributes to the historiography that portrays a complex post-war domesticity. She argues that the idealized nuclear family was a standard that many families did not meet, and that women emerged from the war with a new appreciation of their ability to influence politics. Women drew lessons from wartime consumer politics, which formed the basis of a post-war economic citizenship. As careful shoppers, women adhered to the federal government's prescriptions for frugality to control inflation. In turn, women expected that the expanding state services would be available to them. *Mothers of the Municipality* also rejects the assumption that the 1950s and 1960s was a period of conservatism and complacent domesticity. The articles in the book examine the relationships among women's activism, public welfare and private charitable organizations in post-1945 Halifax. Although women's organizations continued to be based on maternalist discourses, some of which established standards that most women could not meet, the editors emphasize the "multiple meanings of motherhood and maternalism" (p. 7). Motherhood was still an important motivator for activism while race, class, marital status and age shaped women's understandings and experiences of motherhood.

The contributors to this volume take up an earlier challenge by Suzanne Morton to include analysis of gender inequality into regional studies and to use regional studies to challenge unified narratives of the past.⁵ These case studies also show that focusing on public provision of welfare overlooks women because, in Nova Scotia, most women continued to rely on private charities and services. Essays on social assistance, maternity homes and daycare support Finkel's rejection of progressive narratives of the Canadian social welfare state and assist in demonstrating that the economic underdevelopment and poverty of the region made it impossible to adopt progressive welfare legislation without federal money. Janet Guildford's study of public welfare reforms from 1956 to 1958, for instance, argues that federal funding was necessary to help bring an end to the poor laws in the province. Social workers in the province had lobbied for improved public welfare since the 1930s, but government officials resisted them – particularly during the Cold War when fears of socialism slowed down reforms. Jeanne Fay's analysis of women on social assistance after these reforms argues that the infusion of federal money did not change the distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor. Stanfield's government introduced a two-tiered social assistance programme in 1958. Only those whom officials deemed to be worthy (widows and disabled men) were eligible for public assistance. Part II of the legislation gave money to municipalities to provide services for those who did not meet the moral standards laid out in the programme.

Mothers of the Municipality demonstrates that histories of the social welfare state

5 Suzanne Morton, "Gender, Place, and Region: Thoughts on the State of Women in Atlantic Canadian History", *Atlantis*, 25, 1 (Fall/Winter 2000), pp. 119-28.

must include private charities because a key debate in the post-war years was what would be the proper mix between public and private provision. In her contribution to the book, Shirley Tillotson explains that the democratization of public welfare also influenced private agencies and that the debates about how to provide services under the new welfare arrangements also played themselves out in interpersonal disputes. Tillotson examines the 1951 dispute about the dismissal of Gwendolen Lantz, a 25-year veteran of the Children's Aid Society, and shows that the negotiation of the new relationship between public and private provision was connected to "gendered shifts in authority" (p. 78) as men eclipsed women in the management and development of social welfare programmes and priorities. This new cohort of trained social workers introduced a commitment to democratic process in social work, and while men rose to prominent positions in the new mixed social economy, the other essays affirm that women's groups in the 1950s, such as the Voice of Women, also adopted these new ideals. In the 1970s, feminist groups reasserted women's expertise in the development of services for women by insisting that women were the experts of their own lives. Janet Guildford argues that the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women has tried to negotiate the complex relationships among governments and women's groups, but that it has struggled to assert its authority within the government and its legitimacy to women's groups.

Feminist services, such as transition houses, rape crisis lines and training programmes for women, are examples of a recent renegotiation between public and private welfare. In the 1970s, the existence of a federal Ministry on the Status of Women, along with employment programmes based on fostering local initiatives to address social problems based on participatory democracy, made funds available to grassroots women's groups who wanted to establish services based on feminist principles.⁶ The federal government and some provincial governments promoted democratic and local solutions, which created a unique opportunity for feminist groups to design services that addressed equity issues. Within the Ministry of the Status of Women, the Woman's Programme was important for grassroots women's groups because it funded projects that addressed gender inequality.⁷ Nevertheless, feminists who have studied the relationship between women's groups and the state have argued that the marginalization of the Status of Women within government bureaucracies depoliticized women's issues and that governments have organized women's issues according to their own agendas.⁸

6 Josephine Reckart, *Public Funds, Private Provision: The Role of the Voluntary Sector* (Vancouver, 1993); Nancy Janovicek, "Feminist Initiatives, Government Limitations: Feminist Services, Politics and Voluntarism, 1970-1985", in Audrey MacNevein, Ellen O'Reilly, Eliane Leslau Silverman and Ann Taylor, eds., *Women and Leadership* (Ottawa, 2002), pp. 57-76.

7 In September 2006 the federal government cut funds to Status of Women Canada and changed the terms and conditions of the Women's Program. Effective September 27, projects funded by the Women's Program can no longer include advocacy or lobbying. For more information on the impact on the cuts, see Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, *New Federal Policies Affecting Women's Equality: A Reality Check* (Ottawa, November 2006) and it is also available at: http://www.criaw-icref.ca/indexFrame_e.htm

8 For example, see Suzanne Findley, "Institutionalizing Feminist Politics: Learning from the Struggle for Equal Pay in Ontario", in Pat Evans and Gerde Wekerle, eds., *Women and the Canadian Welfare State* (Toronto, 1997), pp. 310-29 and Janine Brodie, *Politics on the Margins – Restructuring the Canadian Women's Movement* (Halifax, 1995).

Wendy McKeen's *Money in their Own Name* nuances this argument by examining how the social policy community, which included feminists, transformed feminist goals in a manner that ultimately strengthened neo-liberal economic policy and reasserted the male-centred familialist foundation of social policy. McKeen explains how feminists lost the campaign for individualized entitlement through a careful analysis of the complex relationship between the policy community and government. The policy-community perspective examines the struggle over meaning among political actors who focus on a specific issue, and McKeen adopts this approach because it explores how "the activities and discourses of politically marginalized organizations and social groups can make a difference in shaping politics and influencing the direction of policy change" (p. 6). Feminist studies have analyzed broad political trends and clashes between grassroots groups and the more powerful state bureaucracies; McKeen considers how the debates with allied progressive groups forced feminists to make compromises that undermined women's equality.

In the 1970s, feminists advocated for two different solutions to women's poverty. The Royal Commission on the Status of Women and the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) endorsed programmes that targeted poor women. The alternate feminist approach was the argument that women needed individualized entitlement to social programmes to counter the assumed dependency of women on family-based benefits. In the context of the federal government's renewed emphasis on targeted programmes and cuts to child benefits in the 1970s and 1980s, liberal feminist groups chose to protect programmes for poor women because they believed that economic autonomy was a luxury for middle-class women. This changed in the late 1980s when NAC became more confrontational and endorsed individualized entitlement, but by then the left-liberal social policy community had shifted the public debate about poverty from women to children and ultimately undermined the women's movement's emphasis on the structural causes of women's inequality. In response to the global shift toward privatized social welfare provision in the 1990s, many feminist groups decided to protect the targeted programmes that governments were cutting. This further undermined feminist analysis of poverty that stressed the need to treat women as individuals rather than as dependent on the family. By choosing to analyze a feminist defeat, McKeen demonstrates how strategic decisions by activists can reinforce the economic and social conditions that they are trying to change.

One of the most significant barriers to ending women's poverty has been women's access to jobs that pay good wages and provide benefits. Lack of child care spaces and the enduring assumption that women are temporary workers rather than breadwinners make it more difficult for poor women to find jobs. From the 1960s to the 1980s equity was an important goal of federal policy on training, and programmes funded grassroots women's groups that sought to move women from the service sector into more lucrative trades and construction. The restructuring of Employment Insurance (EI) in 1996 changed this. In *Training the Excluded for Work*, Marjorie Griffin Cohen argues that women from marginalized groups are "chronically disadvantaged in the workplace" because government policy rejects the structural underpinnings of unemployment and instead blames workers for not acquiring the skills that they need to find jobs in the current economy (p. 3). Employers' refusal to train workers and the concomitant demand for highly skilled workers diverted government money away from EI programmes and into training programmes that not only denied unemployed

workers their own funds, but also required them to enter programmes that usually did not accommodate the specialized needs of marginalized groups. These training programmes were also downloaded to the provincial governments, which has left unemployed women who live in provinces that have adopted neo-liberal economic agendas even less access to the programmes that they need to find good jobs.

The articles in *Training the Excluded for Work* analyze government policies that have undermined equity programmes that target women, immigrants, First Nations, youth and people with low income as well as feminist training programmes that address the structural barriers to women's economic security. One of the most significant changes in the federal policy on job training has been the removal of funds to women's groups that have helped develop job-training programmes for women. Ursule Critoph explains that without federal funds, provincial schemes have tended to favour workers who do not need additional supports such as child care or counseling services. Joan McFarland examines the impact of this shift on programmes in New Brunswick. Since the reforms to EI the onus has been on the individual to pay for training, and the participants in these new programmes usually have to meet EI requirements; McFarland's examination of the history of the training programmes since the 1970s demonstrates that female enrolment in these programmes has always been low because most of these programmes have not provided family support for low-income women. Moreover, few women receive information about them because they are not eligible for EI and, with the elimination of programmes designed for women, their under-representation in training programmes has increased.

Successful training programmes consider women's specific barriers, and many of the contributions to the book demonstrate that the most successful programmes are designed by community groups who worked closely with the people whom the programmes would serve. Margaret Manerey and Marjorie Griffin Cohen's study of the Working Women Community Programme and the Working Skills Programme, which have offered training to immigrant women in Toronto since the mid-1970s, analyzes the specific barriers that immigrant women face when they try to access programmes that will help them break free from the cycle of minimum-wage jobs. These programmes were successful because, in the 1970s, women's groups had access to federal funds to design creative programmes that promoted a just and equitable society. They have survived the stresses associated with the restructuring of the 1990s because of the high ratings from participants and because they have adapted to changes in the labour market. The government's promotion of a more important role for the non-profit and voluntary sectors in the provision of social services in order to save money, however, has been a double-edged sword. While the programmes' success rates have ensured continued funding, the federal government's emphasis on market-ready skills has made it more difficult for organizers to target unskilled immigrants who cannot afford to pay for training programmes.

In sharp contrast with the essays on client-centred initiatives are those that examine training programmes for disadvantaged workers that have not closely monitored the treatment of the women and have consequently not broken down the barriers that restrict women's entry into male-dominated trades. Susan Hart and Mark Shrimpton, in their article in *Training the Excluded for Work*, argue that even though the Hibernia construction project included equity requirements, the project did not alleviate the historical barriers to women's participation in the construction and oil and gas

industry because it did not address the day-to-day actions in the workplace: contractors, unions and governments did not address the informal practices that both undervalued women's work experience and denied women access to training programmes that were necessary for promotion; these practices, in turn, made women more likely to be laid off than men.

Training programmes for women have focused on construction and the trades because these occupations have been particularly hostile to integrating women. Kate Braid's witty essay in *Training the Excluded for Work*, "The Culture of Construction: Or, Etiquette for the Nontraditional" (which should be mandatory reading for young women and men who think that women's equality is no longer an issue in the workforce) explains that there is not a "conspicuous core problem" that explains why women still comprise only three per cent of the nontraditional workforce. Braid describes "the little things happening around the edges" of the construction site culture that send a clear message to women that they are not welcome (p. 92). Drawing from her own experience, she offers practical advice about learning how to understand the expectations and worries of fellow workers and how to confront harassment on the workplace. Braid's advice is useful for women who are confident about their right to good jobs.

Margaret Hillyard Little uses the voices and experiences of less confident women to explain what supports need to be incorporated into training programmes to help disadvantaged workers. Hillyard Little wrote *If I Had a Hammer: Retraining that Really Works* in response to the cuts to social services by Mike Harris's Progressive Conservative government because she needed to work on an optimistic project. The book examines the Women's Work Training Programme in Regina, which was designed for low-income women by two women with years of carpentry experience. Many of the women who participate in the programme are single mothers, some have left violent relationships and the majority are First Nations women. The programme is unique because it combines training with life skills, academic training and job experience at the programme's co-operative business. More important, it is a five-year integrated programme that begins with basic carpentry skills and gives women the opportunity to earn journey carpentry status. Funding is complex because of the length of the programme, but both the federal and provincial governments, along with privately financed grants, have supported the programme despite the cuts to training programmes that promote equity.

Based on her observation of the programme and interviews with the developers and participants in the programme, Hillyard Little argues that the programme is successful because it addresses both individual and systemic change. She adds that because it is such an innovative programme and because it targets low-income marginalized women, it is necessary to develop a different assessment tool to measure its success. Even women who did not earn their papers were successful because they learned skills and became more confident in their ability to participate in the workforce. Individual change is as important as systemic change, and each participant's ability to improve her skills was possible because the designers addressed the systemic barriers to low-income women's participation in the workforce. Hillyard Little juxtaposes the success of the programme with the ineffectiveness of workfare and other neo-liberal welfare policies that force single mothers to accept low-paying jobs. Yet without political will and commitment to the government's responsibility to promote equality, innovative

training that helps poor women take control of lives will be scarce.

The books reviewed in this article make it clear that unified narratives of the development of social policy cannot capture the complexities of the Canadian social welfare state. Federal initiatives certainly promoted citizens' sense of entitlement to government programmes, but provincial and municipal governments determined what sort of programmes people would receive. Closer attention to what people expected from these programmes shows that local politics influenced not only their access to programmes, but also their perceptions about when the government should intervene to alleviate economic uncertainty and when people thought that it was more appropriate for private organizations to provide services.

Analysis of the changing relationship between public and private welfare elucidates women's contribution to the development of social policy. During the years when politicians and other Canadians supported a strong social welfare state, charity groups and private organizations still played an important role in the provision of services to poor and disadvantaged people. Women have actively engaged in the debates about entitlement to social programmes and the democratization of social policy as activists or as recipients of services. At certain times, privately run social welfare programmes that reproduce unequal gender relations have coincided with those that addressed the historical causes of women's poverty. When there has been strong support for innovative local solutions to social problems, the combination of public and private service provision could produce programmes that promoted equality and encouraged democratic participation. Today women's groups that provide women-centred services are struggling to keep their doors open, and feminist analysis of the government cutbacks is justifiably critical of the cutbacks to women. But it is equally important to develop an intervention into neo-liberal discourses that seeks to revise the relationship between public and private welfare in a way that will encourage long-term strategies that both meet the immediate needs of poor women living in poverty and seek to end poverty generally.

NANCY JANOVICEK