The Dream is over

The Moral Regulation of Single Mothers in New Zealand

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Abstract

This thesis explicates the 'moral regulation' (Little, 1998) of single motherhood for welfare recipients in New Zealand. For the purposes of this study the definition of moral regulation' followed Little's (1998) interpretation of Valverde and Weir's (1988) model: the moral regulatory practices of both the state and civil society which reinforce class, gender, race and sexual inequalities. Particular attention was given to the disciplining (Bordo, 1993; Gillies, 2007) of single welfare mothers as state dependants, and their position within the 'mothering hierarchy' (Bock, 2000; Gillies, 2007). The research project also explored concepts of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) vis-à-vis single mothers and questioned whether engaging with (or employing) these forms of capital provided sources of resistance and resilience against negative ideological, institutional and interpersonal responses towards single motherhood, material hardship and the 'push' into paid employment. Data was collected using two qualitative methods of inquiry: autoethnography and in-depth participant interviews with eight single mothers. Analysis and interpretation of the data was self-reflexive and culturally informed, incorporating both reflexive writing practices and sociological theory. The first section of this thesis is a self-narrative (or autoethnography) based on the authors subjective experiences of single motherhood; the second section, is a narrative account of single motherhood based on the qualitative interviews conducted. The discussion section locates the lived experiences of single mothers within the relevant discursive fields and connects the personal dimensions of single motherhood to the socio-political landscape of New Zealand. In short, this study finds that despite some advances in social equality, and better recognition of the needs and rights of marginalised populations, single mothers are still politically underrepresented by way of structural support and advocacy, and overrepresented negatively by the media and in political discourse relating to 'problem populations'. Moreover, single welfare mothers are exposed to moral regulation and discriminatory practices on many intersecting levels – ideological (exo), institutional (macro) and interpersonal (meso/micro) – in their day-to-day lives. However, within their everyday practices, single mothers also mobilise many forms of social and individual agency, thus succouring their material and emotional survival.

Key words

Single motherhood; autoethnography; lived experience; moral regulation; welfare; marginalisation; social capital.

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PREFACE

This thesis is about single motherhood. It is, in its essence, about marginalisation and oppression; namely, how and why some people come to be socially excluded and subject to discriminatory practices more than others. I am a single mother and have been subjected to the discriminatory practices this thesis documents and examines. The symbolic representations of single motherhood which circulate our political, public and mediated realms fail to communicate holistically what it means to be a single mother. Rather, such representations focus on what single motherhood is presumed to be, depending on a particular political, social or moral position. As objects of political rhetoric, academic study or idle gossip, single mothers are both marginalised and victimised as helpless, hapless, and perhaps tragic, social actors. They are studied upon, put upon and speculated upon. Their narratives are constructed and delineated through a particular framework of institutionalised, authoritative knowledge.

Single mothers have been a consistent feature of academic study for some time. Scholarly research has, by and large, focused on the historical lineage of single motherhood and the social positioning of single mothers as Other. Indeed such evidence supports many of the claims made throughout this thesis regarding the social location of single mothers and the punitive treatment experienced by many of them. However, there remains a gap in the literature; specifically research which foregrounds the subjective experiences of single mothers. As Sandra Harding (2004) notes, *"when women refuse to assent to some particular claim made in the name of feminism, that is always a good reason to seek to identify the different situations and experiences that support such dissent"* (p. 9).

In order to achieve this, it is imperative to shed light on the disjuncture and contradictions between official accounts of single motherhood and those accounts/narratives submerged within the biographies of single mothers. Single mothers are already peripheralised via the political, economic and social organisation of society and this should not be perpetuated within scientific scholarship. Social scientific research, undoubtedly, has a place in advancing our understandings of the issues abound with single motherhood; however, particular research methods are more suited than others to uncovering the 'truth' about single motherhood.

Writing an autoethnography, therefore, allowed me to bring together elements of the micro-social and the macro-social; to use different lenses through which to explore the intersecting systems which influence social life. The writing process also emphasised the importance of biography and lived realities in expanding knowledge. As someone who started her academic career at art school, self-reflexivity is not a foreign concept: the incorporation of the self into both working practice and work-

product. Rather, the role of insider-outsider is a familiar one, which many conceptual artists use, whereby the self becomes a conduit to explore overarching concepts and themes. To me, 'doing conceptual art' is not dissimilar to 'doing autoethnography'; the connections between the personal, the political and the cultural are similarly implicit in both, only the medium is different.

Incorporating the self into working practice is challenging and uncomfortable for both the reader and author. The *rationale* for writing an autoethnography comes, in part, from a personal, and enduring, interest in biography and storytelling as a pedagogical tool. It also speaks to a growing body of feminist sociological theory which identifies experience and lived reality as a source of objective knowledge and truth. In order to flush out the research questions posited in this thesis, a less orthodox approach was needed, one which required insider knowledge of the subject matter what to look for and where to look. Autoethnography seemed a natural match despite some derisive responses towards this choice of methodological strategy. Placing 'the self' in ones work will always open up debate regarding narcissism, relevance (or lack of) and generalisability. Regardless, it offers an alternative methodology which is both suited to the epistemological approach of this thesis and the concerns of feminist scholarship regarding the most appropriate ways in which to research women and gender issues.

Writing this thesis was both incredibly painful and liberating. It is an emotive subject which resurfaced many difficult feelings and memories for me and the research participants. I felt a great deal of emotional and moral responsibility towards the women who shared their experiences with me: their stories were deeply affecting. In writing this thesis, I wanted to do justice to their stories as personal narratives and sociologically informative accounts. Part one (*Embodying the Welfare Queen*) is an autoethnographic narrative detailing some of my experiences of single motherhood; while part two (*Related Narratives*) takes the form of a qualitative study into the experiences of eight other single mothers. Ultimately, the objective was to produce a sociologically sound piece of research written in such a way so as to be accessible and relevant to those it is intended to represent.

1. Introducing the 'Welfare Queen'

The 'welfare queen' is often perceived as morally corrupt, illegitimate, deviant, parasitic and dangerous. The 'welfare queen' maintains her lifestyle by living off the backs of hard-working tax-payers. The 'welfare queen' is caricaturised as lazy, dependant, sexually promiscuous, and a bad example to her children. The 'welfare queen' needs to be monitored, constrained, regulated, and educated. The 'welfare queen' is frequently vilified as being reluctant to work and careless in misspending her social welfare money. The 'welfare queen', therefore, fails to meet cultural moral standards; she is socially problematic.

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The term 'welfare queen' was introduced into public lexicon in the United States during Reagan's 1976 presidential election campaign (Hays, 2004). The 'welfare queen' and 'welfare mother' are terms which have become firmly established in public and political rhetoric, and are used pejoratively describe single mothers who are reliant on state welfare (benefits) (Zucchino, 1999). The 'welfare queen' has come to be synonymous with and, therefore, to embody, everything that is wrong with the liberal welfare system which, according to detractors, breeds complacency, dependency and moral degeneracy (Murray & Hernstein, 1994).

Single welfare mothers embody two inherent problems for the neo-liberal state: firstly, they are not actively engaged in paid employment; and, secondly, they are unable to provide a stable, nuclear family (Hayward & Yar, 2006). In short, welfare mothers, as part of a "growing underclass" (Key, 2011b), are at odds with two key social responsibilities: the need and obligation to provide a stable income and a stable family environment (Gillies, 2007; Hayward & Yar, 2006). New Zealand, as part of the neo-liberal project, similarly emphasises social inclusion as being dependant on citizenry obligations and responsibilities to the state (Humpage, 2011).The myth of the welfare queen (Zucchino, 1999) has also become potent within the social imagination of the New Zealand public. Dominant narratives in New Zealand regarding beneficiaries, and in particular single mother beneficiaries, are predicated on the ideological framing of beneficiaries as a drain on social resources and as a 'problem population' (Gillies, 2007; Wacquant, 2009).

Politicized and mediated portrayals of beneficiaries tend to exaggerate existing negative stereotypes and rely heavily on a moral underclass discourse (Levitas, 2010). This discourse emphasises moral and cultural causes of poverty, tends to replay themes about 'dangerous classes' and sees the causes of poverty as lying in moral and cultural self-exclusion rather than structural exclusion (Levitas, 1998). The focus is on the consequences of social exclusion rather than the underlying determinants of social exclusion and inequality. Hierarchical boundaries are drawn between 'us' and 'them', defining those who are included and those who

are excluded from group social membership (Hayward & Yar, 2006). As Gillies (2007) notes, *"*[there exists] a powerful web of discourses which position working-class mothers as inferior, irresponsible or even dangerous" (p. 8); while single welfare mothers are characterised as "benefit scroungers rearing delinquent children" (p. 45).

These themes have proven increasingly popular as rhetorical devices within New Zealand, especially in political debates related to welfare dependency and single motherhood, which draw on wider social anxieties (Hayward & Yar, 2006) regarding 'dangerous classes' (Morris, 1994). Single mothers, in particular, are 'soft targets' for mediated, legislative and interpersonal attacks (Hayward & Yar, 2006). Political and public concern is often directed towards these issues as being of 'central concern', and social policy development in New Zealand over the past two decades has consistently succeeded in contributing to the victimisation (and demonisation) of single mothers (and their children) and the 'feminisation of poverty' (Kelsey, 1995).These same issues have been widely publicised in popular media, and couched in similarly morally loaded terms.

Media coverage of welfare spending has tended to amplify the 'problem', using incendiary language and selective data, to reinforce welfare dependency and welfare fraud as 'real issues' worthy of a moral panic. Figures on welfare spending given by the current National government are often inflated and misleading, as are their projected fiscal savings reports, used to justify sweeping welfare reforms and budget cuts to social spending (see AWWG, 2010; Campbell, 2011; WWG, 2011) Single motherhood and welfare dependency are depicted, somewhat contradictorily, as both a 'lifestyle choice' and a 'social pathology'. The punitive and degrading treatment of single mothers has been further regenerated in recent times by notions of the 'risk society' (Beck, 1999) and risk factor paradigms (MacDonald, 2006) which position single mothers as both 'at risk' and 'a risk' to society (Mitchell, Bunton & Green, 2004). As a 'deviant' population, single mothers are subject to both macro (legislation and social policy) and micro (reactionary stigma and shaming practices) social control mechanisms (Hayward & Yar, 2006), which show no signs of abatement within this fiscal climate of austerity.

The Dream is Over

"The dream is over" decried Social Development Minister Paula Bennett during her reading of proposed changes to welfare entitlements under the *Future Focus Bill, 2010* (Scoop NZ, 2010). When exactly this dream ever existed is unclear; however the subtext of this statement was clear: the situation for many beneficiaries was set to become worse. Since the passing of this bill, various changes to welfare entitlements have gradually come into effect. Most notably, Unemployment Beneficiaries (UB) and Domestic Purpose Beneficiaries (DPB) face stricter 'work-testing' criteria. The *Future Focus Act (2010)* has also enacted a simultaneous tightening of benefit eligibility alongside increased obligations and responsibilities

attached to eligibility criteria (*Future Focus Act, 2010*). Perhaps the most contentious of these changes to the *Social Security Act (1964)* was the introduction of a sanctioning system designed to compel beneficiaries into paid employment, a 'three-strikes-and-you're-out' style gradated system of punishment. Failure to comply with new work obligations and responsibilities can result, as an end step, in the cancellation of an individual's benefit. Phase two of these reforms, which come into effect in July 2013, will obligate parent beneficiaries to send their children to school or early childhood centres and enrol them with a doctor or face the 'graduated sanction system' for failure to comply with these additional "social obligations" *(Future Focus Act, 2010)*.

As in previous times of fiscal crisis over the past four decades, the vulnerable and 'socially problematic' members of society are the first to be affected as welfare provisions are constricted (Wacquant, 2009). For single mothers[1], this punitive treatment has a long historical tradition which is rooted in their ideological framing (Silva, 1996b). A metaphorical question mark hangs over single welfare mothers. 'Single welfare mothers'[2] are perceived as occupying a marginal and amoral space; their legitimacy is brought into question as they are both without a partner and without paid employment. 'Proper' mothers [good mothers] (see Figure 1) are either: married, partnered or employed (Bock, 2000). Recent drives in New Zealand to activate single mothers on welfare back into paid employment have reopened and recast old debates about their suitability as mothers and inclusive[3] members of society (see *Future Focus Bill, 2010*). As state dependants, single mothers neither fit the moral standards of mothering (Gillies, 2007; McCormack, 2006; Silvia, 1996b; Valverde & Weir, 1988) set by contemporary middle-class women (Wilson & Huntington, 2005) nor meet the policy objectives fostered under neoliberal governance, which emphasises self-sufficiency and personal responsibility (Hayward & Yar, 2006). Single mothers, therefore, have increasingly become the object of public scrutiny and public policy initiatives (McCormack, 2006; Wacquant, 2009). The retraction of the welfare state has placed renewed focus on single mothers as 'undeserving' of both state assistance and public sympathy (Chunn & Gavigan, 2006). This is concomitant with an ideological shift towards the 'individualisation' and 'responsibilisation' of society in a western political context (Garland, 2003).

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[1] In academic scholarship single motherhood is variously referred to as solo motherhood, sole motherhood and lone motherhood. Although the term 'lone mother' is considered the academically correct term (see Power, 2005) the term single mother is preferred and, in the authors opinion, more reflective of single mothers' self-description and self-identification. The definition of single mother for the purpose of this research is mothers who have primary care of their child or children and who are dependent on a state benefit i.e. Domestic Purposes Benefit.

[2] A term often used pejoratively, especially in the media and by social commentators, to denote single mothers in receipt of state assistance. This term is often politically and morally charged to convey negative stereotypes of single mothers as illegitimate and irresponsible. For the purpose of this thesis single mothers who are in receipt of a state benefit are referred to as 'single welfare mothers', as a descriptive rather than pejorative term, to denote the hierarchy of mothering.

[3] Social inclusivity is emphasised in neoliberal policy as self-sufficiency and paid employment for all citizens (*see Levitas, 1998*).

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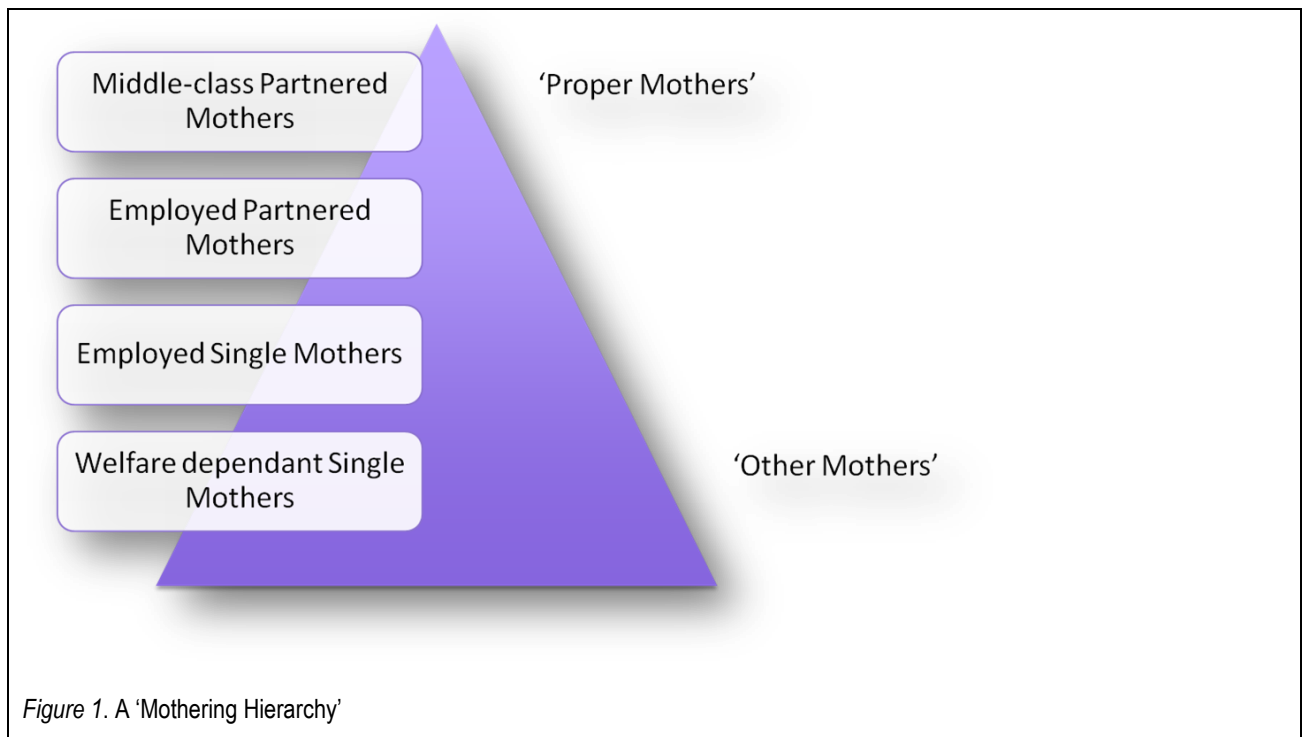
Figure 1. A 'Mothering Hierarchy'

Recent welfare reforms in New Zealand suggest that single mothers can only be tolerated to an extent; a sentiment that is seemingly backed by public response and hostility towards the perceived deviant qualities inherent to single motherhood (Gillies, 2007; Wilson & Huntington, 2005). Referring to the beginnings of the assault on single mothers in New Zealand, Jane Kelsey (1995) notes:

> *The moral responsibility argument was aimed mainly at the domestic purposes beneficiary. The prevailing image was of a young woman who had deliberately got pregnant knowing she could bludge off the state for the next fifteen years. She was never the victim of rape and incest, or the beaten wife who had escaped with her life but had no means to support herself or her children on her own, or a mother who had been deserted and left to fend for herself. She was frequently assumed to be cheating not only the state, but those of her fellow citizens who were prepared to make sacrifices, pay their taxes and obey the rules. (p. 281)*

Dominant narratives in New Zealand have given much attention to the moral fortitude of 'welfare mothers', attacking both the moral constitution of single mothers and their precarious financial toehold by way of significant welfare cuts and public 'beneficiary bashing' (Bennett, 2010; Key, 2010; Future Focus Bill, 2010.). The sustained attack on single mothers is evidenced by legislative reforms and policy initiatives from successive governments, with the acting Minister of Social Development taking these changes to new extremes (Bradford, 2013). The state plays a key role in the social exclusion and marginalisation of single mothers (Fineman, 1993; Little, 1998); however, popular discourse and public support also maintains the Othering of single mothers (Gillies, 2007; Mitchell, 2004; Wilson & Huntington, 2005). These ideological narratives replay morally coded messages about the illegitimacy, inadequacy and irresponsibility of single

motherhood. It is these discourses, coupled with the selective use of statistics related to negative outcomes for single mothers and their children, that have continued to reaffirm and perpetuate the characterization of single mothers as dependant, irresponsible and undeserving (Chunn & Gavigan, 2006).

Social policy plays a key role in the operationalisation of dominant state ideology and the social structural positioning of single mothers. In the UK, for instance, Labour's '*Flexible New Deal' (2009)* (now replaced by the *Welfare Reform Act, 2012*) implemented a programme of active labour market policies which focused on reengaging unemployed beneficiaries in the labour market and, essentially, punishing those who refused 'reasonable employment'. These welfare-to-work programmes closely resembled similar welfare policies in the US under Clinton's administration, which penalised those reliant on state assistance and engendered a huge increases in poverty amongst vulnerable groups, such as single mothers (Hays, 2006), and the 'working poor' (Wacquant, 2009). New Zealand's *Future Focus Bill (2010)* is, arguably, derivative of both US and UK welfare reform policy.

Government sponsored public discourse in New Zealand has aimed itself squarely at single mothers as socially and fiscally problematic. The Welfare Working Group, a government funded task force assigned with, as the title of their report suggests, *Reducing Long-Term Dependency*, proposes that welfare dependency and child poverty can be resolved via the labour market – not social spending (*see Welfare Working Group Recommendation, 2011*). In addition to this report, a government White Paper (*see White Paper for Vulnerable Children, 2012*) takes another swipe at beneficiaries and minority groups, and has provided the Minister of Social Development with renewed justification in her plans to impose, what may be seen as, draconian measures on beneficiaries with her 'second phase' of welfare reforms: the "social obligations" element of the *Future Focus Bill, 2010*. The government's *Regulatory Impact Statement* (MSD, 2010a) does little to hide the punitive measures, which will be called into action should beneficiaries not meet newly imposed obligations and expectations.

Much of these debates are underpinned by ideological currents that are reflected in the moral underclass discourse (Levitas, 2010), influencing similar political restructuring underway in other western neo-liberal states (e.g. UK, Canada and Australia), and characterised by an extensive curtailment of the 'welfare state' (Chunn & Gavigan, 2006). John Key (2011a) is explicit on his position regarding the 'underclass', stating that: "poor people make poor choices", and describing the welfare reforms as a "kick in the pants". These statements seemingly contradict an earlier statement he made in reference to his leadership role: "You can measure a society by how it looks after its most vulnerable. Once, I was one of them. I will never turn my back on that" (Key, 2006). Bennett (2010) has also made several incendiary comments which have sparked political fervour from both sides of the political spectrum, stating that the "lifestyle beneficiaries have come accustomed to is over" and that, "[single] mothers have lost their confidence" to return to paid employment.

This is a simplistic, if not patronizing, analysis of the various structural and personal hurdles faced by welfare reliant, single mothers.

This rhetorical slant, which attempts to justify National's deep welfare cuts, continued with Bennett (2012) stating:

> The welfare system has let many sole parents down and in doing so, has let their children down too...instead of providing support to allow sole parents to get back on their feet, it's trapping sole parent families in a cycle of dependence.

The consequences of radical cuts to welfare spending have been foreshadowed by studies of similar reforms in the UK, and by beneficiary and poverty advisory groups in New Zealand who have reported on this issue for some time (see Auckland Welfare Working Group, 2010; Child Poverty Action Group, 2008, 2011; Ministry of Social Development, 2010a, 2010b; Expert Advisory Group on Solutions to Child Poverty, 2012). Reducing social spending and welfare provisions does not incentivise single mothers into returning to paid employment and, if anything, evidence suggests that it has the opposite effect of further entrenching them, and their children, in severe hardship and disadvantage (Christopher, 2005).

Moral Regulation

The regulation of single mothers is inextricably tied to the welfare state as a key site of regulatory practices. Chunn and Gavigan (2006) observe that the dismantling of the welfare state will have deleterious and subjugative effects on poor single mothers, resulting in the 'feminisation' and 'individualisation' of poverty. From a wider historical viewpoint, the regulation of single mothers is driven by notions of 'moral motherhood', which are themselves culturally and temporally contestable (Smart, 1996). Undergirding current societal reactions and political responses towards single mothers as a 'problem population' are key historical developments regarding both gender relations and the structural (material) organisation of society around 'work' and 'the family' (Baker, 2007; Sangster, 2006; Silva, 1996b). Within this personal sphere are gendered and morally prescribed notions of 'good mothering'.

Mothers, as moral subjects, have always been held to higher cultural standards of morality than fathers (Silva, 1996a). The social politics of motherhood occupies a central, if not pivotal, position within feminist scholarship. The historical social conditions of working class, middle class, partnered and single mothers (Silva, 1996b) are highly significant in contextualising changing mothering practices and attitudes towards motherhood. Moreover, contemporaneous understandings about mothering and motherhood can be located within a broader body of knowledge. In *Good Enough Mothering? Feminist Perspectives on Lone Motherhood (1996)*, Silva *et al* build on this body of historical and contemporary knowledge to question central concepts and discourses related to single motherhood to retrace both the origins of moral

motherhood and the contradictory expectations of what constitutes good mothering. These broader social perspectives regarding motherhood and, in particular, legitimate motherhood underpins societal perceptions about single mothers as deviant subjects, and provides the grounds upon which good mothers can be distinguished from bad 'amoral' mothers in need of social regulation.

Moral regulation theory developed, in opposition to social control theory, as a method for better understanding the state, and especially the development of the capitalist state (Glasbeck, 2006). The concept of moral regulation is not always easy to define as there are various strands of scholarship which have developed since Philip Corrigan coined the term in 1981. According to Glasbeck (2006), moral regulation can refer to "both a way of doing sociology and to practices which social scientists can study" (p. i). She also notes that it has also been identified as a description of how some behaviours (e.g. alcohol consumption) and objectivities (e.g. the welfare mother) get constituted, resisted and regulated. Both morality and regulation are, however, somewhat nebulous concepts and are, largely, dependent on the context, or presuppositions of those utilising moral regulation theory. Moral regulation scholars differ in both their definitions of the term 'moral' and 'regulation', and the central focus of their scholarship i.e. state or non-state mechanisms of regulation. Of general consensus, however, are key ingredients of power, knowledge and authority, and laterally, Foucaldian theories of governance, discourse and the body (Glasbeck, 2006).

Foucault's theorisation of governance, knowledge and the body has contributed significantly to this discursive field: the relationship between power, knowledge (or discourses) and forms of social control fundamentally underpin the development of moral regulation scholarship. The distinction between 'control' and 'regulation', as a central concepts in exploring legal and extra-legal mechanisms of regulation, owes much to Foucault's "simple inversion of commonplace assumption" about power (Lazarus-Black & Hirsch cited in Glasbeck, 2006). Foucault argued that power is neither wholly monopolised by the state nor exclusively repressive; rather he claimed that power is also productive, constitutive and transformative. Furthermore, power is not just centrally located and instrumented by the state, but is also exercised through the diffuse construction of knowledges (Glasbeck, 2006). The term 'regulation', therefore, better allows for issue of agency and resistance to be brought forth in the examination of regulatory practices (Glasbeck, 2006; Sangster, 2006).

Foucault's governmentality theory emphasises the continual interaction between legal and other forms of power, which decentres the role of the state as the primary locus of disciplinary practices. Foucault argues that the state no longer governs through a hierarchical, top-down power structure, and that governance is not limited to state politics alone, but includes a wide range of control techniques (Foucault, 1975). This diffusion of power, he posits, has led to the regulatory society whereby citizens exercise self-regulation, self-surveillance and self-discipline: namely, the government of one's self (Foucault, 1975; Garland, 2006). Foucault's power/knowledge/body trilogy provides theoretical stability to the concept of moral regulation and

the decentralised nature of regulation and social control (Sangster, 2006). Moral regulation theory, while ideologically underpinned by similar notions of deviance and normality, offers a depth of analysis that social control theory does not permit. As Sangster (1996) observes, Foucauldian theory "extends our gaze beyond the state, dissecting power as a multi-dimensional, complex process" (p. 37). Foucault has also influenced many feminist scholars particularly in regards to legal definitions of immorality and 'expert' knowledges which normalise and pathologise female sexuality and reproduction (Sangster, 1996). Feminist contributions to moral regulation scholarship have been particularly insightful in advancing attention to these central issues.

Although Foucault has been charged by some feminists of ignoring issues of gender and femininity, his contributions to feminist theory cannot be ignored, most notably his work on sexuality and the 'disciplining of the body' (Bordo, 1993). Feminist moral regulation studies have also emphasised that sexuality is essential to the development of moral subjects, and link moral regulation to the formation and regulation of sexual subjectivities (Glasbeck, 2006). In some feminist accounts of social control the 'social' is really 'male' and the 'control' emanates from the law (Sangster, 2006). However, feminist moral regulation scholarship moves away from a patriarchal and dichotomised view of female oppression, which suggests that women are controlled by gender relations in their private spheres, and by the state and its legislative mechanisms in the public sphere. Similar to Foucault, feminist moral regulation scholars recognise that while law and male interests oppress women, women are also complicit in the subjugation of other women (Sangster, 2006). This observance is fundamentally significant in examining the moral regulation of single mothers; moral regulation is neither state nor gender specific.

In addition, feminist moral regulation scholarship has also devoted much attention to the role of the welfare state as a site of female oppression (Chunn & Gavigan, 2006). However, the retraction of the welfare state has been equally as devastating to women. As Chunn and Gavigan (2006) note:

> *The dismantling and restructuring of Keynesian social security programmes have impacted disproportionately on women, especially lone parent mothers, and shifted public discourse an social images from welfare fraud to welfare as fraud, thereby linking poverty, welfare and crime.(p. 327)*

For poor single mothers, interaction with the welfare state is both socially and financially imperative, and similarly repressive and punitive. Welfare law, Chunn and Gavigan (2006) point out, is principally (and ideologically) concerned with the lives and issues of poor women, especially lone-parent mothers. Moreover, overarching discourses regarding 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor position single welfare mothers on a precarious knifes edge, whereby at any time they might fall (or be pushed) from the former category to the latter, depending on their moral subjectivities. The welfare state has also divested much of its power to 'discipline and punish' (Foucault, 1975), deputising its citizenry to inform on friends, neighbours and acquaintances (Chunn & Gavigan, 2006). Single welfare mothers are, therefore, governed by both coercive

forms of criminal law and regulatory forms of welfare law in addition to informal mechanisms of regulation and coercion.

For the purposes of this thesis, feminist scholarship (most notably the work of Little, 1986; and Valverde & Weir, 1988) has provided key theoretical linchpins from which to think about the social location and regulation of single welfare mothers. An important aspect of Little's (1998) work is her focus on intragender moral regulation: namely, the hierarchical relationship between different groups of mothers whereby middle-class mothers seek to regulate less 'morally worthy' mothers, in this case, single mothers. Sangster (2006) offers a concise, and helpful, working definition of moral regulation: "the concept of moral regulation is the discursive and political practices whereby some behaviours, ideals and values were marginalised and proscribed while other were legitimised and naturalised" *(p. 38).* As an analytical tool, moral regulation incorporates key discourses from which to springboard this discussion of single motherhood: governance, power, punishment, deviance, the state and the body.

The literature under review, therefore, incorporates scholarship pertaining to both the welfare state and its effects on single mothers, and social inequalities literature. In addition, social policy developments have also been included as they indicate some of the key drivers in the moral regulation of single mothers in New Zealand. Moral regulation (Little, 1998) and the 'mothering hierarchy' (Bock, 2000; Gillies, 2007) are intertwining concepts which this research aims to explore further in relation to single mothers in New Zealand.

Review of Literature

Studies relating to the regulation of single motherhood have tended to focus on *dejure* mechanisms of social control; in other words, the welfare state and its policies and provisions. The volume of research has increased notably post-1996[4] given the hegemonic rise of neoliberal governance which has informed, to a large extent, welfare reform and policy in liberal welfare states[5] such as the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK), Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Although the subject of welfarism and social assistance is a common (and perhaps inescapable) theme throughout all the literature on single mothers, there are several key subthemes: paid employment (Baker & Tippin, 2002; 2004; Baker, 2007; Budig & England,

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[4] 1996 brought major welfare reforms in the United States, which were closely followed by reforms in similarly liberal welfare states such as the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand.

[5] The liberal regime is based on the notion of market dominance and private provision; ideally, the state only interferes to ameliorate poverty and provides for basic needs, largely on a means-tested basis. Hence, the decommodification potential of state benefits is assumed to be low and social stratification high (Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser 2011). Based on Esping-Andersen's (1990) decommodification index, Australia, Canada, Japan, Switzerland and the US can be defined as liberal welfare states, whereas Ireland, New Zealand and the United Kingdom are not clearly classified; however based on a continuum from the most democratic (Sweden) to the most liberal (US). New Zealand is a liberally aligned welfare state as welfare reforms emphasise two key neo-liberal concerns: paid employment and personal responsibility.

2001; Bull & Mittelmark, 2009; Duncan & Edwards, 1997); policy reform under neoliberalism (Dalziel, 2010; Ford & Miller, 1998; Hays, 2003; Kingfisher & Goldsmith, 2001; Wacquant, 2009); and, poverty and material deprivation (Christopher, 2005; Fineman, 1991; Power, 2005).

Of more relevance to this research, however, are the politically and morally charged discourses relating to the illegitimacy and irresponsibility of single mothers, as nonconforming subjects in need of correction (see Murray & Hernstein, 1994). For Wacquant (2009), single mothers are ideologically represented as being part of a bigger 'problem population' and punished accordingly via the neoliberal welfare state. While Wacquant's (2009) argument hinges on an examination of state policy relating to both 'prison-fare' and 'work-fare'. Hays (2003) centralises the experiences of single mothers living through the US welfare reforms introduced in 1996 under Clinton's administration.

In *Flat Broke with Children*, Hays (2003) brings together ethnographic data from three years observing and interviewing single mothers and case managers coping with the welfare reforms. Hays (2003) describes the harrowing effects of these reforms on women and children facing severe hardship as a consequence of cuts to entitlements and punitive welfare-to-work policies imposed via the *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA),1996* (Unites States Congress). Moreover, she offers a critical analysis of these reforms and the political undercurrents of moral regulation, punishment and the assertion of 'traditional family values' on single mothers. This attention to the overlapping of dominant ideology, policy and practice distinguishes her work from the majority of welfare scholarship.

Wacquant (2009) pursues a similar *raison d'être* in his chapter '*Welfare "Reform" as Statecraft'*, which explicates the relationship between the neoliberal reforms of the welfare state and the normalization of 'welfare mothers' via the labour market (although his larger argument is that the penal-welfare nexus serves to indenture and/or incapacitate all poor and minority groups). It is the poor who suffer the most when any government reforms (i.e. retracts) redistributive welfare provisions; however, when social spending is curtailed, it is women and children who are the most severely affected. Fineman (1991), Polakow (1993), and Christopher (2005) speak for, and to, the poverty that single mothers and their children endure as the feminisation of poverty continues its ascent under increasingly harsh welfare and labour market conditions. Similar conditions could be said to exist in New Zealand; however, there is a general perception that single mothers and their children are well provided for by a constitutionally embedded democratic welfare system. This is one myth that needs to be refuted and given greater attention in social research.

Kingfisher and Goldsmith (2001) offer an insightful (although now slightly out of date) comparative ethnography of welfare reform in both the US and New Zealand. Their argument concentrates on the ways in which poor mothers are reconstituted as potential able-bodied workers to fill the unskilled, marginal and low-paid sector of the labour market. Their findings suggest that poor single mothers in New Zealand experience

similar stigmatisation and pressure to engage in paid employment as their counterparts in the US despite the historically divergent (individualist-collectivist) conceptualization and administration of each country's welfare state. This research suggests that much of public policy is underwritten by the needs of the capitalist welfare state.

Welfare scholarship and social policy impact reports offer much needed data relating to the inherent problems of balancing child rearing and paid employment for those who do not fit into the 'nuclear family' paradigm. More recently, both the Ministry of Social Development (Ministry of Social Development, 2010) and the Alternative Welfare Working Group (AWWG) (Alternative Welfare Working Group, 2010) released publications highlighting the multiple disadvantages faced by those reliant on welfare assistance. The AWWG's (2010) report in particular stresses the vulnerability of single mothers and their children to poverty, physical and mental illness and unnecessarily punitive measures from government agencies which detrimentally effect long-term outcomes for single parent families (Alternative Welfare Working Group, 2010).

Little's (1998) work on the 'moral regulation' of single mother's is significant within the extant literature as it expounds the ideological framing of single mothers and practices of discrimination by the dominant classes. Following a Foucauldian understanding of moral culture, Little (1998) employs the concept of moral regulation as a lens through which to examine the complexities of the welfare state. According to Little (1998), "moral regulation can be seen to reinforce not merely class but also gender, race and sexual inequalities" (p. xii). Connecting the ideological framing of single mothers to discriminatory practices of both the state and civil society is an important way of viewing and analysing the intangible and concrete ways that single mothers are subject to punitive treatment. The relationship between the regulator and the regulated (or the rulers and the ruled) is an important one to be explored; in this instance the relationship between single mothers and the state; and single mothers and those mothers included within the ruling classes.

Moreover, the growing popularity of risk analysis paradigms and life-course theories have bolstered both academic and popular discourses which position single mothers as Others (Gillies, 2007; Mitchell, 2004; Wilson & Huntington, 2005). The concept of risk has been attached to single mothers as deviants, or potential deviants, in need of extra regulation and discipline (Beck, 1999; Foucault, 1975; Mitchell, 2004; Power, 2005). The dual representation of single mothers as both 'at risk' and 'a risk' poses interesting questions regarding the treatment of single mothers as a site of moral regulation and as a threat to middle-class stability. It is this revamping of an old and well-rehearsed moral concern regarding single mothers that offers an opportunity for further research and discussion.

Single motherhood is perceived as a (bad) lifestyle choice, but for many women it is a well-considered and positive choice. Mannis (1999) and Bock (2000) explore some of the subjectivities of single mothering and the struggle for legitimacy in the face of vituperative and hostile reactions towards such a decision. As has

been well documented, single mothers have historically been demonised and punished. Recent studies illustrate similar, albeit more nebulous, forms of discrimination including intolerance between groups of mothers (Bock, 2000). The women in Bock's (2000) study differentiate themselves from 'other' single mothers as they perceive themselves to be a better type of single mother: white, middle-class, educated, and perhaps most importantly, employed.

Qualitative research inquiry has also developed around key concepts of resistance, agency and mobility to better understand the lived experiences of single mothers. The scholarship of Bock (2000), Bottrell (2008), Mannis (1999) and Berridge and Romich (2011) suggests that many forms of agency and resistance can be found in the day-to-day lives of single mothers. For some mothers, exerting agency may be to resist social pressure to repartner or remarry (Edin, 2002; Edin & Kefalas, 2005); for others resistance is interpreted as meaningful daily action and interaction with their children (Berridge & Romich, 2011). In their article, *'"Raising Him…to Pull His Own Weight": Boys' Household Work in Single-Mother Households',* Berridge and Romich (2011) highlight an important dimension that remains elusive to much of the scholarly literature on single motherhood. Their findings suggest that mothers both needed their sons' day-to-day contributions to the household and wanted their sons to grow into men who were competent around the house and good partners (Berridge & Romich, 2011). As argued by the authors, "in demanding household work from their sons, these single mothers themselves work to undermine the traditional gendered division of such labour" (Berridge & Romich, 2011). Their research stands out as exploring an issue previously unseen in academic research.

Single motherhood is a neglected subject in New Zealand; however, the gap in research could be reduced if more attention was paid to the subjective experiences of single mothers. The operationalisation, or enactment, of dominant narratives and ideological 'framing' of single mothers in New Zealand could be explored further with greater emphasis placed on the instrumentation of moral regulation throughout the different levels of society: on a macro-level via legislation and policy, and on a micro-level via interpersonal interaction. While much attention is afforded to the effects of the welfare state, little attention, if any is cast upon the day-to-day lives of single mothers. Single motherhood is invariably conflated with issues of 'beneficiary bashing', child neglect and moral degradation rather than a distinct subject matter worthy of independent discourse. I argue that the topic is sorely underexplored and that, consequentially, single mothers lack both a political platform and representation. The lived experiences of single mothers have been, somewhat, submerged in academic research, in the same way that single mothers are socially and politically submerged.

As feminist writers such as Patricia Hill Collins (1990) suggest, social location is largely determined by structural forces such as race, gender and class, along with other socially constructed categories such as sexuality and disability, which privilege some while disadvantaging others. Collins (1990) argues that race,

gender and class *inter alia* must be viewed as intersecting systems of domination and oppression. She proposes that a matrix of domination (Collins, 1990) model can be used as an analytical tool when thinking about diversity: to explicate why certain groups continue to be defined as Other to dominant group values and treated in exclusionary ways. This approach provides an important theoretical framework to study the social location of single mothers, particularly in relation to dimensions of power, privilege and disadvantage, which continue to shape their day-to-day lives.

In order to bridge this gap in the literature, a bottom-up research approach is required: namely, sociological inquiry that "starts from women's lives not just from disciplinary or social policy" (Harding, 2006: 84). Standpoint feminism requires the research to start from within the everyday lives of the group of people under discussion as a point of departure, but social research should also be for that group subject to oppressive practices. One of the primary concerns of critical perspectives scholarship is social inequality and justice: identifying the site of oppressive practices and striving for emancipatory solutions to the problem (Diamond, 1992). As a framework for understanding the complexities and nature of oppression, an oppositional lens is often needed to tease out the political, social and cultural dimensions of particular kinds of inequality (Harding, 2006).

In addition, this approach also opens dialogue about the nature of representation and frameworks through which we filter our knowledge of the social world. Tim Diamond's *Making Gray Gold* (1992) paints an excellent illustration of the dual, and often contradictory, narratives, which exist as frameworks of understanding. These narratives are bifurcated between administrative, official accounts, which are couched in the language of professionalism and bureaucracy, and the biographical accounts of those experiencing a particular set of social circumstances or lived realities. Official, authoritative knowledge often obfuscates the knowledge embedded in experience. By listening to those who speak from the coalface – from the margins of society – the true depths of our [single mothers] knowledge can be appropriately excavated.

Themes and Research Questions

Prior to undertaking this research, several themes emerged from the literature as having significance to the study as likely outcomes of the data collected: stigmatisation, marginalisation, disadvantage and resilience. These themes prompted the development of a set of research questions used to lead both the autoethnographic and participant interview data collected, and the subsequent analysis. The central questions are how are single mothers in New Zealand subject to 'moral regulation'?; and, how do single mothers in New Zealand engage with and employ social and cultural capital in their day-to-day lives? These questions also raise the following sub questions:

- What are the day-to-day sources of stress for single mothers dependent on a main benefit?

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- How do other mothers interact with and regulate single mothers?
- What are single mothers' experiences of interactions with other mothers?
- How do single mothers manage (coping strategies) stigma (societal reaction) and material hardship?
- How do single mothers feel about paid employment and what part does it play in their lives?
- How do single mothers resist negative stereotyping?
- How do single mothers on welfare resist the 'push' into paid employment?
- How are single mothers subject to punitive treatment and demonization in New Zealand?

Significance of the Study

The 'situated knowledge' of single mothers is vital in expanding this field of research. Qualitative research which is grounded within the 'lived realities' of single mothers and their children is needed to elucidate their position as marginalised Others. The dimensions of power, race, class and gender can be better understood from the perspective or standpoint of the oppressed who are subject to structural forces which privilege some and disadvantage others (Andersen & Collins, 2007). Moreover, single mothers are not helpless, passive actors as agency and resistance are equally important aspects to explicate and understand.

At present, the literature relating to single motherhood tends to take a distal academic stance; single mothers are the subject of academic surveillance and representation. The voices of single mothers need to be centralized within scientific methodology, with more attention being paid to issues of resistance, identity and the policing of single mothers via other groups of mothers. In addition, Bourdieu's (1986) 'metaphors of capital' can provide a useful theoretical framework within which to examine single mothers' resilience and day-to-day coping strategies (Bottrell, 2008).

The paucity of qualitative research *vis-à-vis* single motherhood in New Zealand makes it difficult to advance the social and economic position of single mothers and provide a political platform from which to drive horizontal solidarity and resistance. As more single mothers are exposed to the vagaries of declining welfare assistance and fluxing labour markets, it is likely that both marginal work and marginal living (geographically and economically) will be the mainstay of single mothers' 'lived realities'.

This thesis aims to speak on behalf of myself and other single mothers as a marginalized group. I do not claim to give voice to single mothers as a subjugated group; rather, I speak from the margins as someone who embodies the lived reality of the concerns addressed. Single mothers and their children are subject to discriminatory practices and iniquitous outcomes in health, economic and employment indicators. Recent welfare reforms have accentuated these issues and the structural opportunities available to single mothers continue to be constrained. One of the research objectives was to foreground previously hidden and subjugated knowledges of single motherhood that can inform social perspectives and policy initiatives. This

can be achieved through firstly, understanding the relationship that single mothers have with other 'proper' mothers; and secondly, understanding the ways in which single mothers cope with social stigma and material hardship.

Delimitations and Limitations

This research focuses on single mothers in New Zealand who are in receipt of the Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB) and have primary care of their child/children. Although it is recognised that single fathers on the DPB face similar issues of material hardship and disadvantage, this research does not claim to address or represent the experiences of all single parents. Single mothers with a child or children 13 years or under were sought to participate in this research to gain better understanding of single mothers' experiences of managing part-time work, training and/or studying with childcare. Participants aged 24 or less were not included in this study because the discussion does not address issues related to teenage (17 or under) and young (18-24) mothers, which have been studied in greater depth by others in New Zealand (*see Collins, 2005; 2010*) and overseas (*see Boden et al, 2008; Bradbury, 2006*). It is felt that the issues specifically related to teenage and young motherhood are best discussed elsewhere.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to explicate the 'moral regulation' (Little, 1998) of single motherhood for welfare recipients in New Zealand. For the purposes of this study, the definition of moral regulation will follow Little's (1998) interpretation of Valverde and Weir's (1988) model: the moral regulatory practices of both the state and civil society which reinforce class, gender, race and sexual inequalities. Particular attention will be given to the disciplining (Bordo, 1993; Gillies, 2007) of single welfare mothers as state dependants and their placement within the 'mothering hierarchy' (Bock, 2000; Gillies, 2007). The research project will also explore concepts of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) vis-à-vis single mothers and question whether engaging with (or employing) these forms of capital can provide sources of resistance and resilience against negative ideological, institutional and interpersonal responses towards single motherhood, material hardship and the 'push' into paid employment.

Ultimately, this thesis is intended as a prelude to a larger ethnographic study of these issues using institutional ethnography (IE) as a research methodology. The first part of this thesis is structured around three biographical episodes which provide a point of departure to explore the central concepts and concerns (moral regulation, control, agency and survival) of this thesis and how these 'play out' in day-to-day life. They are stories which make up part of my life story, but are not my whole story; rather they are impressionistic scenes which focus more closely on a particular moment in time. Drawing in additional evidence from the small qualitative study adds richness and depth to the data by introducing points of comparison and contrast

to my own story of single motherhood. Adopting two methods of inquiry provides for a broader and more layered account of the issues under discussion.

The thesis is divided into two sections: *Embodying the Welfare Queen* and *Related Narratives.* The first section is an autoethnographic narrative which is divided into three episodes: *Tūrangawaewae[6], Other Work* and *Accidental Mothering*. The stories are written in an active, first-person voice as a 'disciplinary informed essay' (Richardson, 2000). Episode one (*Tūrangawaewae)* is about dealing with an unplanned pregnancy and becoming a single mother. In this episode, I grapple with my own feelings and prejudices about single motherhood and detail some of the immediate practical concerns I had to resolve whilst waiting for my child to be born. The second episode (*Other Work*) explores my interactions with Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ), and the ways in which single mothers are subjected to differential treatment as second class citizens. This episode incorporates overarching themes about welfare as philanthropy and the institutionalised regulation of single mothers. The final episode (*Accidental Mothering*) recounts a bad accident I had, the consequences of which reached far beyond my physical incapacitation. This crisis point highlighted the lack of structural and social support in my life; moreover, I was forced to make critical choices in order to secure instrumental support throughout my recovery. This story also reflects on the reactions of family, friends and medical professionals, which cast me as an irresponsible mother prone to 'accidents' and bad choices. *Embodying the Welfare Queen* is intended to be read as a story of experience, emotion and reflection.

Part two, *Related Narratives,* incorporates the stories of the eight single mothers who participated in this study. The first chapter (*Situating Single Motherhood*) introduces the research participants and describes their situated lives in more detail. Their origin stories are expanded on further in chapters five (*Concrete Spaces*), six (*Liminal Spaces*) and seven (*Subjective Spaces*), which draw on the thematic similarities and differences embedded in their stories. These chapters discuss some of the key issues and themes in relation to the extant literature and theoretical underpinnings outlined in chapter one.

Chapter five explores the structural realm of single mothers: namely, the structural rigidities they encounter in their institutional interactions with WINZ and their efforts to secure material survival through paid and unpaid work. *Concrete Spaces* also illustrates the ways in which single mothers daily lives are overshadowed by external forces beyond their control. Chapter six explores the personal dimensions of their lives, examining their relationships with ex-partners and, as a corollary, the family law process and their social support networks, including friends and family. *Liminal Spaces* draws out the conditional and

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[6] Tūrangawaewae is one of the most well-known and powerful Māori concepts. Literally tūranga (standing place), waewae (feet), it is often translated as 'a place to stand'. Tūrangawaewae are places where we feel especially empowered and connected. They are our foundation, our place in the world, our home. In the concept of tūrangawaewae, the external world is a reflection of an inner sense of security and foundation. The mountains, rivers and waterways to which one can claim a relationship also express this internal sense of foundation

contestable nature of social support, and the problematics embedded in, sometimes, fragile social dependencies which can be, simultaneously, both assistive and damaging. Chapter seven considers the subjective worlds of single mothers by seeking further insight into the thoughts, feelings and perceptions they hold towards themselves and their social location; namely, how they define and mobilise 'good mothering' within the 'mothering hierarchy'. *Subjective Spaces* also incorporates critical dimensions such as agency, empowerment and mobility, and the ways in which these are individually defined and socially actioned by single mothers in their day-to-day lives.

Much of the sociological analysis is interwoven with their stories and expanded on in the discussion chapter (*Chapter Eight: Reflections*), while my own story, largely, omits direct literary references. My personal narrative is, however, located within the same socio-cultural landscape and discursive fields; it reflects both my personal and disciplinary standpoints. My story mirrors many of the same concerns that the other single mothers recounted to me and vice versa. As such, *Embodying the Welfare Queen* sits in conjunction with *Related Narratives*; both sections hold equal weight and relevance to the research questions posited at the beginning of this inquiry.

2. Methodology

The purpose of this thesis is to both chronicle my personal experiences of motherhood and to unpack some of the pertinent social and cultural issues related to single motherhood. In order to gain insight into the subjective realities of single mothers, two qualitative methodological approaches were used to form the basis of my research inquiry: autoethnography and in-depth, semi-structured participant interviews. This chapter discusses the characteristics and strengths of qualitative research, its appropriateness for this research project and the research strategies employed. Each research method is discussed separately in more detail.

A Qualitative Research Paradigm

The nature of qualitative research is interpretative and holistic and as such aims to represent the complexities, layers and details embedded within social phenomena (Creswell, 2003). The main preoccupations of qualitative researchers reflect epistemologically grounded beliefs about what constitutes acceptable knowledge (Bryman, 2004). For many qualitative researchers, epistemic claims, or claims to knowledge are rooted within the subjective experiences and lived realities of individuals, i.e. situated knowledge (Harding, 2006). Of central interest to qualitative research are the meanings that individuals attribute to their social environment. Neuman (2000) notes that qualitative methods are important for research into social settings insofar as they "emphasize the importance of social context for understanding the social world" (p. 146). As such, qualitative researchers are more influenced by interpretivism, which requires that social scientists grasp the subjective meaning of social action; in other words, seeing through the eyes of the people being studied (Bryman, 2004). Qualitative research methods, therefore, allow the researcher to gain in-depth understandings about the central phenomenon under discussion. As this research project primarily aims to study the subjective experiences of individuals, autoethnography and in-depth, semi-structured interviewing were chosen, in this case, for their methodological appropriateness.

Autoethnography

The first research strategy used in this thesis is autoethnography. Autoethnography has its origins in the anthropological tradition of ethnography, which is the study of a group or culture. Autoethnography derives its name from: *auto*, meaning self; *ethno*, meaning culture; and *graphy*, meaning to write (Ellis, 2004). The goal of autoethnography is to study the self in relation to culture using the researcher's own autobiographical writing which is analysed reflexively (Curtis & Curtis, 2011). As Chan (2008) suggests, autoethnography transcends mere narration of self to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation. This approach requires the researcher to be both the author and focus of the story (Ellis, 1999) but also requires the researcher to be able to reflect both introspectively and outwardly to explore their life through many variables and values (Curtis & Curtis, 2011). As Ellis (1999) states:

As an autoethnographer, I am both the author and the focus of the story, the one who tells and the one who experiences, the observer and the observed, the creator and the created. I am the person at the intersection of the personal and the cultural, thinking and observing as an ethnographer and writing and describing as a storyteller (p. 229).

Autoethnography intersects with knowledge, culture and the individual through self-narrative; personal experience and lived reality provide the central narrative from which to explore social and cultural understanding of the self and others (Chan, 2008).

However, it is important to note that I do not claim to 'speak' for all single mothers as one group, but address some of the relevant issues and problems embedded within my own experiences of single motherhood as a jumping off point. My own social location and experiences allowed me access into the lives of the other single mothers who participated within this study: group membership (Chan, 2008). Our lived experiences and situated knowledge informs the critical analysis, which reflects outwards onto the wider social and cultural landscape single mothers inhabit.

Subjugated Knowledge

Standpoint epistemology (SPE) also concerns itself with similar notions of the self and knowledge and offers an important conceptual platform from which to initiate autoethnographic research. Donna Haraway (1991) argues that knowledge grows out of women's unique lived experiences and the specific interpretations of social reality. This thesis, therefore, is influenced, to a large extent by the work of standpoint epistemologists such as Smith (1987), Collins (1990, 2004), Andersen and Collins (2007) and Harding (2006). As a single mother, both the direction of inquiry and claims to knowledge are 'situated' within my own social location and are a *point d'appui* (Smith, 1987) for further exploration into the lives and (epistemic claims) of other single mothers. As Collins (1990) suggests, it is the *"concrete experiences"* of women that provide the ultimate *"criterion for credibility"*.

Dorothy Smith posits that through this framework of understanding experience can become 'experience' in achieving social expression or can become 'knowledge' (1987). By uncovering and accounting for the lived experiences of women, previously subjugated knowledge is revealed. Moreover, as Harding (2006) emphasises, the experiences of the less dominant groups of society always produce more accurate accounts of the social order than the accounts of dominant groups. Feminist scholars argue that social knowledge tends to be produced and controlled by the 'ruling classes' and, therefore, will reflect the prevailing interests and values of the ruling class (Brooks, 2007). Feminist standpoint epistemology challenges us to critically examine society through women's eyes (Brooks, 2007); understanding society through the lens of women's experiences can draw attention to inequalities and injustices in society as a whole. According to standpoint epistemologists, women are more capable of producing an accurate,

comprehensive and objective interpretation of social reality than men are; this concept is often referred to as 'strong objectivity' (Harding, 2006). This is particularly relevant to autoethnographic research, which has been heavily criticized for being too subjective, and inadequately addressing the issue of relativism (Anderson, 2006). Standpoint feminist and autoethnographic scholarship offer a direct, and sometimes unwelcome, challenge to the orthodoxies of social scientific research methods.

Narrative

The primary source of data collection employed methods associated with autoethnographic research: personal memories, stories and reflections. The main sources of data were 'internal': writing from 'emotional recall' and 'retrospective field notes' (Ellis, 2004). I used a biographical account of a defining episode in my life, which illustrates some of the key discourses around single motherhood. The story was written retrospectively in a first-person narrative: it was written from the present reflecting back on events which happened nearly seven years ago. There are no documents, texts, journals or letters to present as written evidence of my story as 'external' evidence (Chan, 2008). The resulting self-narrative is my testimony of what happened.

Memory

Constructing a narrative is not an easy process. Without a journal or other textual evidence to refer to as *aide-memoire,* I relied heavily on the process of emotional recall: to conjure up the thoughts, feelings and imagery from that time in question. Carolyn Ellis (2004) describes this process as analogous to method acting whereby the experience is relived. The events themselves were easy to recall: I have told and retold these stories many times both to myself, and to others. Although Chan (2008) describes the exclusive reliance on memory and recall as a "pitfall" of autoethnography, it is important not to discount the veracity of personal experience just because no corroborating evidence exists. Most people experiencing trauma and/or significant psycho-social instability (as I did during the episodes I have written about) do not tend to simultaneously collect external data to use at a later date. Oral traditions and oral histories are testament to the potency of storytelling and personal narratives as both culturally reflective and pedagogical. Even with other forms of 'external data', such as field notes and journals, the information we gather is always partially interpretive and filtered through the lens of personal experience (Ellis, 2004).

Memories may not reflect accurately, in scientific terms, what happened 'at the time' but they reflect accurately how we feel about what happened and the effect of those happenings. As Ellis (2004) points out, "the 'truth' is that we can never fully capture experience. What we tell is always a story about the past" (p. 116). We are constantly in the process of framing and reframing experience; memories of the past are always subject to revision based on current perspectives (Ellis, 2004). We carry our stories with us; we construct narratives from these stories and these narratives become embodied within us. We draw upon

these narratives to make sense of past situations and when confronting new experiences and 'problematics' (Smith, 1987). As Adrienne Rich says, "the story of our lives becomes our lives" (Rich cited in Ellis, 2004: 117).

Layering

Writing an autoethnography involves multiple layers of consciousness (Ellis, 2004). Tying the self to the social (Reed-Danahay, 1997) involves both self-reflection and sociological analysis: layering narrative, theory and evidence with critical reflection. This layering does not begin and end with the conceptualisation of autoethnography. As Rambo Ronai (1995) suggests, the narrative itself can take the form of a 'layered account', incorporating multiple voices, perspectives and experiences to enable ethnographers to "break out of conventional writing formats". Rambo Ronai (1995) discusses the importance of systematic sociological introspection (Ellis, 1991) in her work. Ellis (1991) developed the idea that introspection was a scientific approach to social science research. She says:

> *The first step in studying this fusion of private and social is to acknowledge introspection, whether our own or that of others, as a sociological technique that can provide access to private experiences and generate interpretive materials from self and other useful for understanding the complex, ambiguous, and processual nature of lived emotional experience. (p. 99)*

My version of a layered account incorporates my own personal narrative and the lived experiences of other single mothers.
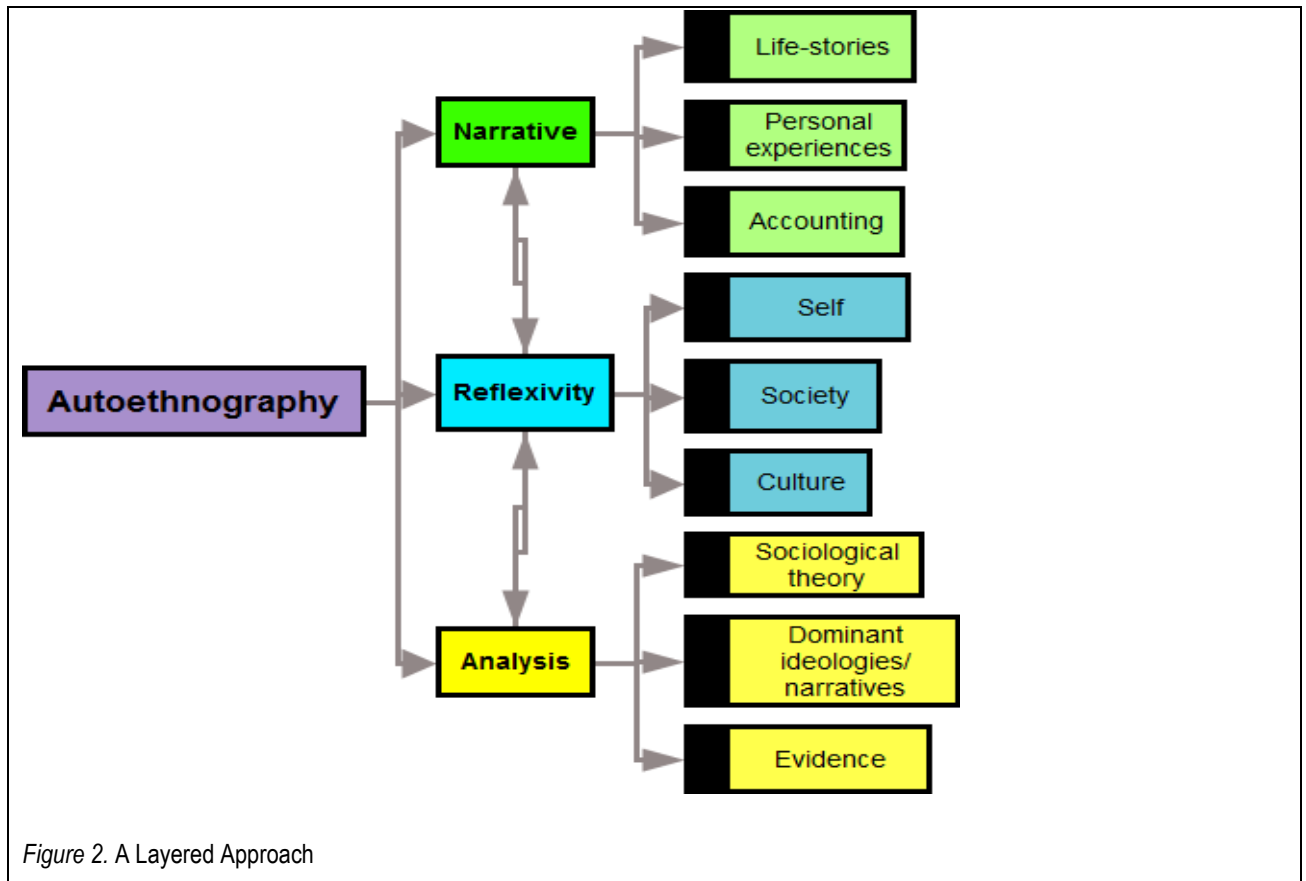
Figure 2. A Layered Approach

Reflexivity and Analysis

Autoethnography incorporates intertwining concepts of reflexivity, analysis and the self. As a working process, autoethnography necessitates a feedback loop, of sorts, between these central characteristics along with outward facing reflection. The self-narrative should be located within both the socio-cultural landscape and discursive field of the author. Interpretation and analysis can be both objective and subjective and depend on the author's position along the art/science continuum (Ellis, 2004). Ellis (2009) notes:

> *I often write about epiphanies of loss and trauma that have occurred in my personal life. Sometimes I include traditional social science analysis with my stories when I feel that the integration of ways of knowing will help me know more and convey better. (p. 15)*

Richardson (2008) discerns the application of analysis as a stylistic preference, varying between traditional analytical scholarship and, what she terms, a 'disciplinary informed essay' in her own writing practice. According to Richardson (2000), writing is a method of inquiry; moreover, autoethnographic writing is a creative analytical process (CAP). As her terminology suggests, creative and analytical processes are not mutually exclusive but interdependent. My own writing practice reflects this creative analytical synthesis.

During the writing of this thesis, I employed a process referred to as reflexive writing (Curtis & Curtis, 2011). There are different reflexivity practices which can be employed when writing; however, the practice which was engaged with most during the process of writing this thesis followed, what Alvesson, Hardy and Harley

(2008) describe as 'reflexivity as positioning practices'. This practice is concerned with the relationships between the writer and existing claims, and the writer and their own claims to authority (Curtis & Curtis, 2011). In other words: to draw out *"the network of beliefs, practices, and interests that favour one interpretation over another; and, ideally, the way that one interpretation rather than another come to predominate"* (Collins, 1998: 297).

When writing a personal narrative it is also important that the writer moves from the general to the specific and back again, often (Nash, 2004). If the objective of autoethnography is to learn from others then the story must be of interest to the reader and contextualized within the surrounding culture to avoid narcissism (Ellis, 2004). Continually drawing the lens inwards and outwards from the writer's life allows the reader to draw larger implications from one's life story, layering the personal narrative with theory and cultural insight (Curtis & Curtis, 2011).

Whilst this research relied, to a large extent, on data from the self, other sources of evidence were also used in conjunction to avoid self-centricism (Chan, 2008). Although using two methods of inquiry (autoethnography and in-depth participant interviews) is not entirely congruent with the traditions of 'evocative autoethnography' it does, however, reflect the evolution of autoethnographic scholarship: multiple methodologies (Taber, 2010), multiple disciplines (Muncey, 2005), multiple styles (Ronai, 1995) and multiple formats (Ellis, Bochner & Denzin *et al*, 2008) are all *de rigueur*, despite academic challenge (Anderson, 2006a; Tolich, 2010; Walford, 2004).

Contemporaneous practitioners of autoethnography feel neither the need to justify autoethnography as a method of inquiry or make commitment to a particular type of autoethnographic style or tradition. Autoethnography, as a methodology, has now established itself to the point that it is no longer necessary in defence of legitimacy. Similarly, I make no such commitments to style, although I do have a personal preference for autoethnography which follows the traditions of evocative autoethnography and the work of Ellis (1993, 1999, 2004) and Ellis, Bochner & Denzin *et al* (2008). My aim is to produce an autoethnography that adheres to Richardson's (2000) guidelines and approximates as closely as possible the type of autoethnography that I find interesting, profound and sociologically stimulating. Exemplars of such scholarship are Averett (2009); Ellis (1993, 2009); Ettorre (2010); Holman Jones (2005); Jago (2006, 2011); Muncey (1998,2005); Olson (2010); Rambo (2005a, 2005b, 2005c) Rambo Ronai (1997); Richards (2008); Ronai (1995); Taber (2010); and Wall (2008).

Accounting for Others

Participant Interviews

A small qualitative study of eight single mothers was incorporated into this research project. A series of semi-structured participant interviews were conducted with women who are in receipt of the Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB). Participant interviews were conducted after I had written the self-narrative which, along with the existing literature, provided a thematic framework for the interview questions.

Participant interviews were conducted with four women aged 24 years and over who have a child or children aged 13 years and under. Although dependants are defined for the purposes of the *Social Security Act (1964)* as children or young people that are 18 or less, living at-home and not in training or employment, research suggest that single mothers have relatively high levels of employment (69.1% as of 2009) once their child reaches the age of 14 (Ministry of Social Development, 2010). In addition, children are legally allowed to be at home without parental supervision from age 14 years (*Care of Children Act, 2004*) and it is felt that the issues addressed in this research may not be as relevant to single mothers with older children.

Participants were recruited via an advertisement placed in the Women's Centre outlining the research issues and process. Potential participants were asked to email the researcher for further information or to express an interest in participating. All agreeable participants were given a consent form to sign, acknowledging their consent to be interviewed and recorded, the use of the information they supplied and their right to withdraw data up until 1 November, 2012. Participants were interviewed by me, in person, at a location of their choice; the majority of the interviews lasted from between 1 -1.5 hours, with the longest interview lasting three hours. All participants were given codenames so that the information they supplied could not be identified as belonging to them. Other identifying facts and personal characteristics were also changed to protect participants' confidentiality. The interviews were digitally recorded and digital files were given code numbers; I was the only person who listened to, and transcribed the recorded interviews.

Creswell (2003) suggests the advantages of interviews are a) they are useful when participants cannot be observed directly; b) participants can provide historical information; and c) interviewing allows the researcher 'control' over the line of questioning (p. 186). Limitations of this type of data collections are a) provides 'indirect' information filtered through the views of interviewees; b) provides information in a designated 'place' rather than the natural field setting; c) researcher's presence may bias responses; and d) people are not equally articulate and perceptive (p. 186). These advantages and limitations were considered in depth before conducting the interviews.

The interviews were semi-structured with a series of questions used to guide the interview process. Although the same interview questions were used for each interview not all interviews adhered strictly to this set of

questions. At times I felt it was more appropriate to let the women interviewed speak freely rather than cutting short a particular line of discussion or narrative to fit the interview schedule. This was decided intuitively from interview to interview depending on the rapport between myself and the interviewee, and the pace of discussion. As Ellis (2004) notes, "ideally the interviewer should not interfere with or change the story that is told" however, the "interviewer is always a vital part of the narrative" (p. 61).

Because the women interviewed were aware of my insider role in the research, and my identification as a single mother, I decided that the most appropriate style of interviewing would be reflexive dyadic interviewing (Ellis, 2004). As Ellis (2004) explains:

> *"[reflexive dyadic interviews] might take a conversational form in which the interviewer tries to tune in to the interactively produced meanings and emotional dynamics within the interview itself; though the focus is on the interviewee and the interviewee's story, the words, thoughts and feelings of the researcher are also considered". (p. 62)*

In this type of interviewing the interviewer's story can be a point of connection between the researcher and interviewee, providing a valuable source of reference and reflection for both throughout the interview process (Ellis, 2004). Many of the interviewees were interested in accessing my story and my perspective on single motherhood, especially those who were struggling, emotionally and pragmatically, with some of the issues outlined in this thesis. Sharing some of my own insights with them conveyed both an intimate understanding about their lived experiences and a sense of horizontal solidarity. I also found that this interviewing approach had particular relevance to the emancipatory and participatory goals of this type of qualitative research.

Sampling

The sample size was relatively small, with eight women being interviewed for the study. The women interviewed were recruited using a method known as purposive sampling (Bryman, 2004), whereby the researcher samples on the basis of wanting to interview people who are relevant to the research questions. The sample size used in qualitative research methods is dependent on the study design and population size (Bryman, 2004). For a population the size of New Zealand, a representative sample can be estimated at 12 participants in order to achieve informational redundancy or theoretical saturation. However, interview-based studies involving small number of respondents are becoming more common in social science, the underlying logic being, that where in-depth interviewing is the method of choice, a small sample size yields richer, explanatory data about the subjective experiences of those in the social world under investigation (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). Crouch and McKenzie (2006) further note, "the justification of small-sample studies hinges most frequently on phenomenological assumptions (broadly speaking) which underwrite investigations of personal experience in a largely subjectivist framework". Given the research paradigm and case-orientated

approach of this thesis, it was felt that incorporating data from eight participants, in conjunction with my own data, was adequate for the scope of this study.

Ethical Considerations

Including participant data in my thesis posed several ethical dilemmas because of the sensitive nature of some of the topics under discussion: domestic abuse issues and illegal sources of income. As Miller notes, "first and foremost, the researcher has an obligation to respect the rights, needs, values and desires of the participant(s)" (Miller in Creswell, 2003: 202). Accounting for other brings into view ethical questions regarding the duty of care between researcher and participant(s); namely, an obligation to protect the physical and emotional safety of participants from intended, or unintended, consequences of their participation.

Risks

Before setting about writing this autoethnography, I considered the risks involved to both me and the research participants. The self-narrative contains personal and sensitive material which cannot necessarily be disguised when authorship is accredited to me. The nature of autoethnographic writing is both personal and political: revealing interpersonal relationships, discussing complex social relations and critiquing existing structural arrangements (Ellis, 2004). Autoethnography also raises ethical questions about who we should write about and where the boundaries of their rights to privacy lie (Jago, 2011). As such, I have changed the names of those I write about to protect myself and my friends and acquaintances from personal or legal harm. Friends and family will, if they choose to read my narrative, undoubtedly recognise themselves, and for this reason I have underplayed their role in my story. In writing an autoethnography, I am at risk by divulging details of my personal life; however, I consider these risks to be outweighed by the importance of speaking openly and honestly about my lived experiences of single motherhood. My rights to anonymity have been, effectively, waived, but not unduly considered. Where possible, I have minimised these risks.

It was important that participants interviewed for this research project remained anonymous as they were asked questions relating to both their relationship status and sources of income not disclosed to Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ). This could potentially result in scrutiny from WINZ or the Inland Revenue and result in sanctions or legal action from these parties. The information participants were asked to reveal is both sensitive and potentially illegal, which could incur serious consequences. For example, earning over a certain weekly amount while claiming the Domestic Purposes Benefit is illegal, and therefore, poses a potential risk to participants should this information become public, or come to the attention of Work and Income (WINZ) or the Department of Inland Revenue (IRD). Discussing 'under the table' earnings posed an ethical risk for interviewees.

Pseudonyms were used to ensure that the personal details of participants' remains anonymous and any details relating to ex-partners, partners or employers were changed if felt necessary to protect participants' confidentiality and anonymity. However, confidentially can never be guaranteed, only maintained. As this research takes the form of a personal narrative, some of the author's personal details were also changed in the event that any or part of the research material is made available for publication due to the sensitive nature of the information under discussion and potential consequences outlined above.

Exposure

Historically, sociology has always been concerned with exposing the underbelly of society: to unearth and critically question what is commonly hidden. Exposing these issues and offering insight into the lives of single mothers left me with several critically reflective questions:

- Am I exposing myself and single mothers to ongoing harm?
- Will this discussion lead to further public scrutiny and stigma?
- Will this autoethnography create further conflict for me and other single mothers?
- Will this study have the counter effect of justifying dominant narratives regarding the legitimacy and deviant status of single mothers?
- Will this promote the need for further policing and moral regulation of single mothers? and,
- Should some things just be better left underground?

I do not know if there is a way of resolving these ethical dilemmas. I came to the conclusion that these ethical questions are a necessary part of the ongoing reflexive process and nature of academic inquiry. Ultimately, it is more risky not to discuss contentious issues than it is to ventilate them for further public and political discourse.

Validity and Generalisability

The validity of autoethnography, as a social scientific research strategy, has been heavily critiqued by those in favour of scientific orthodoxy. However, qualitative research in general is open to these criticisms as reliability and generalisability are harder to establish: findings are not testable to the same degree as in quantitative research. Creswell (2003) suggests that validity can be seen as strength of qualitative research; it can be used to determine whether findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account. The terms 'trustworthiness', 'authenticity' and 'credibility' are exchanged for those of 'accuracy', 'reliability' and 'replicability' in qualitative literature (Creswell, 2003). Ellis takes up this debate in *The Ethnographic I* (2004), suggesting that validity comes from speaking truth to your subject and to yourself. From a social constructivist paradigm, truth-claims based in science, or folklore, are

essentially as valid as universal rules, laws or theorems generated with adherence to scientific principles (Curtis & Curtis, 2011).

There has been much academic contestation regarding autoethnography as a method of inquiry which calls into question the validity of such an approach to social scientific research. In addition, internal debates exist between autoethnographers regarding style (i.e. authorial voice and application of theory) and epistemological approach (i.e. validity of knowledge claims and problems of relativity). Debates regarding validity are at the forefront of the social constructivist/social realist and evocative/analytical autoethnography divide (Curtis & Curtis, 2011). Anderson (2006) argues for a social realist, analytical autoethnography, stating that:

> *The purpose of analytical ethnography is not simply to document personal experience, to provide an 'insider's perspective,' or to evoke emotional response with the reader, Rather, the defining characteristic ... is to use empirical data to gain insight into some broader set of social phenomena than those provided by the data themselves. (pp. 386, 387)*

Writers such as Ellis (2004, 2006) and Bochner (2006), however, would suggest that the self is the social and that reliability and validity are of secondary importance at best. Laurel Richardson (Richardson cited in Ellis, 2004) uses the metaphor of a crystal to deconstruct traditional validity: "a crystal has an infinite number of shapes, dimensions and angles. It acts as a prism and changes shape, but still has structure. What we see depends on our angle of vision." (p. 124)

Triangulation is viewed as the gold standard of qualitative inquiry, whereby research claims are validated (or cross-checked) by using three (or more) points of reference or methodologically approaches. This study uses two qualitative research methods to gather data: autoethnography and participant interviews. Moreover, three theoretical frameworks are employed to examine the data in relation to the research questions: critical perspectives theories, social capital theory and moral regulation theory.

Furthermore, Richardson (2000 p. 254) offers a useful set of question by which to evaluate the merit of autoethnographic work. Her questions address some of the issues regarding the reliability and validity of autoethnography, and provide a useful tool of reference for fledgling autoethnographers, such as myself. The five questions are:

1. Is there a substantive contribution;
2. Is their aesthetic merit;
3. Is the text reflexive;
4. Does it have impact; and,
5. Does it express reality?

These questions were used to interrogate the value and applicability of this thesis as an autoethnographic piece of writing. They presented a useful set of guidelines given that this thesis was a first attempt at autoethnographic writing.

PART ONE: Embodying the Welfare Queen

3. Embodying the Welfare Queen

Embodying the Welfare Queen is an autoethnographic narrative which chronicles my personal experiences of single motherhood and the social realities of 'being on the benefit' in New Zealand. Theoretically, this paper draws on feminist and critical perspectives, which underpin much of the discourse related to gender, inequality and the marginalisation of 'problem populations', in this case single mothers. However, the aim of this thesis is not to provide a pessimistic, or deterministic, impression of single motherhood, even if *prima facie*, this would seem to be the case; but it is necessary to explore these dimensions in order to accurately portray the subjective experiences of single mothers. Of equal importance, however, are dimensions of agency and mobility (Webster, 2008) in the lives of single mothers. As Mitchell *et al* (2004) point out, scholars in this field should be wary of structural determinism as mothers are not passive victims of their circumstances. For marginalised populations, survival, resistance, and resilience are not just abstract concepts, but are consistent features of daily life 'on the edge' (Polakow, 1993).

For single mothers, financial hardship and social stigma persists despite advances to their social and political position over recent decades; the social location of single mothers renders them disadvantaged on many intersecting dimensions (Collins, 1990; Gillies, 2007). These disadvantages are not, however, immutable. Single mothers employ many tactics of resistance and alternative sources of capital in order to temper harsh material conditions (McCormack, 2006). There is optimism and positivity to be found within the lived experiences of single mothers. *Embodying the Welfare Queen* attempts to explicate these issues from the vantage point of a 'vulnerable observer' (Behar, 1996). For the purpose of this thesis, I assume the position of both the subject and object of academic inquiry.

Tūrangawaewae

I lie there with my hand grasped around the knife under the pillow. My dog is snuggled up to me on the bed, seemingly oblivious to my fear and anxiety, but occasionally licking the tears off my face. It is very quiet and dark outside. I have no TV or radio to switch on as background noise, as distraction. He took everything when he left. Every little noise I hear outside sends a little wave of panic off; my heart beats faster and I imagine him coming stumbling through the door drunk – itching to pick a fight. I have no phone, only a knife. I have to get out of here.

* * * * *

I am pregnant. I look at the test over and over again to make sure; but I know – I have known for some time. I can't keep his baby. But what if I regretted having another abortion? What if this is the only opportunity for me to have a child? The same conversation continually replays itself in my head; my mind constructing arguments and counterarguments. What if the baby looks exactly like him? What if I couldn't love this baby? I go to the doctor who refers me to the hospital for an abortion. I know enough about domestic abuse to understand that he is not going to just disappear into the ether without staking his claim on the baby. I have to see the hospital social worker, the gatekeeper to abortive services under the public health system. She does not want me to go forward with the abortion given the circumstances, and I am given two days to decide as I am now twelve weeks pregnant. I have two days to convince this stranger that I am competent to make the decision to terminate my pregnancy. I have yet to convince myself. The two days pass; the deadline is up. In the end the choice is easy. I pack my bags and leave. I call the social worker and she wishes me luck. I am going to be a mother and I have no partner, no home and no family nearby. I am now engulfed in fear and loneliness.

* * * * *

There is no going back. I have been 'strong' – until now. Now I am having a complete breakdown; I am emotionally exhausted. I am still trying to hide everything from my family back home, trying hard to 'keep up appearances'. I can't face telling them the real story. "Everything is fine" I tell them. Everything is far from fine. I am supposed to be intelligent, strong and independent. I don't feel any of those things. I am pregnant to an abusive man and I am going to be a single mother. Women like me don't allow themselves to get into abusive relationships, don't knowingly become single mothers. Women like me: white, educated, middle-class. "Not ideal circumstances" my father diplomatically surmises, once I fess up to my 'situation'. I am so déclassé.

* * * * *

After spending two weeks in bed crying inconsolably I know I need help. I am sleeping with a knife under my pillow. I am terrified that he will come back and try to hurt me – us. I have oscillated from a desire to rid myself of the responsibilities of motherhood, and what I see as an ineradicable point of connection between me and him, to a vixen-like sense of protection towards my unborn child. If I am going to do this – bring a child into the world – I have to protect us both.

* * * * *

I have to find somewhere safe for us to live. I don't want to go back to Scotland. I am resolute about that. Going back to Scotland pregnant, and alone, is an unbearable proposition. I left my hometown at seventeen to escape the parochialism and I wasn't going to go back there pregnant and alone, to be dependent on my parents and pity. It seemed easier to stay in New Zealand, to "hide away from everything" as my mother would say. Perhaps I am hiding, but I need to do this my way and I know, deep down, that if I go back to Scotland I will lose control. My family would step in and support me, but that would come with the obligatory family expectations in exchange for their help. I would have to acquiesce to their ideas about how I should raise my child. I figure that there must be some social support services out there for pregnant women. I find one in the Yellow Pages advertised as a 'Crisis Pregnancy Service'. Well, I am pregnant and I am in crisis; I call the number.

* * * * *

The woman who answers the phone is friendly and concerned. She asks me to come and meet with her in person. The advert I had responded to offered emotional and financial support for pregnant women who were alone. When I meet with Celia she reaffirms this and says that they can offer me a place to live, counselling support and provide everything that I would need for the baby. She says that they will do anything they can to help me and the baby. I am relieved and overwhelmed; this could be the solution to my problems. Can I really make this work? "Have a look around the house", says Celia. "We have plenty of rooms for you to choose from and only one other mum is living here at the moment". The house is big, spacious and clean. "It's only $150 p/w including food" she continues, and we have phone and internet. It seems too good to be true but some cursory checks dispel my anxieties. I start to mentally calculate how much I can save by staying in the boarding house. I am still working full-time, so after I paid board I will be left with almost $300 p/w. It seems an obvious choice given the alternatives. I arrange to move in the following week.

* * * * *

Within weeks the house has started to fill up with other pregnant women and girls. The youngest is only fourteen years old and has been kicked out of her family home. They are a deeply religious Samoan family and they are too ashamed to allow her to remain in the house. Then we are introduced to our new house mother, Bridgette. Bridgette is an ex-nun who has just spent the last two years as a missionary in Peru. We clash immediately. "Bridgette will look after you all", we are told by Celia. We are also given a curfew of 11pm and no male visitors are allowed at the house. It is not long before the atmosphere in the house deteriorates into hostility as Bridgette tries to impose her 'third world experience' and ascetic lifestyle onto us. I find it increasingly hard to ignore her attempts to indoctrinate

us into her Christian worldview. Bridgette holds the household purse strings and is in charge of doing the grocery shopping. She thinks that in order to live frugally we should eat two or three day old leftovers, and prepares our meals with out-of-date produce 'donated' to us by the local supermarket. "There are starving children in the world", she argues when I try and protest. I point out that it is a potential health risk to pregnant women to eat out-of-date food and leftover seafood salad; she accuses me of being a spoilt princess. I shouldn't complain, she says, I am lucky that I have nice food and a place to live when there are so many others who are less fortunate. I know her attitude bothers the other women too but they don't vocalise their concerns, not to Bridgette or Celia at least. Our ideological differences come to a head in a discussion about abortion and mothers who work outside of the home. Her condemnatory attitudes are too much for me to bear and we have a heated argument about the choices women make. I am getting increasingly upset by the presence of religious rhetoric in the house. Everything about the way this place is run seems so at odds with their claims to be a support service for pregnant women. It starts to dawn on me that there is a political agenda at play. I feel so stupid.

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I creep along the corridor at the front of the house. It is supposed to be a private area for staff only. They hold their meetings and counselling sessions down here. I have been in here once before when I first met with Celia. It smells damp and musty and unused, like the inside of an old Church. Mary and Jesus look down upon me from a painting high up on the wall. The eyes of the Lord are everywhere, I think to myself. I make my way surreptitiously to the 'counselling room' at the end of the corridor, thinking that I am going to get caught sneaking around at any moment. The room is set up like a waiting room in a doctor's surgery except for the presence of a television in the corner. Various pamphlets line the walls in display racks. In the corner, under the television, are some videos, ring-binders and magazines. Pulling them out for a closer look, I scan the titles of some of the videos: '*The Silent Scream'*, '*Abortion is Murder'* and '*Eclipse of Reason'*. The ring-binders contain photographs and texts with similarly graphic titles and content. All the material I find is pro-life propaganda; there is no pro-choice or objective information about pregnancy and childbirth. I feel repulsed, and then angry. It seems clear now what the agenda is here.

* * * * *

My mum is becoming increasingly worried about me. I spend hours crying on the phone to her and she begs me to come home. I can't, I say. I need to stay here and see this through. I still have some contact with him. He says that he is going to be involved in his child's life, be a father. Part of me, so badly,

wants to retain a sense of normalcy in this situation that I allow him to come to the ultrasound scan where we find out we are having a boy. I am happy I am not having a girl. I don't want a daughter because I never want a child of mine to deal with any of this: pregnancy, abortion, abuse, abandonment, and isolation. I think about how I had to deal with the abortion by myself as well. My partner at the time just walked away, refused to deal with it, or me, emotionally. This time I want to be in control. There is no way I am going to have my baby in hospital: on this much I am clear. I just have to figure out how I am going to actually have a homebirth without a home. I broach the subject with Celia the next time she comes over to the house. "No", she says: "you can't have a baby here". "Why on earth would you want to do that anyway", she goes on; "you should go to the hospital and take as many drugs as you can". I am stupefied by her response. "But I thought this was a home for pregnant women? You said that I could have my baby here until I found my own place", I counter. "Yes, you are welcome to stay here with your baby but you can't disturb the other residence here by actually having your baby here; it's just not practical", she says. I am not going to let Celia's ignorance stop me. I tell my midwife. "You know what you want so just stick to that", she says; "you can have your baby at my house if you want, other women have given birth at my home before when they have been in a similar situation". Her kindness and empathy make me cry: "I just want to have my baby at home, the way I want to do it". "You still can", says Jenny. "You really need to get out of this place" she advises, "it's not right for you here; these people are not right". I know she wants to say more, but holds back as it would seem unprofessional to criticize their belief system. "I'll work something out", I say. I'm just not sure what.

* * * * *

Another woman and her young daughter move into the house. She is expecting another child very soon to her partner, but according to Celia they can't live together. I take this to mean that there is domestic abuse. I feel uneasy because her partner frequently parks outside the house and sits in his car for hours at a time. Celia does not find this particularly problematic. I find her casualness towards the well-being of the women in the house disconcerting. Her absence of any real concern for those staying in the house becomes particularly evident when the same woman starts to verbally and physically abuse her in the house. Over dinner one night she threatens to beat her daughter with her jandal if she doesn't finish her dinner. She takes off her jandal and stands over the little girl to convey the imminent threat to her: "sit down and finish your dinner now or I will give you a hiding". I sit there astounded as nobody says anything; nobody raises an eyebrow or offers any word of concern. I can't help myself to say something, although it is clear from the others' reactions that I am not meant to do so. "Just leave her alone she is only a little girl", I say; "how would you like it if someone threatened to beat you over

dinner". Everyone cringes as I break the unspoken code of silence. "Why don't you mind your own fucking business" she retorts. "It is my business if you are going to physically assault someone in front of me", I come back. "Whatever, I can do what I want with my own kid", she snarls. Silence. I get up and leave the room to demonstrate my disgust, not just at her but at the complicity of the other women. The next day I talk to Celia about it. She looks unfazed as I relay the events to her. "Well, you are the only one with a problem with it" she says. "Perhaps there are things that you do that she doesn't like, did you ever stop to consider that?" says Celia. "So you don't find it concerning that she is abusing her child in the house and we have to witness it" I dispute. "You don't think that you have an ethical duty to intervene? I thought you were a social service and you don't think that her hitting her child is a problem, especially in house where there are other vulnerable women who have themselves been the victims of domestic abuse"? Celia shrugs. "I can't stay here if that's your attitude", I say. "Well it's probably for the best if you go, if you can't get along with the other women" Celia says, barely disguising her satisfaction. I can tell she is delighted that I am going, I am a trouble maker. "OK, well you said when I moved in you would be able to help me find a flat – so are you still able to do that"? I query. "Are you able to help me with a bond or moving costs? Otherwise I don't see how I am going to be able to find a place before that baby is born", I say. Although I am already quietly determined that I am getting out of here, no matter what, part of me wants to challenge Celia, to see if they will actually follow through with their initial offers. Their package of seduction, I think to myself. "Well no, we can't really help with anything like that", says Celia flatly. "But I thought that's what you said when I first came to see you; your advert even says that", I beseech. "We can give you some clothes for the baby and perhaps some baby formula", she says, "to help get you set up for the baby". "But that's not what I need; I need somewhere to live and somewhere that I can have my baby because I am going to have a homebirth". "Well that's your choice", says Celia, "you are welcome to have a look through our stock room and see if there is anything there that you want". "I want somewhere to have my baby" I say, deflated. I know I am not going to get anywhere with her, but I put up one last fight as I am angry. "It seems like you don't really want to help me" I persist, "I thought the idea was that you help women to have their babies and find some sort of security"? Celia looks at me impassively. I go to my room and weep inconsolably for hours out of frustration and anger.

* * * * *

The following week I find a tiny, but affordable, flat nearby and borrow the money from my dad and WINZ for the bond. I feel like my nightmare in "the house of horrors", as mother calls it, has almost come to an end. I stay with a friend at the weekend as I have a terrible bout of food poisoning which leaves me drained and exhausted. I return to the house to pack my belongings and when I get there I

find my room empty. I feel myself boiling over with anger. I storm up to Bridgette's room, "where is all my stuff?" I fume. I know I am raising my voice but I can't help it; this seems like the final jab in the ribs. "I packed it up for you and put it in the store room", she says matter-of-factly. "I am still paying board for my room; you had no right to touch my stuff", I shout. "You knew I was coming back to get my stuff, I told you I was moving next week". "Well, we needed the room" Bridgette offers, as if this adequately explains everything. "It was still my room – what the hell is wrong with you", I cry. I think she has got the point, so I thunder back down the hall as loudly as I can to exhibit my anger. I start hauling my boxes and belongings out to the car. I am nine months pregnant so it is no easy feat, but I am overcome by herculean strength to get the job done and get out of there as quickly as possible. I squeeze as much as I can into my old Toyota and leave for my new place in a hail of tears.

* * * * *

At my new diminutive apartment I solemnly and solitary unpack my belongings. I set up the baby changing table and lay out the unfeasibly tiny baby-grows and singlets that I have got second-hand. Physically, and mentally, I feel as though I have completed a marathon, and I have not yet even had my baby. Only now does it dawn on me that the biggest challenge is still to come; I have barely had time to even think about the birth. I survey my sparse surrounds and picture myself there with the baby. Yes, I think to myself, this is it; I can do this. This is my place, our place: *tūrangawaewae*.

* * * * *

"Hope for the best and prepare for the worst", I repeat this phrase in my head as a mantra to myself. I know this isn't going to be easy. I don't know how things are going to pan out. On a practical level I have never even held a baby before, never mind the emotional and psychological challenges that this situation presents. I am going to be a single mother and I have no idea if my ex-partner will be around, and if he is, if I will want him to be around. All my family live overseas and most of my friends have dropped by the wayside. I guess single motherhood is not just frightening to me. "Hope for the best and prepare for the worst".

* * * * *

My due date comes and goes. I know the date has no real meaning, but I can't help but be disappointed when it passes and there is no sign of the baby. The date was a psychological goalpost which I was counting down towards. A week goes past, and then another week. "The baby will come when he's ready", reassures my midwife. By week 42, I am beside myself – inconsolable. The fortitudinous, which had kept me together thus far, was failing me now. It was like everything that had

happened in the past few months had drained my emotional and psychological reservoir. Even my physical power is diminishing as I get bigger and bigger; moving, sleeping and even breathing is objectionable to my pregnant body. "I can't do this anymore", I cry to my mother on the phone, "I want it to be over now". "I know, I know, but it won't be long now and you will have your beautiful baby", she tries to console. "Maybe you should go to the hospital to see if they can do anything", she suggests. "No, I am not going there", I obstinate; "I am having my baby at home and that's that". I try to remain strong – to remain positive. I spend every day alone, at home, waiting, with only bad daytime television to try and distract my disquieted mind. I go to the cinema and watch River Queen: I weep uncontainably in the movie theatre when the protagonist loses her son and her family abandons her to the alien landscape of Aotearoa. I feel her pain and alienation. Exactly three weeks after my 'due date' I go into labour.

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The pain is unbearable; there is nothing that could prepare you for this and I am glad I gave the birthing classes a miss. I always wondered why in old films they need boiling water and towels, and now I find out. The hot towels placed on my lower back bring temporary relief to the pain: but only for a second or two. After eighteen hours of labour I resort to crawling around the floor on all fours, exhausted. At some point in the morning he turns up, but I make him wait outside: I think that I may kill him if I see his face. I know I am making terrible, guttural, animal noises, but they seem to not even belong to me. I have a weird sense of detachment from my body. My midwife says my neighbours are lurking around outside worried that there is a murder taking place in my apartment, and wondering whether they should intervene. Finally, she says I need to start pushing: "he's not coming out so you need to just start pushing". Three hours later I finally get my first glimpse of my baby boy; he is here.

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A few hours later and everyone is now gone. The excitement is over; the phone calls have been made; congratulations have been bestowed; and my midwife has packed up the, as it turned out, redundant, birthing pool. "You really fought for this baby", she says. I know what she means. I look down at the tiny little creature that I am cradling. He looks like him, but it doesn't seem to matter now; he is not him, he is my baby, and I know I will love him. My whole body aches and I am so tired to the point of incapacitation. I want my mummy.

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My face and back are pouring with sweat; my hair soaked right through by the time I finally reach the shop. I collapse onto a bench outside and close my eyes feeling sick and dizzy. The sweat just keeps on coming, running down my face and onto the top of baby's head. I sit there for ten minutes hoping this will pass and I can carry on into the shop to buy my groceries. A woman passes by and stops when she sees my face: "are you OK" she says, "you look terrible". "I feel terrible", I say: "I had to walk here because my car is broken, and I have just had a baby". "Aw how lovely, when did you have baby?" she says. "Two days ago" I respond, aware of how hideous I must look. "I look awful and I can't stop sweating," I say fighting back tears. "You need to be in bed, resting; you've just had a baby you shouldn't be out at the supermarket", she admonishes kindly. I know she means well, but I don't really want to have to explain to this stranger why I have no choice but to get my own groceries. "I know" I say, "but I am by myself so I have to get some food or we will starve". I know this probably sounds dramatic to her, but it is not far off the truth. I brace myself for her next question knowing exactly what she is going to say: "but where are your husband – and your family"? I sigh inaudibly.

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He has been coming over to see baby. It is a strange experience; looking at him holding our baby. Part of me feels affection towards him but at the same time I feel repelled and angry with myself for falling back into those feelings. Do I still love him? No. I can't; he has hurt me. I have to remember that. I am still attracted to him and this disgusts me. I know he has a new girlfriend. My counsellor says this is unsurprising, but it was a shock to me. She waits outside for him in the car while he visits baby. I find this really creepy and odd, like we are under surveillance. Apparently she knew I was a having a baby when they got together and she was "fine with it". I find that hard to believe. Baby is two weeks old when I get a call from him telling me he is going to be having another baby; she is three months pregnant. There are no words to describe how I feel as he casually relays the information to me, like he is buying a new car. Sucker punched, kicked in the guts, stabbed in the back. None of these metaphors come to close to describing the visceral pain which causes me to physically crumple after speaking to him. Some things are so emotionally hurtful that there is no language to describe the pain. This is how I feel now.

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I start taking sleeping pills. Most nights I lie awake until 2 or 3am consumed with fear and stress about the upcoming court case, and the impending birth of the other child. The day we are due in court my lawyer calls to tell me that the hearing has been adjourned to a later date as, the night before, the baby was born. I take some sleeping pills to temporarily knock me out of this veritable nightmare.

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The thought of seeing them in court sends me into a state of absolute panic. I can barely eat because of the tight knot, twisting around in my stomach. My milk has all but dried up, and I can't breastfeed if I take the sleeping pills, so I stop nursing baby. I feel guilty, but I need to sleep more. When I see them in court with his replacement family, I feel physically ill. I want to scream at her, and tear her hair out, but I have to keep calm and pretend to be impassive. She has already written an affidavit to the court stating her designs to be my son's step-mother. "Stay calm", "breathe", "don't react", I tell myself. But I can feel the mother fox just under the surface, seething, quivering, and poised to pounce. Mother fox protects her cubs at all costs.

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It's over, for now. He doesn't show up for the final hearing; no more court cases, no more lawyers. I feel as though I can breathe again. He has receded into the peripheries. Me and baby move house. I want a fresh start, somewhere where they have not been, somewhere untainted. But his shadow still looms over us; that will never go away.

A Velvet Glove

"Hello Jane, can you please come into the Work and Income office as soon as possible. There is something that the service centre manager needs to speak to you about. You don't need to make an appointment, thanks", plays the answer phone message. That's weird, I think: case managers never call clients. I'm not going to go all the way down there under mysterious circumstance so I call the number that Rajid has left on the message. "Why do I have to come into the office?" I ask when I get through to him. "It's just something, about, well, something to do with some questions the manager has about a newspaper article" Rajid says. "What about it?" I ask, suspiciously. "Just, erm, well just come down to the office", he evades. "But I don't have an appointment, and I don't see why the manager needs to speak to me so I'm not going to be coming in to the office" I respond firmly, but slightly apprehensively.

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I have an appointment at WINZ with my case manager to discuss my application for a special needs grant. I am nervous, as I always am about going into the service centre. The feelings of dread usually start the day before and get steadily stronger as the time counts down to the meeting. I mentally start to prepare and rehearse my defence. I know all the questions off by heart now.

CASE MANAGER: Why do you need this extra money?

ME: Because I need new tyres for my car.

CASE MANAGER: Why do you have a car?

ME: Because I need to get to university and to my son's day-care. I don't have any family nearby to help out with transport.

CASE MANAGER: Why can't you use public transport?

ME: I would need to take three different buses to get to the day-care and then university.

CASE MANAGER: Why does your child need childcare?

ME: Because I am studying at university.

CASE MANGER: Why are you studying at university?

ME: Because I want to re-qualify so that I can get a good job and be financially autonomous.

CASE MANAGER: Why don't you have any savings?

ME: Because I don't have enough to pay my expenses every week, never mind save anything.

CASE MANAGER: Have you asked your friends or family for the money?

ME: No. My friends don't have any money and all my family live overseas.

CASE MANAGER: How much are you spending on accommodation per week?

ME: $300 per week.

CASE MANAGER: Can't you fine cheaper accommodation?

ME: It's not accommodation; it's my home. Plus, I don't set market rates for property rentals.

CASE MANAGER: How much is your monthly power bill?

ME: $120 per month.

CASE MANAGER: That's quite a lot for one person.

ME: It's not for one person it is for a family household. The power company says that my bill is pretty low.

CASE MANAGER: Can't you reduce your living expenses?

ME: (sigh).

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I know the script. The interrogation of my life(style). Most of the case managers make clear their disapproval, but there are some that are supportive. They understand that re-training and re-qualifying are the best chance single mothers have to get out of the benefit hole. Rajid is nice; he is empathetic but not pitying. I get to the office and report to reception; the receptionist sees that I am there, but pretends not to and carries on doing her imaginary filing. She makes me wait for a few minutes before bothering to look up and acknowledge my presence. She doesn't say anything, but I take this as a cue that I am supposed to present myself to her. "I have a meeting at 10am with Rajid", I say. She says nothing as she flicks through her list of scheduled appointments until she finds my name. She crosses it out with her pen and tells me to take a seat while continuing to look down at the piece of paper. I wait for a few seconds, but she doesn't look up, I have been summarily dismissed.

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I wait for half an hour despite being five minutes early for my appointment. Eventually Rajid calls me over to his desk. The office is all open-plan. I walk past several other case managers with their clients before getting to Rajid's desk. I have heard that the interior of all WINZ offices are specifically designed like this so that everyone can hear and see what is happening throughout the whole office: to prevent anyone causing a 'scene'. I give Rajid the paperwork I have with me: the application form; a bank statement; several quotes for the new fridge I need; and a letter from the repair shop stating that my current fridge is beyond economical repair. Rajid doesn't inquisition; he just asks the procedural questions that the computer programme prompts him to and then approves the advance on benefit. I am supposed to repay this at $10 per week but Rajid lowers this to $3 per week even though he is not really supposed to. While I am waiting for him to finish signing the necessary paperwork, a woman approaches from the back of office and stops next to the desk. "Hello, it's Jane isn't it?" she says. "Yes" I say, glancing at Rajid quizzically, trying to read his expression. "I'm Maureen Campbell, the service centre manager" she goes on, "I just need to have a word with you if you will come over to my desk please". This is more of a command than a question. I look at Rajid, he looks embarrassed. "I will finish off this paper work, don't worry you can go now", he says. I follow Maureen's lead and take a seat at

her desk. "So, I wanted to speak to you about the article in the Western Leader" she states, frostily. Crap. I should have just left the office. "Yes" I say, "what about it". "Well, I am most aggrieved by what you said in the article about WINZ", she says. "How could you say those things about WINZ when we offer you nothing but support; when you have to come to this country and we have provided you with a means of survival", she says. "You talk about being stigmatised and mistreated as a beneficiary and how my staff talk down to you" she goes on, "when WINZ and all the people that work here are just trying to help people exactly like you: we provide a valuable social service and without us then you would be much worse off you know". I am momentarily dumbstruck but quickly pull myself together: "well, that wasn't really the purpose of the article – to criticise WINZ", I say. "The article was about promoting the single mothers support group at the women's centre; I simply wanted to highlight that it isn't easy being a single mother and trying to make do on the DPB" I say, knowing that she wants me to show contrition. "Your staff are rude to me and they try to be deliberately obstructive", I say; "I am just being honest about my experiences of WINZ". "How dare you say those things" she says, obviously affronted by my candour. I never know when to keep my mouth shut. "I stand by everything that I said in that article" I go on, digging a bigger hole for myself. "The main thing is that the article attracted a lot of interest for the single mothers group and that was the aim. "So you don't think that you should apologise for offending me and my staff" she says, imperiously. "No" I say, "I don't, and I don't know why you thought it was OK to confront me about it while I was here for an appointment regarding an entirely different matter". I feel myself getting very flushed and my voice has crept up several octaves. I need to keep it together till I get out of here. "I think I have every right to question you about" she says, "I am paying for you to live here". "No you're not", I argue; "I am here because I am a New Zealand resident, and because my child's father refuses to support us, and because I am legally entitled to claim a benefit in my circumstances" I plough on. "The money isn't coming out of your pocket, it comes from the Crown and I don't feel guilty about that, and I don't think that negates my right to freedom of speech". I'm on a roll now. She looks at me incredulously, clearly affronted by my temerity. "I have to go now" I say, "I think this conversation is really inappropriate". I get up to leave. I can feel her eyes boring into the back of me. I am shaking inside and hope that this isn't detectable from the outside. As I am leaving, every case worker in the office turns to look at me. I make it through the double doors without further ambush and rush to my car. I cry all the way home.

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The following week I get a letter from the Department of Investigations telling me that I am now under investigation for benefit fraud.

I have a meeting with a lawyer at the neighbourhood law office. The manager of the women's centre comes with me for moral support. She feels terrible that I have been put in this position but I try to reassure her that it is not her fault: I should have been more guarded about what I said in the newspaper interview. The meeting with the lawyer doesn't go well. "I can understand why they are investigating you for benefit fraud" he says, after I show him the newspaper article. "What? Why?" I exclaim, shocked at his response. "Because you say that you "work two jobs to help support yourself and your son"" he says reading from the article. "But...but...that isn't what I said; that isn't what I meant", I stammer. "Well you must have said that to the reporters" he says, clearly unsympathetic to my plight. "I don't remember the exact words I used; all I meant was that I work hard at university and do voluntary work at the women's centre to try and build a better life for me and my son because the DPB isn't enough to live on – I didn't say anything about waged-work", I attempt to defend. How could I have been so stupid and unguarded about what I said to the reporters. "Well, WINZ are not going to think that; they have read this and taken it as an admission that you are working while claiming a benefit", he says impassively; "my suggestion is that you don't make a big deal of this; just comply with their investigation or they will make things very difficult for you". "But I am not working for money" I dispute, tearing up. "Well, then you have nothing to worry about", he responds. I thank him for his time and we leave; my fears unassuaged. I have heard horror stories about WINZ accessing peoples' bank accounts and beneficiaries being dobbed in by informants. I cry all the way home.

Accidental Mothering

I hit the ground at 30 kilometres an hour. Thud. I wait for a second. Yep, I am still alive. I wait for the pain to hit. The dull ache in my right arm tells me it is broken. I roll onto my back which sends a searing pain up through my right hip and lower back. I wriggle my toe around in my boots. OK, I am not paralysed. I wriggle my fingers a bit; they still work. I hear galloping hooves approaching. The ground is freezing and I feel it sucking all the heat from my supine body. I am sweating and shivering at the same time. OK, I can handle this – this is nowhere near as bad as child birth.

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Three hours after the accident I arrive at the A & E department of the hospital. "I just want a cup of tea" I say to the ambulance officers as they wheel me in to be processed. "I hate to say it, but it's going to be a long time before you get a cup of tea", responds the medic who accompanied me in the back of the ambulance. "What do you mean?" I say. "It will take a long time to process you and then for you to

see the orthopaedic surgeon – you might need an operation" he says empathetically. "I can't have an operation" I say, getting worried: "I have to go and collect me son – I am a single mother". "Where is your son now?" he asks. "He is with some friends of mine for the day" I say, getting upset. The gas induced bubble is wearing off and reality is seeping back in. He smiles at me reassuringly: "don't worry – he will be fine – just wait and see what the doctor says". Once we reach the ward the ambulance officers have to leave me. "Good luck" they offer, as they park me next to the nurses' station. I don't want them to leave. I feel safe with them. "Hello, I am Nurse Betty" my nurse introduces herself, "I will be looking after you". Nurse Betty looks like a witch from a children's storybook, and has an inappropriate amount of red lipstick on, which makes her mouth look like its bleeding. My suspicions are confirmed when she leans on my broken arm to take my pulse. I scream in pain. "Stop that racket" she castigates, "I am trying to help you". "I know" I whimper helplessly, "it's just that you leant on my broken arm". She glowers at me: my complaints go unheeded as she continues to bash into my arm while affixing several monitoring devices to me. When am I going to get the drugs, I think. Nurse Betty goes out and comes back with a large pair of scissors; before I know it she has cut most of my upper clothing off. I beg her not to cut my jodhpurs off as it is freezing in the ward. She inserts a drip into my and I get the analgesics that I so desperately need. As the Morphine rushes to my head, everything recedes into the background and I start floating.

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"You have a midshaft humerus fracture" announces the doctor, scanning my x-rays: "we will try and set it in a plaster cast – if that doesn't work you will need to have an operation to have it pinned back together; humerus fractures are notoriously difficult to set straight". Shit. "What about university, I have to go back in two weeks"? I say. "I doubt very much you will be going back to university next semester" he says, gravely. The doctor instructs Nurse Betty to give me more Morphine and Pethadine before attempting to set my arm; it is going to hurt. After I am suitable anaesthetised, Nurse Betty and another nurse prepare to plaster my arm. I have to sit on the end of the bed and dangle my arm downwards with it bent across my stomach at the elbow. I almost pass out from the combinations of drugs, and the pain of moving my arm. After a gruelling half hour I am plastered from shoulder to wrist with a cumbersome monstrosity. Still no cup of tea. I get wheeled back to the recovery ward.

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The doctor looks at my notes and at the x-rays. "You are pretty lucky" he says, "it could have been a lot worse; most of these types of fractures need operated on". I nod, compliantly. "How is your pain? When was the last time you had Morphine? Who will be at home if I discharge you? Have you managed to get

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to the toilet yet?" he quizzes. "Erm, not too much pain; the last time I had any Morphine was at 4pm; it's just me at home; and, yes, I have been to the toilet" I say, as confidently as possible. I don't tell him it took me twenty minutes to get to the toilet – with the help of an orderly – and that my lower back is in excruciating agony every time I bend forwards. "Hmm" he says, not looking entirely convinced. "OK, if you can get up and walk around the whole ward by yourself, unaided, by the time my shift finishes at 8pm, then I will let you go home" he offers, hesitantly. "OK, no problem", I reply. He departs abruptly, keen to finish his rounds. I mentally prepare for my test; there is no way I am staying in this freezing, drafty hospital all night. Aware that I am running out of time, I inch my way out of bed and begin to shuffle my way up the ward cradling my broken arm for extra stability. Moving at a glacial pace, I complete a circuit of the ward, making sure I smile generously as I pass the window to the doctor's office. I pass the test and the doctor, slightly reluctantly, discharges me with several prescriptions.

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I have been alone for five days now. Laddie is staying with Sarah. This is the longest that we have ever been apart. It is so quiet in the house. I take my painkillers every four hours and drift in and out of sleep, but it is difficult to sleep as I have to prop myself upright with pillows. I jolt awake periodically as my body tries to turn itself while I am sleeping, which makes the bones in my arms separate and then grind together. Getting my injured body out of bed is the biggest challenge; my back, despite any obvious signs of damage, is more painful than my arm. The practicalities of actual toileting and showering require the application of some seriously creative thinking. After five days of not washing, I desperately need to shower or bathe. ACC still hasn't processed my application for home care. It may be two more weeks, they tell me, as nobody can seem to find my hospital notes. I draft in Sarah for assistance, and we use several black bin liners and duct tape to try and water proof my plastered arm. The shower feels amazing. I still have detritus from the forest in my hair, and mud and plaster all over my skin. Sarah helps me to dry and dress and get back into bed. Once you are a mother you tend to lose any sense of shame about nakedness and being cared for in such an intimate way. It does not faze Sarah at all: "it is what we do, as mothers, every day" she says. After Sarah leaves, I am alone again. I want Laddie back, but I start to panic about how I am going to manage to look after him – and then there is university, and work. How are we going to survive financially? I can't clean houses with a broken arm? How will I attend lectures and take notes? I take some more Codeine. Mum is right – this is all my fault.

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I have no choice, I have to call him. I can't look after Laddie properly, and I am scared that social services will get involved. The doctors and nurses keep asking me lots of questions about my 'situation' at home. ACC still hasn't approved my claim for assistance and now, to make things worse, I have a really bad respiratory infection. I briefly consider inquiring about putting Laddie into foster care until I can function better. I can't do that. I could never live with myself. I call him and explain what has happened. He says he will be here in two days. Part of me is relieved, but at the back of my mind, I cannot shake off my feelings of trepidation. I have to let him stay in my house to help with Laddie, but this goes against everything that I know and feel about him. But now, he is my own source of support.

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My mum is doing a great job of making me feel worse than I already do about this situation; adding insult to injury takes on a literal meaning when dealing with her. Her response to the accident is unequivocal: "you shouldn't be riding horses if you are a single mother – it's dangerous". "So I am not allowed to do anything that I enjoy or have any quality of life then" I say, argumentatively. "No, not if it involves risky activities", she says resolutely; "and horse riding is on my list of dangerous activities". "So, because I am a single mother I have to take up knitting as a hobby" I retort, facetiously. "Well, yes, you have to sacrifice your wants for your child" she says, matter-of-factly: "he is your main priority". I feel my blood boiling. "Right, like everything I do isn't for Laddie – isn't to make his life better by trying to get us out of poverty" I say, my voice elevating. "I go to school, scrub rich people's toilets and do everything for him without any help from anyone, and I am not supposed to have any enjoyment in life – I think I make plenty of sacrifices", I explode. "But look at you" she says, "you have broken your arm and you can't even look after yourself, never mind your child – you chose to have a child and you chose to go recklessly galloping about on horses". "It was just an accident", I yell. "No, it's not an accident if you know something is dangerous" she says. I can hear her voice cracking. I know she is getting upset, but that doesn't stop me: "oh, would you prefer I got run over by a car because that isn't on your list of dangerous activities – then would I get some sympathy and some support"? "What am I supposed to do from all the way over the other side of the world", she responds. I know this conversation isn't going anywhere. Both of us are needlessly tearing chunks out of each other. The truth is my mother is going to punish me for my 'accidents' forever.

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Two days after he leaves I start to feel that familiar dull ache in my left ear that signals I have an infection establishing itself in my middle ear. I have a good selection of painkillers to choose from, so, I take my maximum allowance of Codeine, Paracetomol and Brufen in the hope that I can block the

worst of the pain. I drift off into a febrile sleep, but wake up again a short while later in agony. It feels like a hot poker is being rammed into the side of my head. I can't take any more painkillers. Laddie is asleep in my bed and I stare at his innocent little face. I start weeping, quietly at first so as not to wake him, but soon I am sobbing. The pain is unbearable. I just want to be able to crawl into my mum and dad's bed like I used to when I was little. I don't know what to do. The pain is so intense I start retching, but nothing comes up. I phone the after-hours medical advice line and the nurse advises me to go to the hospital. I don't want to call anyone and wake them up so I decide I will have to drive to the nearest A & E. I manage to get my jacket on and manoeuvre Laddie's slumbering body into his jacket; I hoist him up onto my shoulder with my good arm. The freezing air outside rouses him: "Where are we going Mummy?" he mumbles. "Don't worry" I say, trying to reassure him: "we are just going to the hospital because mummy isn't feeling well".

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At A & E I report to a disinterested nurse at the reception. "Why did you come to A & E?" she inquires, cynically. I try to explain to her about my ear and the pain. After taking some cursory notes, she tells me to wait in reception. The other people in the waiting room stare at us quizzically. We must look a sight in our pyjamas with our bed hair, and me, with my plaster cast sticking out of the bottom of my jacket. We wait. And wait. Periodically, I go to the bathroom to throw up in the sink. Eventually I am called in to see the duty doctor. "You have an ear infection", he says; "we will get you some Paracetomol and some anti-biotics, and then you can go home". I meekly try to explain to him that I have already taken panoply of painkillers. He eyes me detachedly and consults with a nurse who goes away and comes back with two small plastic cups: one containing pills and one containing water. I take the contents of the cups and the nurse tells me to wait in the cubicle for twenty minutes to check I do not have an adverse reaction to the medication. She comes back after the allotted time and tells me to go to reception to call a taxi. I shuffle back to reception and ask to use the phone; as I punch in the numbers I am overwhelmed with nausea and projectile vomit all over the reception area. The nurse passes me a small plastic receptacle. I ignore him and continue vomiting all over the floor and desk. They have no choice but to admit me now.

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"How dare you cry like that in front of your poor wee laddie" the nurse admonishes: "dragging him here in the middle of the night, when he should be in bed". I continue to cry, albeit a little quieter. "Why can't you call somebody to come and pick him up" she queries, in her matronly tone. "I don't have anyone to call" I say. "What's wrong with your arm?" she asks. "It's broken" I say, "I didn't come here about my

arm – I came about my ear". She looks at me disdainfully: "well you will just have to wait for the doctor; in the meantime just try and keep the noise down so your son can sleep". She gently tucks a blanket over him, checks my drip and then goes back to her desk. When the doctor comes to see me he examines my ear: "you have an inner ear infection; there is a lot of fluid trapped behind your ear drum" he says. "I know" I grimace: "I just want something for the pain". "We have given you pain killers" he says. "But they haven't made any difference to the pain level" I wail, "can't you give me something stronger"? He looks at me suspiciously. I am pretty sure he thinks I am drug seeker now. "No, we have done everything we can – an ear infection isn't life threatening" he says, sternly. He leaves and I don't see him again. I lie there just trying to endure the pain. As the morning light starts to filter into the ward from outside, I wake up Laddie and we leave. I don't bother waiting to be officially discharged. I am sick of hospitals.

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I have to go back to university. I only have one more paper left to complete my qualification and I am determined to enrol this semester. I am almost completely deaf in my left ear as a consequence of the ear infection. Attending lectures is certainly challenging, if not a bit Monty Pythonesque, with only one functioning ear and one functioning arm. I have to sit with my good ear towards the lecturer whilst trying to write with my left, non-dominant hand. The practicalities of doing the housework, childcare, grocery shopping and school runs are on another level of difficulty. I get a warning letter from Laddie's school about his lateness and absences; I get warning letters from the phone company and the power company due to unpaid bills; I get warning letters from the bank because I can't afford to repay my bank loan. I feel myself fracturing, so I go into survival mode. I ignore the letters and phone calls, and create a protective bubble around us. My only focus is Laddie and my studies.

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Eight weeks later I surpass all the doctors' expectations and ask to have my cast removed. "I can't afford to be injured any longer", I tell them. They acquiesce, and I am freed from the cast. I am not, however, freed from the doubt and anguish that the past two months have elicited. I am worn down, depleted, tired of fighting.

PART TWO: Related Narratives

4. Situating Single Motherhood

In order to expand the scope of this thesis beyond my own experiences of single motherhood a small qualitative study of the lived experiences of eight single mothers was conducted to enhance the autoethnographic data: from the single case to a multiple voiced standpoint. A recruitment notice was placed in the Auckland Women's Centre (five participants) and an advertisement appeared online via a research study recruitment website (three participants). The women interviewed ranged in ages from their early 30's to early 40's; the women's children ranged in ages between 2 years and 8 years old. All of the women identified as being primarily of Pākehā/European descent although two of the women had connections to Māoritanga through their children's cultural identification, and one woman self-identified as being of both Pākehā and Māori descent. All of the women interviewed lived in the Auckland area in rented accommodation with their children and all bar one lived independently of any other family members or adults, friends or flatmates. All of the women interviewed had primary (day-to-day) care of their child/ren and were in receipt of the DPB with the exception of one woman who had just transitioned into full-time employment two weeks before being interviewed for the study.

The length of time participants had spent on the DPB ranged from approximately 18 months at the shorter end of the scale to eight years for one woman who has been in receipt of the DPB since her child (now aged 8 years) was born. Of the women interviewed, four had been claiming the DPB since their child/ren was born while the other four had been reliant on the DPB as their sole source of income since separating from their child/ren's father. Out of the eight participants in this study four women had experienced some form of domestic (intimate) violence during their relationship with their child/ren's father. For three women this was characterised by physical and/or psychological abuse and for two women this was described in terms of psychological and emotional abuse and intimidation. Four of the women had experienced post-separation abuse and at the time of interviewing two of the women were still experiencing post-separation abuse: psychological threats and intimidation.

At the time of interviewing, contact and care arrangements between the women's children and their fathers varied between no contact (n = 3) and regular contact (n = 5) of which three were informal parenting agreements and two being Family Court parenting orders. However, for those women with Family Court parenting orders regular contact between father and child had only recently been established and, prior to these orders being made, the father had been absent for extended periods of time from their child's life. All of the women who had up to date contact and care arrangements in place

with their child/ren's father described the arrangements as being problematic due to either ongoing patterns of abusive and coercive behaviour directed towards them (n = 3); and/or, patterns of unreliable and elusive behaviour demonstrated by the father over a period of time in regards to maintaining regular contact with their child/ren (n = 5). Of the four women whose child/ren have no contact with their fathers, three had parenting agreements set down by the Family Court soon after separation allowing for regular contact between father and child; in all three cases the father did not exercise their rights of contact. In the other instance, the child's father did not want to have any contact with his child although he did acknowledge that he was the biological father.

All of the participants in this study received the minimum level of IRD calculated child support (*Child Support Act 1991*) for their child/ren, which is paid directly to the Crown whilst in receipt of a main benefit, and the women interviewed did not receive any extraneous financial support from their child/ren's fathers. Seven of the women in the study supplemented their incomes via various means: three women were working part-time earning the maximum allowable income set by WINZ; and four were engaged in, or had engaged in, part-time 'cash-in-hand' (unofficial sector) work to make ends meet whilst receiving the DPB.

Several differences and similarities became apparent from the origin stories of the single mothers interviewed. Their situated knowledge made clearer some of the commonalities of experience that single mothers share. One of the most salient aspects which came forth from the women's stories was the prevalence of domestic violence and relational conflict. Out of the eight women interviewed, four women (Abbie, Alicia, Katrina and Barbara) experienced domestic abuse from their child/ren's father and it was a contributing factor to the breakdown of their relationship. Alicia, for example, separated from her partner when she was pregnant with their third child due to domestic violence, while Barbara separated from her partner when their child was one year old. Their relationships were characterised by violence, intimidation and coercion. For Abbie and Katrina, the abuse they experienced was characterised by psychological and emotional abuse, including domination and harassment. However, domestic abuse was not limited to women who were living with their partners; Katrina experienced domestic abuse from her child's father despite not having lived together as partners.

For some women (Barbara and Abbie), the domestic abuse they experienced continued postseparation; whilst Tanya did not experience domestic abuse during their relationship, she did experience psychological and emotional abuse from the father of her child postseparation. These finding are consistent with national (MSD, 2008; Snively, 1996) and international literature (Stark, 2007, 2009; Scott, London, & Myers, 2002) on domestic and intimidate violence which suggests that one in

three women experience domestic abuse from their partners. In addition, women commonly experience postseparation abuse and violence from their ex-partners, which is further complicated where children have resulted from the relationship, especially where there is conflict over care and contact arrangements (Elizabeth, Gavey, & Tolmie, 2012; Scott *et al.*, 2002). Several women (Abbie, Barbara, Katrina, Tanya) describe how their child/ren's father has displayed obsessive and controlling behaviour towards them postseparation including stalking and making repeated attempts to contact them even in cases where a Protection Order has been granted (Barbara, Katrina). One other woman was granted a Protection Order (Alicia), but her ex-partner has ceased to make any contact with her or their children.

The participation of fathers in their children's lives had both positive and negative consequences for the women interviewed and their children, and was a key influencing factor in their experiences of single mothering. For those mothers who did have care and contact arrangements with their ex-partners, most found their presence more of a negative than a positive influence in their lives. Those with history of abuse experienced the worst problems with their child/ren's fathers as most continued to experience some form of abuse, or inescapable conflict, due to ongoing contact around care arrangements. Those women whose ex-partners had ceased making contact with them or their child/ren were, generally, relieved that they did not have to deal with him anymore, believing that it was in theirs, and their child/ren's, best interests to have no further contact. None of the women received financial or material support for their child/ren over and above minimum IRD child support payments. This also created dilemmas regarding childcare, housing and paid work due to financial hardship and budget deficits. Irregularity and unreliability in care and contact arrangements, for those who had them also contributed to these issues. For those women who had no instrumental support from the nonresident parent, these issues were greatly exacerbated.

Most of the women had had some involvement with the family law process and conflict over contact and care arrangements with the father of their child/ren. Negative experiences of the family law system, and conflict with ex-partners and family law professionals, featured heavily in the womens' narratives, especially for those with unresolved disputes. These women felt under threat from their ex-partners and the legal system, which in some instances (Tanya, Barbara) their ex-partners were able to use instrumentally to their advantage. External crises imposed on the women, whether interpersonal or structural, situated the women in a precarious position financially, socially and ideologically, as single mothers on welfare. Without the ability to effectively communicate their experiences and circumstances to others, most of the women interviewed felt they were unfairly stigmatised and judged by society for being both single and reliant on welfare.

The origin stories of the women interviewed provided an important starting point from which to subjectively understand their lived realities and to dismantle some of the stigmatising myths regarding single welfare mothers. As with my own story, neither I, nor the women I interviewed, contrived to become single mothers, as dominant narratives would suggest, but through various circumstances this is where we have arrived. Some of us knew we would be single mothers before our children were born and for others this status, or label, would come later.

For most, the assignment of the label 'single mother' is a social label of non-conformity (Anleu, 1999) rather than a self-definition; first, and foremost, we are mothers. Single mothers are categorised and distinguished from 'normative' prescriptions of motherhood, which are ideologically underpinned by culturally defined notions of the nuclear family and 'legitimate' mothering (Bock, 2000; Gillies, 2007; Little, 1998; Silva, 1996). In addition, single mothers who are reliant on welfare assistance are further problematised as state dependants, regardless of the multivariate underlying factors precipitating their need to claim social assistance (Christopher, 2005; Edin & Kefalas, 2005; Gillies, 2007; MSD, 2010c; Scott *et al.,* 2002). Many of the women interviewed faced "multiple marginalities" (Hayward & Yar, 2006), which can best be examined by foregrounding the 'situated knowledge' of single mothers (Harding, 2006). The following three chapters – *Concrete Spaces, Liminal Spaces* and *Subjective Spaces* – aim to contextualise and give further insight into their lived experiences.

5. Concrete Spaces

This chapter explores the structural realm of single mothers; namely, the structural rigidities they encounter in their institutional interactions with WINZ and in their efforts to secure material survival through paid and unpaid work. Their institutional interactions with WINZ and their engagement in marginal work were often problematic; moreover, their experiences emphasise deeply entrenched notions of welfare philanthropy and the 'undeserving poor' in New Zealand. Both the welfare state and the labour market are key sites of moral regulation for poor single mothers; their reliance on these structural institutions for their material survival may serve to perpetuate, rather than alleviate, their pauperdom.

It was important, therefore, to look at the levels of 'support' the women received as a centrally influencing factor in their experiences of single motherhood. For the women who participated in this study, their primary source of financial support was government transfers: the Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB), Temporary Additional Support (TAS) and Accommodation Supplement (AS). In addition, many women relied on extra assistance from WINZ such as Special Needs Grants (SNG), childcare supplements (OSCAR) and the Training Incentive Allowance (TIA). For others, their key to survival was part-time work, both legitimate (disclosed/taxed income), and unofficial: cash-in-hand work or *contra* trading (grey market).

This chapter is divided into six substantive sections: *Jumping Through Hoops, A Temporary Existence, A Better Place, The Road to Salvation, Getting off the Benefit, Other Means*; a discussion sections follows. *Concrete Spaces* illustrates the ways in which single mothers daily lives are overshadowed by external forces beyond their control.

Jumping Through Hoops

The single mothers interviewed for this study had a mixture of negative and positive experiences when dealing with WINZ case workers. Their experiences often depended on the type of assistance they were applying for and the individual case worker appointed to conduct the interview. Most felt that decisions made by case workers were often arbitrary and designed to make things difficult for them, rather than assist them. Negative experiences left the women feeling powerless and marginalised, while positive experiences were less commonly experienced. Most of the women interviewed felt it necessary to adopt a defensive stance when interacting with WINZ personnel and conflict was not uncommon. In addition, the need to constantly justify their access to social assistance as legitimate was a salient feature of their accounts.

Abbie's experiences of WINZ have, on the whole, not been *"too bad"*; however, she does discuss one particularly negative experience with a case worker who initially refused her request to have her rent paid directly to the landlord. She says:

> *There was no reason for him to decline my request; it was fairly straight forward but he was very rude and his mannerisms were abrasive. I had to argue with him to try and get him to pay the rent directly to my landlord and he kept saying that it wasn't something that they could do, but I knew they could do it. He was just being difficult.*

She also highlights that appointment times are never adhered to at WINZ and that, more often than not, she is made to wait a long time to see a case worker. She feels that even though she is called a 'client' of WINZ she is not treated as such, as in reality, she has *"no ability to complain"*: she is effectively *"powerless"*.

Katrina goes to interviews *"armed"* with legislation and policy documents in order to "*argue"* her case when applying for certain types of assistance. Katrina's experiences emphasise the need to be well prepared and adopt a combative attitude when dealing with WINZ; applications for assistance are often decided (and declined) on the basis of complicated eligibility clauses that can be confusing to both client and case worker. She says:

> *I have to say I am really quite assertive, like with stuff like dealing with WINZ. What I do is go onto their website and search through their manuals and procedures and you can calculate how much you are entitled to – although their calculations are bloody complicated – but you can work out yourself how much you are entitled to. Most people don't seem to do that. The amount of misinformation you get from them, or the fact that they don't volunteer information, or sometimes I think that the staff just don't know themselves.*

For Katrina, her persistence and knowledge of the system paid off; but for others, who may lack her social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), a different scenario usually unfolds. She comments:

> *They don't think outside of the squares. I have had to challenge them on the wording of their policy. The big one, which took weeks and weeks, was, I had started a home based business, which for me is good option…but the struggle was to get an extra day of childcare. I had to fight and fight and fight for it and, you know, you shouldn't have to. There is more than one way to earn money and there is more than one way to get off the benefit. For most people they would have given up…but I read what the law and the policy said, and I believed that I was entitled to it…and I kept arguing, and kept arguing, and I eventually got it, but it took three months.*

Alicia also addresses the discretionary granting of assistance: *"some case managers are very rigid in the application of policy whereas others are more flexible and find a way to get you the money you need".* This means that dealing with WINZ is somewhat of an unknown quantity; official documents regarding WINZ entitlements and eligibility may support the application, but the application may not necessarily be approved by the granting officer.

Barbara's experiences suggest that, on the one hand, WINZ case workers can be helpful and supportive, but in other instances, exercise rigidity and punitive treatment. Barbara compares these differing experiences when applying for work related costs:

> *WINZ were great, the manager was like "what do you need? You need clothes don't you" she said nodding her head. So I said, "yes, I need clothes" and they sent me down here [to the mall] to get me two new outfits. Then she said "right, how are you going to pay your rent?" and I said, "I don't know" and she said, "OK we will pay your rent for the next two weeks". So, it was easy.*

This is in marked contrast to when she tried to claim a main benefit:

> *Like when I went on the DPB and they said you have to apply for child support, and I said well he has been abusive to me so I don't want that, and they said: "well we will cut your benefit". So, they cut my benefit by $30 a week. He really scared me away from it so all this time, for the last year and a half, I have missed out on that $30 a week.*

However, despite pursuing this matter with them now that her circumstances have changed, she has still not received any payments: *"needless to say, I have applied for it now but they still haven't raised my benefit."*

These tensions between the administration of assistance and punishment are encapsulated felicitously by Alicia:

> *When you go into WINZ they are reasonably nice but then they follow that up with a slap on the wrist".* Assistance is conditional on meeting obligations to the state and beneficiaries are reminded of this during interactions with case workers.

The lack of information forthcoming from WINZ regarding entitlements was also a point of concern raised by the women interviewed. Janet says she has only just become aware, through a friend, that she is entitled to 9hrs per week of subsidised childcare, which she could have been claiming for the past two years, but was not informed of this entitlement by her care worker. Barbara says: *"you have to*

ask every step of the way with WINZ; you have to go informed". Some of the women felt that information was deliberately withheld by WINZ caseworkers, while others felt that information was not passed on due to the complicated nature of benefit entitlements. Recent changes to the welfare system have further conflated the equitable application of eligibility clauses by case workers.

As Barbara points out, two people applying for the same assistance in similar circumstance might get different outcomes based on case workers knowledge of the entitlement system, and their discretion in approving assistance based on eligibility criteria. Barbara had difficulty in applying for a Special Needs Grant (SNG) to cover the cost of registering with her professional body, which was mandatory for her to begin working within her qualified field:

> *… when I graduated to register as a therapist I had to pay a registration fee so I could start working…I couldn't just come up with $300 for the registration fee, so I went to WINZ and after much toing and froing my new case manager was very, very helpful. I spent three hours down there and they approved $300 and I just had to pay $80 and, yet, another friend went to WINZ…and they said no.*

Being legally entitled to assistance does not guarantee access. However, Barbara tested the confines of their eligibility clause and, on this occasion, was rewarded with a positive outcome: *"I had all the documentation from the [health] board, saying it is illegal to practice without being registered and I had it written in two forms that I couldn't work without this so they classed it under 'Work Assistance'".*

Work and Income case workers were much more helpful and forthcoming with information regarding work related costs and extra assistance available to those returning to paid employment. This is possibly in line with recent changes to welfare legislation around paid employment, which requires women to satisfy increasingly stringent obligations and responsibilities (*see Future Focus Bill, 2010*). Applications for other forms of extra assistance are often met with obfuscation and obstruction. Barbara, for example, applied for a SNG for emergency dental treatment after her tooth was knocked out and was met with a bureaucratic wall:

> *But, yeh, so I gave up with WINZ on the dental treatment; I got creative because I had tapped my mum. It's ridiculous, every time WINZ say:"can't you ask your family". I mean I know that I could have gone down there [to WINZ] at certain stages and got the food [grant]…I just couldn't bring myself to go and beg for food – I just couldn't do that.*

These types of interactions with WINZ also left women feeling like 'beggars' and 'scroungers' even though they knew they were technically entitled to the assistance. The paternalistic treatment of DPBs

as needy and incapable dependants was often played out during interactions with case workers. Alicia says that some of the case workers she has been appointed to have negated her efforts to qualify as a teacher and questioned her ability to complete her studies, making her feel condescended and worthless. Katrina points out the performative aspect of these interactions with WINZ case workers:

> *I have found that the case managers at WINZ have the same position: that they know you are not getting enough money to get by, but we have to make you jump through these hoops, so off you go.*

Applications for extra assistance are recorded over a 52 week period, and clients are placed on a gradated scale (e.g. 'high user') based on the number of times they apply for a SNG. After the third application, extra assistance will not be granted without clients attending a seminar despite it being axiomatic (although not officially acknowledged) that benefit levels are set at unrealistically low levels. Katrina says:

> *Every time you go into WINZ to get a food grant or whatever, you go in with your budget and they [budget advisors] look at it and say: "how do you manage to get through every week because your incomings don't meet your expenditures". And you say: "yeh, I know, this is how much you're giving me so tell me how I am supposed to make ends meet.*

For those mothers with other ongoing costs, benefit levels are catastrophically low. Theresa's son's high health needs and behavioural problems place extra demands on both her emotional and financial reservoirs; with limited financial resources, she has been forced to make tough decisions regarding her son's health needs. Because her son has multiple diagnoses, she struggles to pay for treatments. Theresa also believes that her son has a specific learning disability (SLD) which has, thus far, gone undiagnosed because she cannot afford the $400 fee for a formal diagnosis. In turn, this has manifested itself in behavioural difficulties, such as angry outbursts, which she attributes to his feelings of frustration and confusion. He has also physically hurt her on several occasions, but because she has reached her maximum number of applications for SNGs, paying for her son's dental work, she cannot access further assistance for her son's learning needs. The social and psychological consequences of being systemically under-supported, as a single mother, are evident in Theresa's story. Theresa has exhausted all avenues of financial assistance from WINZ; there are no more hoops to jump through.

A Temporary Existence

The high cost of living in Auckland and the affordable housing crisis is a key area of concern of beneficiaries and low-income households. Many of the women were also reliant on 'extra assistance' from WINZ, most notably, Temporary Additional Support (TAS) and Special Needs Grants (SNG). Unlike a main benefit, most forms of extra assistance have (increasingly) higher eligibility thresholds and criteria testing, and require separate applications for approval. TAS, for example, must be reapplied for every 13 weeks and clients must demonstrate how they have taken necessary steps to increase their income or decrease living expenses (see *Future Focus Bill, 2010*). Katrina says:

> *It really annoys me that the way that they do Temporary Additional Support (TAS); it does my head in. That whole myth that you can earn $100 before it effects your benefit is totally irrelevant now because so many people claim TAS because they can't afford market rent; so as soon as you earn any money then TAS is cut off.*

From Katrina perspective, the current system is also helping to exacerbate rental market inflation via TAS payments; in effect, keeping rental prices unaffordably high while cutting spending to social housing. There is no working logic in welfare practices, especially from a cost benefit perspective.

In addition to these temporary measures, which many beneficiaries have to rely on to meet their basic living costs, government welfare reforms aim to redefine all main benefits as 'Temporary Assistance'. This was of great concern to many of the women interviewed, especially those with the youngest children. Several of the women had attended a local women's group where they had been given a seminar by a WINZ case worker who addressed the forthcoming changes to welfare entitlements and reconfiguration of benefit types. While the dissemination of this type of information is vital for awareness and (self)advocacy purposes, it is also suggestive of social control by consensus: ideological persuasion (Jackman, 1994). The central message from this government is a reminder of their dependency on the state paternalism, while underscoring the ephemeral and arbitrary nature of social security; welfare is only a temporary safety net and not a long-term solution. This shift towards a skeletal benefit system has had devastating effects in other western liberal states where the redistributive model has been, largely, eschewed in favour of 'trickle-down economics' (Marmot, 2010; Wacquant, 2009; Wilson & Pickett, 2009). In other words, those who are socially disadvantaged must look to other mechanisms or resources of support: family or charity.

Temporary relief can, in some cases, be accessed through government funded social support services. Alicia has been receiving some social support from the local trust, which provides support programmes

to families identified as 'in need'. For Alicia, this means ongoing family support via social worker visits to her home and 20 hours free childcare for her daughter. The role of the trust is to fund the cost of the assessment of needs, while the costs of their recommendations are met by WINZ. However, recently, this particular trust has come under government scrutiny, and funding has been axed by the Minister of Social Development for 'poor performance'. The trust has gone to court to block the funding cuts (Steward, 2012). Alicia receives valuable support from the trust, she says: *"the trust does really help the disadvantaged and there are those in far worse situations than me"*: if the government permanently withdraws funding then this will effectively disadvantage those people further.

Alicia also recognises that there is a lot more funding and social support services for Maori compared to non-Maori who have access to targeted funding for study and health care needs. Although she feels that this is legitimate, she also points out that non-Maori can also come from socially and financially disadvantaged backgrounds like she did. Furthermore, the trust she receives support from only operates locally (in lower decile areas) and Alicia feels that similar programmes should operate in other areas as poverty and disadvantage are widespread. Alicia's observations capture the essence of debates regarding universal versus targeted support. Government funding cuts have further constrained what could already be considered, a discriminatory system where social support is afforded to those deemed most 'at-risk', but who are, in reality, systemically disadvantaged from the outset (*see Matrix of Domination* Collins, 1990).

A Better Place

Since changes to welfare legislation were enacted by National in October 2010, many structural opportunities and provision previously utilised by sole-parent DPBs (DPB-SP) have been closed off, most notably, the Training Incentive Allowance (TIA). This has meant that, for those women already in receipt of the DPB, tertiary level education has been partially funded, whereas for those who weren't already enrolled in a degree or diploma have, for the most part, been left out. Changes to TIA entitlements meant that eligibility is restricted to those enrolled in foundation courses (level 3 or below), while those studying at level 4 or above are only eligible for a $500 Study Assistance Loan (*Future Focus Bill, 2010*). Those undertaking honours degrees, post-graduate diplomas or masters qualifications are not eligible for any assistance with study related costs from WINZ.

For women such as Tanya and Abbie, these changes have meant that, although they would like to study, to improve their employment prospects, university fees and study costs make tertiary education financially prohibitive and, therefore, inaccessible. Tanya wants to go back to university to re-qualify.

However, she has been told by WINZ that she is not eligible for any support as she holds a previous tertiary qualification. She has tried to apply for this assistance, justifying her need to re-qualify because the industry she worked in prior to being on DPB has changed significantly, therefore, making her qualifications and experience redundant. Her application was unsuccessful and she does not see the point in reapplying as she will be met with the same bureaucratic wall.

Alicia is studying for an online teaching qualification. She has been able to apply for the $500 Study Assistance Loan; however, she has already used up her entitlement for this year. She recently approached WINZ to help her pay for a $200 textbook and they exercised discretion in granting her this extra money; however, they told her that any more applications for assistance will be declined. Alicia now has no funding options for her final year of study. For Rosie, who is also studying for a teaching qualification, education is a pathway to a better future for herself and her daughters; it has also mitigated her experiences as a beneficiary. She says:

> I feel that [the positive interactions with WINZ] has been due to me studying: the fact that I have been studying the whole time. I don't know if it would have gone as smoothly if I didn't have that; and it finishes from 2012 and you've got a date from which you can say you're not just living in the now, living hand-to-mouth and being helpless. It ticks the boxes; it helps them [WINZ] tick the boxes that they need to tick.

Most of the women who participated in this study were either working part-time or studying to gain qualifications that would support their entry into the labour market. Given the current government's emphasis on reducing welfare spending and the 'cycle of dependency' by reactivating single mothers into the employment market, limiting training and education opportunities would seem counter-productive to both their own policy goals, and the goals of the women interviewed.

The Road to Salvation

Despite national and international data (OECD, 2010, 2012) supporting arguments against pushing welfare mothers into paid employment as counterproductive to both increasing household incomes and alleviating poverty rates, the current government has reinforced its position on paid employment as "the road to salvation" (Angus, 2010) with extensive welfare reforms. Employment prospects for single mothers are, however, already limited: time poverty, childcare availability and financial penalties being fundamental barriers, to name but a few (Baker, 2006). Welfare reforms have exacerbated existing structural factors (determinants), which make paid employment for single mothers problematic, at best, and punitive, at worst (Hays, 2006; Wacquant, 2009). The focus around paid employment for domestic

purpose beneficiaries is both ideologically and politically driven, with global restructuring practices influencing current policy initiatives, at times, almost verbatim (*see PWORA, 1996; New Deal (UK), 1998; Work for the Dole (AUS),1998; Welfare Reform Bill (UK), 2012*).

However, even part-time work testing for single parents is, arguably, both disadvantaging and discriminatory. In reality, women account for 88% of single parents on the DPB (MSD, 2010c) while existing gender inequalities within the labour market (Baker, 2007, Budig & England, 2001) as well as higher rates of ill health (Baker & Tippin, 2004; Worth & McMillan, 2004) significantly affect employment outcomes for single mothers. Furthermore, women who have experienced domestic abuse are less likely to secure permanent employment or come off welfare (Raphael, 1996, 1999).

The benefits of part-time paid employment for single mothers have not been well established. Although the Minister of Social Development has claimed that new work obligations for beneficiaries will potentially save $100 million over four years and reduce household poverty, critics have disputed this cost-benefit analysis (AWWG, 2010, CPAG, 2010, Dalziel, 2010). High effective marginal tax rates, along with extra employment costs, such as childcare, result in nominal, if any, net gains in household income (CPAG, 2008, 2011; Dalziel, 2010). Furthermore, the social costs of workfare programmes may result in increased ill health for single mothers (Bull & Mittelmark, 2009), and exacerbate overall poverty rates (CPAG, 2011; Children's Commisioner, 2012; Christopher, 2005), despite evidence asserted by the incumbent government (MSD, 2012; WWG, 2011). It is also worth noting that the MSD has relied heavily on OECD (2009, 2011) reports to support its position on changes to work obligations for single parents, but has selectively omitted many of their recommendations for increased social support and training as key factors in reducing child poverty.

Barbara's case provides a pertinent example of the importance of structural and social support in returning to paid employment. Barbara began studying prior to welfare reforms and successfully re-qualified and gained full-time employment. She was able to access various forms of financial support (TIA, childcare supplement and cash employment) which enabled her to study and remain financially buoyant. She also had instrumental support from her ex-partner, family and friends. Barbara was also able to tap into essential sources of human capital, which carried her through. Barbara feels she is now in a better position:

> *Financially, yeh [I'm better off]; I mean my wages is $34,000, but I get a car, and they told me to sell my personal car, which is a considerable difference. I mean, I've had one pay, but it felt so good going, "wow, I can pay my bills"; and I've sat and worked out a plan of exactly how*

much I'm getting from WINZ, how much from IRD, how much my wage is and what needs to be
paid each week and how much is play money.

However, Barbara does emphasise that she was only able to accept her current employment position due to the suitability of hours and location, and the added benefit of a company car. For Barbara, the bottom line is her son's welfare:

Part of me doesn't want to work and I'm doing this because if I get a job in south Auckland then
that's the most practical for me because there isn't anyone to pick him up. Well there is, but I
don't want to be picking him up from someone's at 6 o'clock at night and dropping him there at
8 o'clock in the morning because I have to work on the other side of Auckland.

As Barbara illustrates, paid employment raises an important quandary for single (and partnered) mothers regarding the practicability and tenability of paid employment given the current employment market, especially in light of post-GFC market insecurities. Moreover there are morally loaded assumptions regarding paid employment for single mothers, who struggle to meet both the financial and social demands of parenting alone. Barbara says:

I also found that when I was looking for work I had these two courses of thought; one, "why
aren't you staying at home with your son", and, "why aren't you waiting until he is five to go to
work" from quite a few other mothers...and others were like, "yeh, get off the benefit."

Getting off the Benefit

For some women 'getting off the benefit' is not a solution to financial and social disadvantage. Reducing welfare rolls does little to reduce poverty or material disadvantage, and has, in other countries, merely served to shift poor single mothers into an ever increasing category of 'working poor' (Wacquant, 2009). As Katrina points out: *"there needs to be bigger incentives to work; it costs money to work as well." It's like they need to restructure or have some different rules".*

She also offers an interesting perspective on the individual tax system in New Zealand:

My theory is, and it's just a theory, that people should be allowed to earn $100 cash, whether it
is cleaning, or trading, or lawn-mowing, or babysitting, or whatever it is. Everyone – not just
beneficiaries – should be allowed to earn $100 cash without having to file tax returns or declare
it and it doesn't affect their income in any way, shape or form. People are doing that anyway

and it's just legitimizing it – it would be a zero effective income as far as taxes and benefits are concerned.

For single mothers, being able to increase their income by $100 per week would make the difference between grinding poverty and debt and being able to afford the necessities which are not accounted for by current beneficiary allowances. For those already disadvantaged in the labour market, returning to paid employment as a single mother represents a Herculean challenge. Alicia, for example, has a difficult set of circumstances and has already experienced periods of unemployment prior to becoming a single mother and receiving the DPB. She knows how tough the job market is and she recognises that it is going to be very difficult finding suitable work when she is caring for three young children. Irrespective of the affordability of quality childcare, juggling the responsibilities to her children with work will, as she states, be *"very challenging"*.

Alicia is also aware of the punitive dimensions of work-testing and sanctioning. Having attended several mandatory workshops and seminars at WINZ, she thinks that the underlying purpose of these workshops is to try and instil discipline and routine into beneficiaries lives. The prospect of going through this process again – with three pre-school children to consider – instils her with anxiety. In addition to the logistical issues of returning to paid employment, Alicia's financial circumstances make this transition seem all the more incongruous. Serious debt has left Alicia without control of her bank account and any taxable earnings she makes will instantly be recouped by the bank to repay her debts. For Alicia, paid employment is not the 'road to salvation'.

Theresa also has similar trepidations about returning to full-time paid employment. Due to her son's high health needs, Theresa feels that she needs to be available for her son as much as possible. She says:

> *Kids that don't have active parenting suffer in future – I want to be around to help him now to save the social cost later in life. The more I work, the more it affects his behaviour. I have seen what happens to children who have similar issues to my son's, and that don't get the care and attention they need when they are younger, and how that can affect them as adults.*

Although WINZ have put pressure on her to increase her paid employment, she has so far resisted this push, rationalising that is neither in her, or her son's, best interests long-term.

Other Means

Many of the women interviewed had found alternative, and creative, ways to increase their incomes or make up for budget deficits. Subsisting in the margins often leads to marginal work (i.e. low-waged, temporary and unskilled employment) and entry into the unofficial sector: grey market trading and cash-in-hand work. These shadow economies reflect the shadowed existence of poor single mothers, who are often reliant on either welfare or poverty wages, or a mixture of both (Christopher, 2005; Hays, 2004). With little political or social power, single mothers are effectively marginalised from the official sector, while an increasingly unregulated labour market and neo-liberal welfare reforms have led to the pauperisation of single mothers over time (Christopher, 2005). While single mothers are clever at devising strategies to make up budget shortfalls, these take up a great deal of time and energy, are usually highly unstable and sometimes illegal: survival is *ad hoc* (Edin, 2002).

For some women, this meant engaging in illegal or unofficial employment, making them vulnerable to both labour exploitation and, in some cases (see Barbara, Tanya and Katrina), to retaliative accusations of benefit fraud. All of the women, except Abbie, depend on alternative or supplementary sources of income; some disclosed and others concealed. Alicia, Barbara and Rosie rely on cash-in-hand from cleaning and child-minding, while Theresa, Tanya and Katrina undertake various types of declared contract work to supplement their benefits (although in most cases the financial gain was nominal). Janet, on the other hand, manages financially due to redundancy money she received just prior to having her son; she has not disclosed this money to WINZ and worries about the ramifications of them finding out.

Katrina draws in extra income from online trading and by setting up her own sole-trader company. She points out that current abatement rates for beneficiaries have no 'real effect' once deductions are made:

> *That whole thing of self-employment income after your expenses is a fairly simple concept, but it's like they don't want people to know about it and do it: $100 p/w cleaning for a single parent for example shows zero profit once you have claimed all the things you can. It's the difference between being able to spend $20-30 per week on fruit and veggies and being able to, God forbid, have a bottle of wine sometime.*

Although her company makes no *"paper profit",* she has used her accounting skills to offset some of her household costs as business expenses, meaning she can afford 'extras' such as running a car.

Many of the women discussed the ways in which they accessed otherwise unaffordable goods and services by engaging in alternative (unofficial) economies, circumventing the need for financial capital.

In some cases the women would go to, perceivably, extreme lengths to meet their own needs and the needs of the children when no other feasible alternative was available. Theresa, for example, travels 300km to visit her family dentist as she cannot afford to pay for dental treatment locally and she has used up her entitlements (SNG) for medical treatment from WINZ on her child's health costs.

Theresa also has many reciprocal arrangements with friends and acquaintances and has an instrumental approach to securing the goods or services she needs. She openly confesses to making friends with people she knows have something that she needs and is equally frank with them about the potential mutual benefits: "you scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours". She sees this social networking and "bartering" as imperative to making ends meet on the DPB. Theresa plays a very proactive role in her material survival; she works hard to develop new contacts and maintain existing symbiotic relationships. For Theresa contra deals are the best way to get what she needs without money. She attributes her ability to employ other forms of capital to her upbringing on a farm; she says: *"it was always the way my parents did things; it's the way of life in country."*

Rosie, Barbara and Alicia were reliant on cash-in-hand domestic work and 'mothering for others' to stay above the bread-line. Cash-in-hand employment, by its nature, is usually limited to certain kinds of work: low-skilled, temporary and, often, menial 'dirty work'. Barbara's immediate survival was secured, albeit tenuously, by her work as a cleaner. The extra cash she earned meant being able to afford sufficient food and pay her utility bills. Her weekly budget deficit of $30 meant that this extra $50 cash was pivotal in keeping her head about water, significantly reducing her financial hardship.

The reliance on 'other means' for financial survival also raises ethical questions and potentially legal consequences for single mothers. Single mothers who engage in this type of work are forced to remain hidden, concealing their hard labour and financial penury from legal and public purview. Single welfare mothers are expected to be grateful for the state paternalism they receive and remain quietly thankful they are not inline at the soup kitchen (Jackman, 1994). It also confirms many social fears regarding welfare recipients as benefit 'cheats' and 'bludgers', and the deservingness of 'illegitimate mothers' (Chunn & Gavigan, 2006). Moreover, a climate of naming and shaming, recently instigated by the Minister of Social Development, leaves single mothers vulnerable to being publicly pilloried and exposed to accusations of welfare fraud and tax evasion by engaging in these shadow economies. Moreover, for those living this 'social reality', it entrenches feelings of fear and alienation, a peripheralised way of living. As Katrina states poignantly,

> *It would be really easy to just never walk out the door. I am sure there are plenty of single*
> *mothers who don't. It would be really easy to live your life through the TV or the computer if you*

can afford either of those things. It requires creativity and motivation, when you're not feeling
like it, to have a quality of life, and for anyone who is suffering from mental issues or physical
issue, it must be hard.

In the Shadows

The interactions that the women had with WINZ case workers is an important dimension to explore as they show how both ideology and policy operate together within a legislative framework which is then enacted upon single mothers as recipients of government welfare. The outcomes of these interactions not only left the women feeling marginalised and dejected, but they were also no further forward in their quest to seek greater security and a peaceable existence for their family. As beneficiaries, single mothers are regarded as state dependants with a set of obligations and responsibilities which they must meet in order to receive social assistance. Single mothers, therefore, are subject to a set of normative regulations which extend beyond those regarded (under neo-liberal governance) as citizenry obligations and responsibilities. These regulatory practices are underpinned by ideological framing of single mothers and a moral discourse pertaining to single mothers as socially problematic. Because single mothers are supported by tax-payer money, the tax-paying public makes a democratic claim on single mothers deciding if they are deserving of social assistance and on how much they should receive.

WINZ case workers embody both authority and power as official agents of the state, their primary role being to administer a set of legislative entitlements and managerial directives from the Ministry of Social Development. However, the discretionary nature of eligibility clauses means that, in practice, personal attitudes and prejudices also come into play, with both positive and negative consequences. Legislative entitlement, therefore, does not necessarily guarantee that individuals can access social assistance and, in many cases, single mothers have to fight protractedly, and without access to legal representation, to claim their legal right to social security. As the women's stories suggest, securing structural assistance was often dependent on individual effort: tenacity, researching policy and legislation documents, self-advocacy and knowledge of the system (social and cultural capital).

In addition, most beneficiaries were dependent on other forms of income: extra forms of assistance (such as TAS and SNG) and under-the-table employment to meet basic living costs. Recent changes to welfare policy have tightened eligibility criteria and limited the number of applications made per year (52 weeks) by clients. This makes the position of beneficiaries even more precarious, especially given market vicissitudes: "Poor choices" play little part in the equation.

For some women other means of survival, such as cash work, and other forms of temporary or casual employment, were called upon in order to secure their immediate survival. For those who worked part-time in the official sector, any extra income was usually offset by high effective marginal tax rates, a reduction in extra assistance and increased employment costs, such as transport and childcare. For those women engaging in the unofficial economy (e.g. cash work and contra trading), this presented a veritable Pandora's Box.

In addition to being vulnerable to legal scrutiny and prosecution for benefit fraud and tax evasion, undertaking this type of work also poses other social and personal consequences: surveillance, policing and moral entrepreneurialism. Moreover, it may have the unintended outcome of confirming social fears about the welfare mother as deviant. Marginal employment also raises issues of labour and class exploitation; with no regulatory framework for protection, single mothers are exposed to poor working conditions and no legal redress for loss of employment or wages. However, despite the potential risks for some women, these shadow economies were the only way to survive structural disadvantage and, sometimes, catastrophic poverty.

6. Liminal Spaces

This chapter explores the personal dimensions of single mothers' lives; examining their relationships with ex-partners, their community, the family law process, and to social support networks, including friends and family. In the interface between external systems of privilege and advantage (macro-level) and individual systems of agency and resistance (micro-level) are contestable, grey areas. Liminality is both a product of marginalisation and an altered space where stigmatisation and trauma can also become productive forces. In this liminal space, vital negotiations are made between structure and agency, society and the individual, the formal and informal in the day-to-day lived realities of Others.

For single mothers, relationships with ex-partners can be a double edged sword; on the one hand ex-partners can provide much needed instrumental support, while on the other hand relational factions can engender ongoing interpersonal conflicts and, in some instances, legal disputes. As a result of these interpersonal difficulties, other problematic interpersonal and systemic interactions arise, which can have devastating consequences for poor single mothers. In addition, these difficult personal relationships are often characterised by complex social dependencies which highlight the tensions between conditional and unconditional support. For single mothers, social support networks mitigate many of the negative effects of structural oppression and inequality. However, many of these social support networks are unstable meaning, that single mothers must continually negotiate and renegotiate vital systems of social support.

This chapter is divided into three sections: *Factions, Dependencies and Negotiations. Liminal Spaces* draws out the conditional and contestable nature of social support, and the problematics embedded in fragile social dependencies which can be, simultaneously, both assistive and damaging.

Factions

For some of the women interviewed, their interpersonal relationships with ex-partners were fraught with acrimony and conflict. For others, like Rosie and Janet, they remained on friendly terms with their child/ren's father, although tensions still occasionally arose, primarily, regarding the care of their child/ren. Relationships between resident and non-resident parents can be complicated regardless of how much, or how little, contact the non-resident parent has with their child/ren. In New Zealand this is further complicated by changes to legislation (*Care of Children Act, 2004*) which grants natural guardianship rights to fathers if they were living with the mother at any time between conception until birth, irrespective of whether the father chooses to exercise his right to contact, or voluntarily pays child support.

From the eight women interviewed, four had been, or continued to be, involved with the family law process regarding contact and care arrangements between father and child/ren. The family law process in itself was emotionally demanding and demoralising procedure for these women; interactions with their ex-partners and family law professionals contributed to feelings of powerlessness and (re)victimisation. Alicia and Abbie both made applications to the family court for parenting orders to protect their children by seeking supervised contact between father and child. After going through the family court process, neither Abbie nor Alicia's ex-partners have pursued formal contact or care arrangements with their children or exercised the natural guardianship right; they have not seen their children since.

Tanya's experiences of the family law process are markedly different as her ex-partner has pursued full-time care of their daughter and has, to date, made eight applications to the family court regarding care and custody arrangements. Tanya has only been able to defend these applications as she was unable to secure a legal aid lawyer, and relies on the pro bono services of her current lawyer. This arrangement has been stressful for Tanya and produces a great deal of anxiety preceding court dates. Legal aid reforms have particularly affected those applying to the Family Court, which, in practice, have meant less money for low income earners and fewer lawyers willing to take on legal aid cases (NZ Law Society, 2012). Because Tanya's ex-partner refuses to come to an arrangement with her regarding the care of their child, she has had no option but to engage in the family law process.

Tanya's worst experiences, however, centre on the family law professionals she dealt with throughout the process. For example, on one occasion her lawyer could not attend a scheduled court date and another lawyer was sent in his place. Tanya describes this lawyer was very *"unsympathetic, rude and dismissive"*. The acting lawyer [female] commented to her that it was her own fault she was in this situation and that *"she shouldn't have had a child with him knowing what he was like"* amongst others. Her interactions with the lawyer for child have been similarly distressing and in Tanya's view *"unprofessional"*.

Tanya describes the lawyer for child as being *"awful"* with no real concern for the case work she is responsible for. When she had the home visit from the lawyer for child, the lawyer made it clear that she could not be bothered dealing with her case and expressed that to her in as many words. Her ex-partner managed to rush through the court hearing under urgency, therefore, the lawyer for child was handed her case at the last minute. Tanya explains, *"she came to do the visit on the way to a Christmas party wearing tinsel and then told me how "marvellous" he [ex-partner] is and how much she*

loves the [media] work he does"; her final report also *"clearly favoured"* her ex-partner. The experience left Tanya feeling upset and traumatised. She says, *"I have just tried to block a lot of it out"*.

Current family court practices are especially problematic for women who have experienced domestic violence from their ex-partners, or for those who have concerns regarding the quality of care their child/ren receives while in the care of their ex-partner (Elizabeth *et al.*, 2011; McIntosh & Chisolm, 2008). This issue is not adequately addressed by current legislation and family court practice which, in reality, promotes the rights of fathers to have a continued relationship with their child/ren even when this may not be in the best interests of the child (McIntosh, Smyth, Kelaher, Wells & Long, 2010). This also means that women are, effectively, mandated to have some form of interaction with their ex-partner despite historical, and, in some instances, ongoing domestic violence, dominance and coercion (Elizabeth *et al.*; 2011; Stark, 2007).

Alicia and Barbara were both granted Protection Orders against their ex-partners due to domestic violence; Alicia, counts herself lucky that her ex-partner has *"disappeared"* and has not had contact with him since she left him. Barbara, on the other hand, despite having no contact with her ex-partner, continues to interact with him as a result of their parenting order and his attempts to disrupt her life. She says,

> *I don't have any contact with him, only through the lawyers. He was abusive and I took a Protection Order out, finally. We had separated for a year but we still had quite a bit of contact but he started doing stuff like not leaving my house, so I decided it was time; I was over it. Now he is doing everything he can to make things difficult. We have clashes over everything. The next legal battle will be where he goes to school.*

Barbara's ex-partner has also intimidated her, and violently assaulted a male acquaintance; he also continues to use their son to gain information about her personal life:

> *...he came home and said, "daddy was asking about the man that comes to our house" and I said, "what man" and he said, "I don't know mummy, daddy keeps asking and saying there is a man that keeps coming to our house and I don't know what man" and I said, "that's because there is no man is there": a boyfriend, because the whole thing, right from when my son was three months, of trying to find out if I had a boyfriend.*

Because they have a parenting order put in place, which allows her ex-partner unsupervised contact, there is little that Barbara can do except address any concerns she has, regarding care, via her lawyer:

> *I sent him a letter saying that he's not allowed peanuts because he's reacting to them...and he's now at the point where he's starting to cough and say, "my throat's sore" and what does his dad go and do: gives him peanuts to see [what would happen]. And he puts him in a booster seat in the front of the car, and he is three. And I wrote a letter to his lawyer and it came back: "that does not happen". He has to be right about everything, and if I try and tell him something then [he just disregards it]. There's always a way around everything.*

Tanya's relationship with her ex-partner is similarly problematic; despite refusing to speak to her in person, she frequently receives abusive text messages from him. She has also raised concerns about his ability to care for their daughter adequately, which makes his applications for full-time care even more distressing for Tanya; she worries that, through persistence, he will eventually be successful. Tanya's ex-partner also refuses to come within a certain physical distance of her which makes handing over care of their daughter difficult, and in Tanya's view, unsafe. When he returns their daughter to her care he will only meet her in a busy public place where he will leave their daughter several metres away and make her walk towards Tanya. On one occasion, he left her on the busy sidewalk, whilst she was at a considerable distance from their daughter, and then jumped onto a waiting bus. To Tanya, this illustrates his willingness to let his hostility towards her colour his judgement when it comes to their daughter's safety. This oppositional behaviour also extends to the way he cares for their daughter, she says:

> *He will only dress her in clothes that he has bought her when she stays with him and then he will put her back in the clothes that I have dressed her in, even if they are dirty or soiled, before returning her to me or dropping her off at daycare.*

This has, understandably, created frictions between Tanya and the daycare centre staff who have questioned why her daughter has arrived at daycare with dirty, smelly clothes.

In addition, these intrusions bring home the lack of legal and social accountability levied on her ex-partner. Tanya currently has no contact details for her ex-partner and does not know where her daughter is when she is in his care. She has tried unsuccessfully to get the court to intervene and force him to pass on this information; however, the judge, while sympathetic to her request, has no legal justification to compel him to disclose this information to her. She says*: "even the judge said he was being "very immature" not giving me his address, but his hands are tied".* Every time she hands her daughter over to his care, Tanya does not know where she is going, the condition of his home, and whether it is suitable for her daughter. Tanya finds this situation very distressing and hard to accept, but has no social or legal redress.

For many women, the dominance and abuse they experienced during their relationship continues postseparation (Stark, 2007, 2009) and for some, their ex-partners are able to use the legal system as a weapon of control (Elizabeth *et al.*, 2012). In addition to their interactions with the family law process, two of the women (Barbara, Tanya) were also subject to involvement from Child, Youth and Family (CYF) due to concerns raised regarding the care of their child/ren. For both of these women, being placed under the scrutiny of CYF was incredibly distressing and made worse by the circumstances leading up to the involvement of CYF.

Barbara was subjected to two CYF investigations due to allegations of child sexual abuse made against her by her ex-partner. As well as pursuing full-time care of their child, her ex-partner also claimed that she was sexually abusing their son. For Barbara, these two events were indicative of the abuse and domination she had experienced during their relationship with her child's father, both before and after separation; Barbara's ex-partner was able to manipulate these systems instrumentally to control and dominate her. She says:

> *The first CYF investigation he claimed that I was sexually abusing my son and all of the men that came through my house were sexually abusing my son, so of course CYF were on my doorstep that very day. And so I got this knock on the door and, "hello", they were like, "we're from CYF" and I said, "oh, did you get a call from [ex-partner]" and they said, "well, he didn't give his name", and I said, "well, did he come across as being very well spoken and as if he was reading it", and they said, "weellll". He had written a script. And, so she said, "OK, this is the allegation" and my jaw dropped.*

Although Barbara felt upset and stigmatised by her involvement with CYF she tried to positively reframe the experience*: "I was like, "ugh, I've got a caseworker – stink". You know it makes you feel really stink especially as I had been in the right the whole way; but you know… it [the investigation] just proved that I'm a good mother."*

Barbara's ex-partner had a history of abusive behaviour and harassment towards her and others, yet Barbara was still forced to defend his accusations of abuse and have her lifestyle scrutinised:

> *They knew it was all wrong and they knew we weren't living in filth and decay. She went, "well, there is toys on the floor but you've just been playing". She said, "you're dishes are done", and I said, "go and look in the bathroom", and they did. She said, "your bathroom's clean; you didn't even know we were coming we just turned up on the doorstep". So that went nowhere. They basically rang him back and said that it was a malicious complaint and they won't do anything*

and not to ring again. They didn't [record anything on file] that time but then he rang back a
month later with similar abuse claims – that I'd bashed him.

Tanya was referred to CYF by a social worker at the children's hospital where her daughter was admitted for treatment after overdosing on Pamol while in the care of her father. Tanya was questioned regarding the details of the incident by medical staff, but was unable to satisfactorily answer their questions as she did not know here her daughter's father lived or where they were when the Pamol was administered. As Tanya was the one who took her daughter to the hospital, and she was her primary caregiver, the nurse in attendance called a social worker to come and interview her and assess the situation.

Tanya believes they were concerned about her abilities as a mother and (her seeming) lack of care and responsibility for her daughter. She was subsequently placed under a great deal of scrutiny by CYF. Tanya was left feeling angry that she had been placed in this predicament due to restrictions on her knowing her daughters location. Although her daughter was fine, the incident highlighted to her the unfairness of the situation and her lack of power. Tanya was, effectively, being held accountable for her daughter's safety and well-being even when she was not in her care; while her ex-partner was held to a much lower standard of legal, and moral, responsibility.

Dependencies

These complicated and fractured relationships also translated into complex social dependencies, even for women that had not experienced domestic abuse or acrimonious conflicts; most notably, around care and contact arrangements. Instrumental support was, for some women, more problematic than it was helpful; while for others, lack of social and family support forced them into "dangerous dependencies" (Scott *et al.*, 2002). Care and support was very often conditional and, in some instances, led to negative consequences and unresolved crises.

Rosie and Janet, for example, are on reasonably good terms with their ex-partners, but were concerned about the level of commitment and care shown towards their children from their fathers. Rosie questioned the influence her ex-partner has on their children's lives:

He'll pick them up from school and Kindy usually and have them overnight and take them to
school and Kindy the next day, so it's not even…it's barely 24 hours...he is not a happy person,
he is quite depressed…he has just quit another job so his situation is, sort of, not very stable;
so I don't feel that I can actually rely on him.

Consequentially, she has also considered the possibility of him not being present in their lives as preferable in the long-term because of his "*mental health issues*", she says:

> *He is from the States...he is only here because his girls are here. Things have been bad enough, and I have encouraged him to do it [move back to the States], and I have said the girls will be happier maybe in the long run if they see you less often, like once a year, in a good space, a place that you feel happy and you have a place as opposed to every week in a [bad space]...but he couldn't do that...it's a guilt thing.*

As Rosie's story suggests, although her ex-partner cares about his children, his ability to care for their children is compromised by his emotional and psychological ill-health. Indeed, all of the women interviewed had concerns about the quality of care their children received during contact with their fathers'. This issue is at the forefront of current discourses regarding child care and contact arrangements between resident and nonresident parents (McIntosh *et al.*, 2010). These debates are located against the legal-political backdrop, where the fathers' rights activism has become a powerful player in family law reform in many western states. This has, at least in part, prompted legal reforms regarding the right to ongoing contact and guardianship, which has been couched in terms of the 'rights of children'. However, recent social research from Australia has examined these issues in relation to child custody arrangements; cautioning against the predominance of shared care arrangements between resident and nonresident parents, as detrimental to the well-being of children (*see McIntosh et al., 2008, 2010*).

Like Rosie, Janet and Katrina want their ex-partners to be part of their lives, but not at the price of their emotional and physical safety. For Janet, this meant cutting ties with her ex-partner's family when they continued to interfere with her mothering decisions, which she says was unfortunate, but necessary for her own sanity. For some women, care and contact arrangements with their ex-partners were perceived as more of a hindrance than a help; care arrangements between fathers and their child/ren were often underwritten by the resident mothers (*see McIntosh et al., 2010*).

Janet, for example, wants her son to have a relationship with his father, but is uncertain about his abilities to care for their son. Her son stays every second weekend at his father's, but she knows that his new girlfriend does most of the caring work. Janet also provides all the nappies, formula and clothes for his visits and finds it necessary to supply him with a list of instructions as he does not trust him to provide adequate care or basic childcare items.

Tanya, Barbara and Rosie also expressed similar concerns with the care arrangements they have with their children's fathers. Tanya's daughter currently spends two nights a week with her father; however, he has a history of suddenly dropping all contact: the longest period being five months. He also continues to cancel arrangements at the last minute, or fail to collect their daughter without adequate explanation. Unreliable care arrangements add further complication regarding paid employment for single mothers, especially those who cannot draw in auxiliary support from friends or family when last minute child care is needed.

In addition to practical arrangements of support from ex-partners, the women interviewed also discussed the issue of financial support. At the time of interviewing, all of the women received only minimum child support payments deducted by the Department of Inland Revenue (IRD). As all of the mothers interviewed were in receipt of the DPB, this money was paid directly to the Crown to recoup benefit payments. Of those women who had care and contact arrangements with their ex-partners, none offered any extra financial assistance for their child/ren by way of gifts, clothing, or childcare payments.

Tanya, for example, made a voluntary arrangement for child support with her ex-partner after their daughter was born; he would officially pay her minimum child support but give her extra cash. Tanya helped him arrange his income returns so that he could afford to give her extra cash, and help with childcare costs. However, this money has never been forthcoming. He currently pays $17 p/w in child support, and continues to dispute (in court) his liability to help with childcare costs, meaning that Tanya is now being pursued for arrears by her daughter's childcare centre. Alicia's ex-partner, on the other hand, pays no child support as he is able to circumvent the current process by showing he has zero effective income from his business. This is particularly aggrieving to Alicia as she is still paying off the debts her ex-partner took out as loans in her name.

Raising a child alone, without regular or dependable support, is a difficult predicament for those who, through choice or otherwise, live alone. All of the women interviewed lived alone with their children, with the exception of Alicia who lived on her mother's property. This left a deficit of practical and emotional support for these women. Many of the women were reliant on instrumental support from friends, social services and ex-partners to get by. Katrina would like to see more social support for single mothers and those with high social needs through increased social spending. She says:

> There needs to be a 0800 number that you can just call and say: "hey, this is my predicament – can you help". Not just for single mothers but for all people in the community that are vulnerable and in need of help. It would be costly, but there seems to be this thing that

everybody has somebody to rely on, family to rely on. Actually in this day in age and the break-down of family, and even if you've got really good friends, your really good friends are busy coping with their own lives and busy with their own children and can't just drop everything and come over. Some people have those kinds of friendships or sisters that they have that kind of relationship with, but I think that in this day and age that this is rare.

This deficit in instrumental support is particularly problematic for single mothers. Katrina is faced with a stark predicament regarding her ex-partner:

I have had to call the police on my child's father quite a lot, he has never hit me but any kind of abuse to me is violence all the same. I feel that he is the only person I have got to rely on and provide me practical assistance, but he is abusive, but I feel like I need his help and so I keep allowing him into my house and this keeps happening. He keeps abusing me, and abusing me in front of my daughter.

Their relationship is mired in dysfunction and abuse, yet Katrina cannot find a way to cut ties with the father of her child, her primary source of support, as injurious as it may be.

In Katrina's case, this created a binding predicament with her ex-partner, whom she depended on as her sole source of practical support in caring for their daughter, despite him continuing to abuse her. Katrina was, and is, effectively trapped in a relationship with her child's father, not because of a biological imperative for them to co-parent their child, but a social imperative to obtain practical and instrumental support (Scott *et al.*, 2002; Stark, 2007). For Katrina, her ex-partner was the only social resource she could make claim to: a "dangerous dependency" she was unable to extricate herself from (Scott *et al.*, 2002). In addition, the complex relationship she has with her child's father has led to other, equally damaging, social and financial consequences.

Katrina also faced multiple sources of official scrutiny with investigations from WINZ and Housing New Zealand (HNZ). For Katrina, these events have eclipsed her life for more than two years, and still remain unresolved. Katrina has a well-developed narrative around these issues and is also acutely aware of the political dimensions to her story. Problems arose after she let her ex-partner stay with her to help care for their daughter although she is adamant that they have never been in a relationship. She believes that her neighbours informed HNZ that she was cohabiting with her child's father and was subsequently placed under investigation by both HNZ and WINZ for benefit fraud. This has resulted in lengthy legal battle with WINZ and HNZ who are trying to recover accommodation supplement paid to Katrina, which they assert she was not entitled to due to claims that she was living with a partner.

In such cases, the agencies involved must prove that, to meet the definition of partner, there needs to be financial interdependence and emotional commitment between two parties. After investigation, WINZ were satisfied there was no evidence to suggest they were living together as a de facto couple; however, HNZ interpreted the legislation differently and, at the time of interviewing, were still pursuing her for $8000 worth of rent. Katrina was forced to move from her HNZ home and wait 2 ½ years before the charges were dismissed, she says: *"in practice HNZ evict tenants before cases are brought before courts: there is no natural justice".*

Furthermore, HNZ have lodged the debt against her name and Katrina now has a bad credit rating. Both the court case and the battle to clear her name have caused Katrina overwhelming anxiety and stress. She feels that she is being punished by the system for accepting instrumental support from her ex-partner when he is, in reality, "*fulfilling his responsibilities as a father".* Katrina continues to suffer from anxiety and paranoia, she says: *"I don't trust anyone anymore and I am scared of being put under surveillance by the authorities".* Although Katrina's situation is complicated, it is far from unique (see Edin & Kefalas, 2005; Hays, 2006; Scott *et al.*, 2002). It also raises questions regarding what constitutes support, and the psycho-social costs of accepting conditional forms of support.

Levels of family support, as well as meaningful participation, provided an important linchpin for the single mothers interviewed. Those who had immediate family nearby that were able to provide some practical and financial intervention, when most needed, minimized some of the most deleterious effects of single motherhood. Lack of money for food, clothes and utilities were a constant source of anxiety amongst the women interviewed; however, those with good family support knew that, in times of crisis, they had a safety net. Rosie, for example, has a close relationship with her parents who provide much needed support and respite:

> *That's one thing that definitely needs to be said for me, is that, I, my parents would hate it to think of me lying awake at night wondering how I'm gonna do it financially, like they would never want, like they would be like: "what bill needs to be paid, give it to me".*

When she has a break from her children, she retreats to the sanctuary of parent's house. She says: *"I usually just hole up either here at the library or at my parents place because it's warm and there is lots of food."*

Barbara also has good levels of social support from family and friends, which plays an instrumental role in her immediate survival and day-to-day reality: *"I have two aunts who live nearby, one of whom I went*

to live with when I first split up with my partner. They were really good when I split up with him. She let me live rent free for two months." Her parents also provided vital financial support when needed:

> *I mean, I was like...mum and dad gave me money, occasionally, for big things, like mum would pay the car registration. Like mum would pay the mobile phone bill because it's tied to her account for safety reasons, so we just kept it like that. So mum's still paying my bill but I'm going to take it over once I get all my other bills in credit.*

Moreover Barbara's story is important as it reveals important clues as to how she successfully transitioned off the benefit and into full-time employment. Several coterminous systems of support, both structural and social, allowed her to successfully navigate the welfare system, achieve her qualification and enable her to secure full-time employment. However, this does not negate the difficult circumstances that she has endured, which for others, becomes concretised. For some, the structural barriers to paid employment entrap women on welfare, while for others being on the benefit allows them to escape the abuse and domination they have experienced in their personal lives (Baker & Tippin, 2004; Edin & Kefalas, 2005; Scott *et al.*, 2002; Stark, 2007; Raphael, 1999. For most, however, being a welfare mother is neither a choice, nor a lifestyle.

Negotiations

Negotiating systems of support and sense of social inclusion were important aspects of the women's stories. Some women felt socially excluded from their communities due to the structural arrangements of society (around the nuclear family and paid employment), while for others their sense of alienation was a product of negative societal reactions. For single mothers, negotiating social space is both complicated and contestable.

Interpersonal interactions with others, such as friends, acquaintances and members of the public, were often infused with problematics (Smith, 1987). Being on the receiving end of negative societal reactions was all too familiar for the women interviewed for this study. All of the women had experienced, at some time, discrimination and prejudice due to their status as a single mother. Katrina, who is acutely aware of the differential treatment she encounters, recollects emotionally:

> *I'll tell you another experience I had, which I really wanted to tell you about. Just before the election, they had a local meet the candidate meeting at a local organization down the road. So I thought that I would go along: I was interested to hear what the candidates had to say. My daughter was about two at the time and she was well behaved, as she usually is...in the break*

the manager, who I know, came over and said: "we've been having complaints: can you keep your daughter quiet". I said, "she is 2 ½"and he said: "well, we have been getting complaints, so…""

At the time, Katrina felt that she had no option but to leave the meeting and the wounds from this experience are still raw: "*It's even pushing my buttons now revisiting it even after all this time. I cried afterwards. It's really hard – it's humiliating.*"

Katrina's story is not uncommon. All of the women shared stories of prejudice, discrimination and "daily interruptions" (Marvasti, 2006) based on negative stereotypes, both from strangers and those they were more closely acquainted with through the course of daily routines. The social expectation for mothers to socialise their children, whether at an early childhood education centre or local playground, also leads to daily interactions with other mothers. Some of these interactions were positive and convivial; however, others were more problematic and led to some of the women avoiding certain social situations or people they felt would judge them as single mothers.

The social housing problem and the high cost of rental properties pose serious threats to the security of single mothers on welfare. For poor single mothers, material disadvantage coupled with discriminatory practices mean that homelessness and itinerancy are all too common, and geographical mobility can be all but impossible for some (MacDonald & Twine, 2013). Abbie has had problems in the past trying to find suitable accommodation and has moved several times, as had many of the other women interviewed. She knows she has been discriminated against by landlords and property agents because of her status as single mother. Many have been open about their prejudices towards single mothers. Abbie recalls one property she applied for where the owner told the property manager he didn't want a single mother living in his house because "*she may have gang connections*". She has even had trouble finding accommodation when mother has offered to be guarantor. It took Abbie seven months to find her current home despite having money for a deposit; good credit rating; and a statement of means.

Abbie has resorted to bending the truth, in order to secure accommodation, because of the overt stigmatisation and differential treatment she has experienced. As a corollary, she does not often disclose to people that she is a single mother. Furthermore, most of her single mother friends offer similar anecdotal evidence of being treated prejudicially by prospective landlords. Abbie believes it is a very common problem and one that most single mothers are aware of: namely, that irrespective of economic means, the socio-political status of single mothers places them at the bottom of the rental ladder.

During the course of her university studies, Barbara met with some unsympathetic attitudes from her university cohort and educators, she says:

> *...there was one particular girl, because she had a daughter a similar age, and you know mums and daughters with other mums, you tend to gravitate [towards them] and set up play dates, and she was really religious and she just thought that it was abhorrent that I was unmarried and that I had a child...and she became a mother the 'proper' way.*

However, she did also receive empathy and support from other mothers, most notably, from other single mothers. It was often difficult for her to convey to others the difficulties that came with being a single mother, especially during the course of her studies. These interactions were frustrating for Barbara who felt she needed to constantly account for herself; she says:

> *So I said to one of them, "look, what do you do when you get home"? And she said: "oh, well, I sit down, I cook my dinner, I do my washing and I play computer games". And I said, "right, you try and imagine doing that with a two year old that's going, "mum, mum, mum" every ten second and can't wash themself, and can't undress themself, and can't bath themself, and can't take themself to the toilet, and you've still got to feed him, do the washing; and she went, "oh" – she had no idea what it was like being a mother.*

Securing social and practical support was a pertinent issue for all of the single mothers in this study. Katrina spoke particularly insightfully about the issue of negotiating social support from friends and community services:

> *I felt that it was quite frustrating when I went to the single mothers' group at the Women's Centre because – although I thought that overall it was worthwhile doing – but I was raising this whole thing that I don't like to ask for help...I don't feel that I have an awful lot to offer. The way I am at the moment I couldn't help out much with other people or be able to have them ring me up and ask if I could come over because their kid is sick. I don't feel that I could offer anything back...so I think saying to people you have to go and build little groups and support networks – it is good, but it is not always what you need.*

Katrina raises an important point about the nature of reciprocal support from friends, especially other single mothers, who empirically understand the need for help, yet their own circumstances prevent them from being able to offer dependable support in exchange. Most single mothers are already pushed to their emotional and psychological capacity. Katrina says:

> *Sometimes you need external help and I think about all those young women out there – for them to be able to actually go out once a month or whatever; to go out have enough money and have somebody reliable to look after your kids would be great. I personally don't feel the need to go out and do that anymore, but those who do, they really get screamed at by society for expecting to have a social life and a child. It's normal to want to connect to other people.*

Having neither to consistently depend on makes single mothering problematic, not single motherhood per se, as Katrina surmises:

> *I would enjoy [single motherhood] more if I had more resources and, I guess, money buys you help.*

For Rosie, her day-to-day reality is permanently juxtaposed to the lifestyles and values of those in her local community. Furthermore, she feels that others pity her as *"a lost cause, an anomaly"*; Rosie wants to feel a sense of belonging, not a permanent status of outsider. Rosie lives in a decile ten area and struggles to pay the rent on their two bedroom house. She often thinks about moving out of the area they currently live:

> *I've just recently starting thinking actually that I wouldn't mind moving further out and the kids being around kids that, a bit more diversity basically, I am aware that they have kids in their class that go to Fiji on holiday, that go to Queenstown skiing...and they have started asking me why we don't do any of that stuff and I just thought... I wouldn't mind a bit more diversity.*

Rosie also feels that her children are being exposed to a world that is unrealistic and that her socio-economic status alienates her from her local community.

> *I'd say the school, the school really, that school community, but now thinking about it I wonder if it is more that my feeling of alienation is really more related to socio-economic stuff than my status as a single mum. So, I just feel that the heart of my sense of not belonging is the socio-economic stuff: lack of means.*

The Abyss

For these women, the family law process, and in particular their interactions with family law professionals, was traumatic and disempowering, exposing their vulnerability to systemic gender and class inequalities entrenched within current legal and social institutions. Their social location permitted those invested with greater structural power to exploit extant systems of power and advantage. Along

axes of class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity, single welfare mothers are exposed to many interlacing systems of domination. In addition, single 'welfare dependent' mothers are pulled into a powerful institutional nexus where both formal (legal) and informal (extra-legal) mechanisms of moral regulation are enacted with, potentially, devastating consequences. For single mothers, this means being held to higher standards of moral responsibility than their male counterparts, and other mothers further up the 'mothering hierarchy'.

Lack of unconditional social support was a key feature in the lives of the single mothers interviewed. The need for instrumental support is particularly problematic for single mothers who often become dependent on conditional support lifelines: ex-partners, friends and, sometimes, family members, who expect something in return. These complicated reciprocal arrangements may, for some lead, to unsafe situations; for others exchanges of social currency mean constantly renewing social contracts with others to obtain basic social provisions (e.g. childcare, food, clothes). Negotiating instrumental and practical assistance is time consuming work, fraught with interpersonal tensions and sub-textual understandings about the nature of social dependencies.

For poor (welfare dependent) single mothers, lack of financial and human capital is a problem exacerbated by the structural arrangements of society around paid employment and the nuclear family. Single welfare mothers lack the protection of financial capital (via paid employment/financial autonomy) and the protection of the (heterosexual) family unit as one of the central institutions of Anglo-western society (Weigt, 2010). Social institutions such as the law, the welfare state, the family, charitable organisations and social services are all sites of moral regulation for single mothers. However, interpersonal social relationships also play a pivotal role in the lived realities of single mothers 'on the precipice'; in the absence of financial and material capital, social capital, or lack of, can be the difference between survival and the abyss.

7. Subjective Spaces

This chapter considers the subjective worlds of single mothers by seeking further insight into the thoughts, feelings and perceptions they hold towards themselves and their personal location; namely, how they define and mobilise 'good mothering' within the 'mothering hierarchy'. It also incorporates critical dimensions such as agency, empowerment and mobility, and the ways in which these are individually defined and socially actioned (operationalised) by single mothers in their day-to-day lives.

An interesting aspect of this research is how single mothers viewed and felt about themselves; namely, their self-perception, self-awareness and self-identity. In other words, whether they internalised negative messages and stereotypes about single mothers and how the perceptions of others affected their identity, status and lived realities. Most of the women felt that the negative messages regarding single mothers were still very salient within public imagination and that single mothers, as a group, were stigmatised and subject to varying forms of discrimination, both overt and covert. As evidenced in the previous chapters, some of these discriminatory practices were institutional, while others were interpersonally communicated.

Of particular interest in this chapter, however, were their relationships with other mothers within the 'mothering hierarchy', and the effect these interactions had on their perceptions about 'good mothering', and in resistance to a forced identity: single welfare mother (McIntosh, 2005). In addition, their social location often disenfranchised them from political and social arenas; however, as their stories suggest, there is space for agency, empowerment and potentiality to be found within the day-to-day lives and subjectivities of single mothers. This chapter is divided into three sections: *Being a 'Good Mother', A 'Mothering Hierarchy' and Living Day-to-day.*

Being a 'Good Mother'

All of the women who participated in this study were acutely aware of the dominant narratives regarding single mothers and how these played out in their day-to-day life. They reflexively understood the nature of their social location and how that leaves them exposed to exploitation, discrimination and structural disadvantage. For the single mothers interviewed, the term 'single mother' was a social label, which did not describe the complexities of who they were, or what they did on a daily basis. Several of the women interviewed emphasised that their role as a mother, and their ability to mother well, was instrumental in both developing a sense of identity as a single mother, and in resisting negative stereotyping. Their ability to be a good mother was autonomous from their socially ascribed label as the putative welfare

mother (McCormack, 2006). For the single mothers interviewed, being a mother – a 'good mother' – was an important identity hook (McIntosh, 2005).

Alicia discusses the stigmatisation of single mothers in society and, in particular, the way they are in the media as 'bad mothers' who fail their children and don't want to 'work'. She feels that more recognition of that value of what she does (as a mother) is needed, she says: *"I teach my kids the value of money and the importance of education and ambitions, but most people don't think that single mothers do this because they don't work full-time or have a partner"*. She points out that her status as a single mother on welfare does not reflect her ability to provide a sound living environment for her children and to teach them these values. Janet feels that single mothers are still vilified in society; she does not want to be negatively labelled as a single mother. She says: *"I am a mother who happens to be single"*.

Katrina also points out the negative societal reactions she encounters, which posit single mothers as Other: a "spoiled identity" (Goffman, 1963). She says:

> *The demonization and witch-hunt of single mothers is evident in everyday life. Even normal, rational people believe the negative stereotypes about single mothers; those who are educated and seemingly tolerant for some reason find something about single mothers particularly offensive – intolerable. It grinds their gears and the media does not help this situation.*

As Katrina observes, single mothers engender a level of social hysteria – an irrational response to marginal individuals from dominant social groups (McIntosh, 2005).Theresa, on the other hand, feels that social attitudes towards single mothers are changing and that motherhood, in general, is increasingly being recognised and socially valued. When Theresa encounters negative social attitudes, she tries to educate as many people as possible about the situation of single mothers and their experiences. Her tactic of resistance to "disrupted social encounters" (Marvasti, 2006) is deliberately pedagogical: to correct others on their presumptions about single mothers by offering them insight into her lived reality.

Many of the women were (understandably) defensive about their mothering abilities perhaps as a reflection of the negative, media-fed, messages regarding single mothers which permeate and perpetuate within popular culture. Rosie finds social attitudes towards single mothers irksome; she is sick of people pitying her and presuming that her life must be really bad because she is a single mother. She emphasises that many of the problems and hardships she has encountered in her day-to-day life are attributable to her socio-economic status, not symptomatic of her status as a single mother. For Rosie, 'good mothering' has little to do with material privilege and financial capital. She says:

I am pretty rich. It doesn't fit into their schema…my single mother status is second to the fact that I don't live the way that these other people [in the local community] live.

Although Rosie is structurally underprivileged because she is a single mother, she feels that this only reflects her socio-political location and not her personal location. Rosie also underlines the fact that it was her choice – although perhaps a socially unacceptable one – to end her relationship with her children's father as it wasn't a happy relationship. In other words, for her, being a good mother was about ensuring her children were happy and secure, even if that meant leaving the financial and social protection of a heterosexual partnership (Bock, 2000; Gillies, 2007). She says: *"people want to believe that it's a tragedy; this tragedy that is an anomaly and isn't natural". "I left for happiness",* she adds poignantly.

A 'Mothering Hierarchy'

Tanya offers a different perspective on the stigmatisation of single mothers and the role of the media in the negative framing of single mothers. She believes that the media consciously underreport on the pertinent issues related to single motherhood because any media attention would further stigmatise single mothers by agitating class conflict. She says: *"if people found out how much Domestic Purpose Beneficiaries receive they would be lynched by the middle-class majority"*. Whether a concerted media blackout exists or not, Tanya's assessment of existing class tensions is an important dimension to explore in relation to single mothers, most notably in their interactions with other mothers. Most of the women spoke of their tendency to gravitate towards other single mothers for friendship and support as this allowed them to be themselves, whereas in other social situations they felt the need to be guarded about their status as a single mother and their socio-economic circumstances. Impression management was an important mechanism for "passing" (Marvasti, 2006) during their daily interactions with others. There was a sense of distrust around middle-class, partnered mothers as being equally complicit in the subjugation and moral regulation of single mothers.

Abbie, for example, feels that she is slower to make friends with partnered mothers as she is more wary of them and worries what they will think of her. She also feels she connects with other single mothers better as they have similar life experiences and day-to-day concerns. Because of the negative societal reactions she has experienced, Abbie does not often disclose to people that she is a single mother. Her interactions with other 'proper' mothers often made her feel stigmatised; she describes getting *"snooty looks"* and *"stand-offish"* attitudes from the other mothers at her sons' Kindergarten. Although Abbie

has *"no proof"* that she is treated differently by other mothers, she believes that her experiences are *"real"* and that there are perceptible differences in the way they interact with her.

The surveillance and policing of single mother by middle-class mothers is a phenomenon that feminist scholars and moral regulation theorists – particularly in light of Foucault's governmentality thesis – have attempted to uncover (Chunn & Gavigan, 2006; Dworkin, 1983; Gillies, 2006; McCormack, 2006; Little, 1988). Class is a powerful social divider which does not discriminate on the basis of gender; the hierarchical arrangement of society privileges some mothers over others (*see Figure 1*.). However, interestingly, several of the women interviewed also echoed some of these dominant narratives about single mothers and were quick to distinguish themselves from the archetypal welfare mother who – rather than being a figment of the social imagination – is both 'real' and guilty of tarnishing the reputation of all single mothers. The fear of this folk devil exists amongst single mothers despite their social positioning as Other: an Othering of the Other (Freire, 1968). This in itself is not a new phenomenon; many socially marginalised peoples replicate the same processes of oppression they have experienced from dominant groups towards their own people (McIntosh, 2006). However, this has not been explicated in relation to single mothers as a socially marginalised group.

Theresa emphasises that she is a "*good mother*" and "*not like one of those other single mothers*" that the media depicts as morally and fiscally irresponsible. That single mothers also believe in the threat of the welfare mothers is perhaps a reflection of the potency of this mythologised identity. It could also be viewed as a defensive act against the (real) oppressive practices which emanate from this (mythical) narrative. Rosie reflects critically on this paradox:

> *With other single mothers it's an "I'm not like them" kind of thing…I really think that is because we are marginalised as a group in general; amongst the pecking order everyone's trying to say they are not at the bottom – "there's gotta be someone worse than me"; but no one can actually give a name [to the person] that is giving everyone else a bad name – those other single mothers. It's the government that reinforces that more than anyone.*

As Rosie suggests, the demonization of single mothers is omnipotent; so salient are these narratives that even those subject to social vilification are invested in this process of scapegoating. Nobody wants to be at the bottom of the social heap, or to be accused of wasting tax-payer money; threatening to undermine the comfort and stability of the middle-classes (McCormack, 2006). For single welfare mothers who are objects of political, social and mediated castigation and policing, many tactics of resistance are employed to deflect these external forces of oppression. Individual resistance can be both internally located (self-identity and self-actualisation) or externally reified (education and

advocacy); however, acts of resistance can also be found in the everyday, subjective worlds of single mothers. Although the lives of single mothers are often imbued with hardship and difficulty, these circumstances can also produce, and mobilise, resilience, creativity and community.

Living Day-to-day

As their stories suggest, there is space for agency, resilience and mobility to be found within the day-to-day lives and subjectivities of single mothers. For single mothers, positively framing their lives in these terms is an important act of both resistance and resilience; namely, reclaiming and redefining what is so often depicted in negative terms by society and the media. This sense of resilience can also be buoyed by connecting with other single mothers to exchange coping strategies, both practical and emotional, and communicate shared experiences: group solidarity. Many of the women interviewed had attended a single mothers group at a local women's centre, some, several times. This community group provided an important sense of collectivism and cohesiveness *vis-à-vis* the social isolation and stigma experienced by the single mothers interviewed.

Abbie has attended the solo mums group several times; she has found it very useful and likes that mothers are encouraged to come back as many times as they like. She has also developed strong friendships with some of the other single mothers she has met there and sees the group as an important community service which brings together individuals who are otherwise socially marginalised. Katrina, who has also attended the single mother's group, believes that while such groups are imperative to building social networks, the same set of social structural problems remain, which cannot be mitigated by community support groups:

Katrina discusses her self-location and social location with an acute awareness of the systems of privilege and disadvantage. She reflects on her social location and that she profits socially from her whiteness and her age as she is *"a bit older than a lot of single mums"*. She feels that she is able to cope a lot better than other single mothers and that she can use her status, education and acquired knowledge to help her deal with many of the life-problems which arise from being a single mother.

Although lack of social and practical support was seen as a key issue in 'coping with' the demands and challenges of single motherhood, the women interviewed also spoke about their individual coping strategies. For some women, their ability to cope hinged on imposing structure in their daily routines and household rules whilst for others this involved using physical or intellectual conduits, such as exercise or reading, to externalise stress and anxiety. Rosie says:

> *I always find that if I feel particularly wound up I go and swim and I swim twice as far as normal. It forces you to breathe really deeply, which you don't, which we just don't do. So swimming and I did pump class, so are those my releases.*

Barbara retreats to her books in the evenings as a stress release and source of intellectual stimulation:

> *I read lots, like I sit and request books on the library website and get them delivered and I'm like, "ooh, what do I want to read next", it's awesome…at the moment I am reading my way through the Whitcoulls top 100 list .*

For Abbie, household routine and getting some time alone serve as important coping mechanisms. Abbie tries to maintain a firm schedule with her children who go to bed early so that she can have some time to herself in the evenings and *"switch off"*. Having autonomy and control over her living environment and her daily routines allows her to manage on a day-to-day basis without getting overwhelmed. She says, *"I like running a tight ship at home and being in charge of setting the household rules and regulations".* For Abbie, this level of self-determination is also a positive aspect of single motherhood which she feels is sometimes overlooked. She likes that there is no one else there to change or challenge her rules ; she can make all the decisions at home and does not have another parent there to undermine her decisions whether it be small, day-to-day things, or major decisions such as schooling and education. Abbie is proud that she has a peaceful, conflict-free household, which would not be the case if her ex-partner was still present in their lives.

Katrina also reflects these sentiments:

> *There is a certain amount of self-determination [being a single parent] – you can set the environment in your household so if these things are important to you then you don't need to battle against a partner: it's completely within your control and that's great.*

Barbara speaks with great clarity and positivity about her current living arrangement which is in marked contrast to her experiences living with domestic violence in an environment of fear and conflict. She says:

> *It's time you get to spend with them [as a single mother] and you know what you say to them is going to sink in because you're not having anyone to conflict with you at the time. Yeh...and I don't have to argue with anyone about the way I'm doing it.*

Alicia tries to focus as much as possible on *"the good stuff"* rather than the negative aspects of single mothering such as financial insecurity and hardship. She also enjoys being able to make decisions

about her children's lives but recognises that this can be both a positive and a negative as all the responsibility is solely incumbent on her alone.

Resourcefulness and creativity were central motifs in the women's lives and necessary for material survival and as a temporary departure from the mundane. Finding alternative methods to provide for their children, the women interviewed prided themselves on their tangential thinking and problem solving skills. Accessing social and cultural resources was perceived as fundamental to daily survival and ameliorating some of the negative effects of material hardship.

Tanya, for example, has a well-established network of friends and community which she has managed to retain since having her daughter. Of all the women interviewed, Tanya appears to manage relatively well on the DPB and says she does not find it that difficult to make ends meet. However, she does acknowledge that this is largely attributable to her social location prior to becoming a single mother, and that most of her household possessions were purchased when her income was significantly higher. Tanya tries to remain positive about her current situation as *"only temporary"* and thinks that she is lucky that she can (and will) eventually improve her circumstances whereas other long-term beneficiaries, such as Disability Beneficiaries, are more seriously disadvantaged and have lower employment prospects. For Tanya, acknowledging her own, relatively, high levels of social and cultural capital helps her to reposition herself as fortunate rather than disadvantaged.

Living hand-to-mouth raised both internal dilemmas for the women interviewed and engendered differing, and often creative, responses to the problem of how to meet extraneous costs. Although time consuming, the women coped well with these challenges, which bolstered their sense of actuality and agency. Rosie says:

> *For me I'm living [day-to-day] and a lot of my mental energy, my thoughts are taken up on number crunching and scheming and scamming. I've just worked out I'm gonna sell my wedding ring and that's gonna be, like, how I'm gonna afford some stuff. It's so…especially in the winter.*

For Barbara, careful planning and exercising frugality meant she could afford the occasional treat for her son:

> *You know, I still managed to buy him a bike and a trampoline for Christmas... just through careful planning and lay-buys…and I got the trampoline and it was literally 11 o'clock the night before and I was outside putting the trampoline together...one day he is going to look back and*

> *go: "how on earth did mum do that; she wasn't working and she gave me a trampoline for*
> *Christmas and dad gave me nothing."*

As Barbara's story illustrates, these small triumphs were both symbolically and literally significant. The ability to provide some semblance of relative normalcy for their children was paramount to the single mothers who participated in this study. However, these symbolic markers of success (symbolic capital) would not be achievable without tapping into internal reservoirs of strength, resourcefulness and creativity (social capital). For single mothers, emotional survival is instrumental to material survival; human capital mitigates many of the prohibitive factors associated with limited financial capital.

Self-care and finding even small measures of life quality were also important notions foregrounded in the women's stories. In a bid to counter both time poverty and material poverty, Barbara describes how she finds her moments of daily enjoyment:

> *Everything costs money...like, for his birthday, I made him a scrapbook; I cut pictures out of*
> *magazines and did an alphabet scrapbook and photos of people so he knew that their name*
> *started with that letter, and just stuff like that.*

For Alicia, relaxing means family time with the kids and they enjoy going to the park and going for lots of walks together. Similarly, Janet usually finds free local events and parks for day trips. She says: *"we need to get out of the house otherwise we get cabin fever".* Janet also remarks, however, that even when she does have a night off she usually has no money or nobody to go out with. For single mothers, socialisation and hobbies are often difficult to arrange around childcare and cost prohibitive. Abbie speaks wistfully about her love of painting and how she is unable to paint at the moment due to lack of time and money. This sense of pathos for a past life far removed from their present lived realities, and a future encompassed by uncertainty and insecurity, was also evident when the women spoke about their hopes and desires for the future of their families. Adapting to life as a single mother on welfare was, for some, incredibly challenging and, at times, demoralising.

The ability to adapt is a key feature of resilience (Bottrell, 2008). For single mothers, this means adapting to both the role of motherhood and often a social location that is markedly different to their previous social and economic status. With these circumstantial changes came the need to manage, or redefine, life expectations, educational and career pathways, and hope and dreams for the future. Tanya says the hardest thing for her to deal with in becoming a single mother was giving up the hopes and dreams for the future that she used to have. Before she had her daughter, when she was working full-time, she had planned to buy a house in her 30s, but now she recognises that this is probably never

going to happen. It has been difficult for her to reconcile the hopes and expectation she held previously with her current lived reality. She has also given up on certain other aspects of her future; she can't see herself *"ever going out again"* and is doubtful she will ever meet a new partner.

Nevertheless, Tanya recognises that her circumstances may change and that she has to remain positive for her daughter and make plans for their future. To help realise these goals she has set up an education for her daughter by saving what she can from her weekly budget. All of the women expressed a certain amount of trepidation about the future, especially in light of recent welfare reforms; however, underpinning these anxieties was also an indefatigable spirit; a common narrative was that, although things were bad now, the future of their family is depended on their resilience and resourcefulness.

In addition to important feelings of autonomy and self-determination, the women interviewed also highlighted the strong emotional bonds that they had with their child/ren and which they attributed to being a single mother. Abbie enjoys a very close relationship with her boys *"we have a very tight bond"* she says, adding, with a great deal of pride, that *"both boys are sweet, passionate and caring".* Barbara also comments on the intimacy she shares with her son:

> *He's so loving, getting to the point of clingy some days, but he's just such an affectionate kid. He goes to bed in his own bed and when he wakes up the first thing he does is come in to me and says, "good morning mum, love you" and that just sets you up for the day: I'm really lucky he is just such an affectionate kid.*

For single mothers, this close relationship with their child/ren is seen as a 'pay-off' for the hard work and tenacity imbued within the everyday: when hardship and adversity can at times seem overwhelming and without cessation. Alicia, who has three young children, struggles at times to be available for all her children, especially given their close proximity of ages, as she *"can't be in more than one place at once".* However, she wants to make the most of her time with time while they are young: *"[I] just try to enjoy mothering as much as possible and give them lots of cuddles and attention".* Alicia also describes the value of being present for her children, she says: *"I get the time to listen to my kids and I will always be there for their special moments".* Alicia, like the other women interviewed, measures herself against the capital she is able to offer her children, rather than the materialities that are beyond her financial reach due to her socio-economic status.

Barbara, who has recently transitioned off the DPB to full-time work, offers an interesting perspective on her circumstances and the changes she has endured over the past three years. She discusses adapting her lifestyle to her current circumstances:

> *I still – I was in the supermarket last week and I had $100 and I went, "woohoo", and then I went, "oh, hang on" it's still $5 for this, and $6 for this. I'm still conscious. I'm still not gonna spend just because I have the money. There are still hidden things...so I'm still budgeting and still switching off my lights when I'm not using them because I think it's just ingrained in me now.*

Barbara's values are not correlated to her socio-economic status, and although money is tight, she remains sanguine about her situation:

> *But, yeh, I'm still budgeting because I'm on a low income; it's not like I've suddenly got...it's more than I was getting on the benefit, but it's still not, I mean, I can't buy a house: I can't save enough for a deposit. I'm not even thinking of moving to a flasher house: I'm happy where we are. It's small, but it's warm, it's dry and it's got a big lawn: end of story.*

The World of Light

> *Women are the well-spring of tears. They bear the burden of sorrow for the pain and suffering experienced in life. The woman's karanga on the marae is likened to the cry of a woman when she gives birth to her child, when the child leaves the womb and enters the world of light. The woman's karanga arouses the spirits of those who have passed on to the spirit world. Similarly, when she gives birth her cry in labour indicates that a sacred new life is about to come forth. The high-pitched cry penetrates beyond the confines of the physical world and into the spirit realm. (Barlow, 1991: 39)*

As the chapter suggests, resisting negative stereotyping featured heavily in the women's stories. Being a 'good mother' was a central narrative, one which was inextricably linked to both their sense of self-identity and how they responded to normative constructs about 'mothering'. Their subjectively defined worlds created a barrier against negative stereotyping, hierarchical power and material hardship. Furthermore, through hardship and necessity, single mothers tapped into internally located sources of empowerment and agency within their day-to-day lives. This sense of mastery over their immediate surrounds was particularly significant for those women who had experienced domestic violence or were continuing to experience dominance/control from their ex-partners.

As discussed, all of the women were highly cognisant of their social location which, in turn, helped them to redefine, and reconfigure, the parameters of their personal location. Their sense of identity was used to rebut dominant narratives about their mothering abilities, and operationalise key concepts, such as resilience and agency, in their everyday life practices. Moreover, there were many positive aspects to their lives which promoted a sense of transformation, potentiality and hope; it is through this world of light that single mothers find their *tūrangawaewae*.

8. Reflections

The primary research questions which led this research inquiry were firstly, how are single mothers in New Zealand subject to 'moral regulation'?, and secondly, how do single mothers in New Zealand engage with and employ social and cultural capital in their day-to-day lives?. These questions were used to explore the subjective experiences of single mothers in New Zealand and critically reflect on these experiences by drawing on existing literature and theoretical frameworks of understanding. The theoretical anchors used to frame this discussion were, moral regulation theory, feminist theories, critical perspectives theory and social capital theory. However, it was the stories themselves, both my own and the other mothers' narratives, that revealed the themes of this research project and gave teeth to the analysis of moral regulation vis-à-vis single mothers in New Zealand.

The central themes brought forth from this study were paternalism, surveillance and punishment (*Concrete Sp*aces); instrumental survival, conditional support and fragile dependencies (*Liminal Spaces*); and identity, resistance and agency (*Subjective Spaces*). Both my own story, and the narrative accounts of the women interviewed generated and reflected these themes amongst others. The similarities (and differences) in our stories also reflect the socio-political landscape in which we live; our experiences are situated, temporally, culturally and geographically, within our social location. These shared experiences are also reflective and informative of wider discourses/issues pertaining to the welfare state, social exclusion and inequality, marginality and 'problem populations' and hierarchical power. These issues, amongst others, were discussed in more depth in relation to their structural, social and personal environments. Examining the everyday practices of single mothers within these domains allowed me to analyse both how and why moral regulation is enacted on single mothers.

Using moral regulation theory as an analytical tool allowed me to tease out some of these concerns, most notably in relation to the regulatory and disciplinary practices which constrain and punish single mothers. According to feminist moral regulation theorists, these oppressive practices are both located, and operate, within the public and private spheres of women's lives. In this sense, it was essential to understand the ideological context within which single mothers are framed (*Introducing the Welfare Queen*), their social location and origin stories (*Situating Single Motherhood*), the institutional interactions and relationship which affect their everyday practices *(Concrete Spaces)*, and their interpersonal relationships and social support networks (*Liminal Spaces*) as key sites of moral regulation. In addition, it was also important to understand their subjective understandings of their social location and their subjectively defined everyday worlds (*Subjective Spaces*): the internalising of mothering norms; the meaning of 'good mothering'; the effect of regulatory practices on their self-

perception and perception of other mothers; their interpellation into the 'mothering hierarchy'; and coping with their day-to-day lived reality of single mothering.

From my own biography, and the accounts of the single mothers interviewed, several common features arose in relation to our experiences of single motherhood. Firstly, none of us contrived to become single mothers, as dominant narratives would suggest, but through various circumstances this is where we arrived. Some of us knew we would be single mothers before our children were born and for others this status, or label, would come later. Secondly, many of us had experienced domestic violence and relational conflict which had contributed to our status as welfare reliant, single mothers. Thirdly, many of us faced multiple marginalities, which were both a product of our socio-economic status and a contributing factor in precipitating our reliance on state assistance. Some of these factors were structural and economical, whereas other factors were psycho-social or health related. Not all of these factors were determinants; rather they were external and internal forces which influenced our day-to-day lives.

The lived realities of single mothers are located within a particular set of political, cultural, social and personal settings. As Bourdieu argues, within these settings individual agents are positioned in relation to the interaction between the specific rules of these fields and the agents' habitus and capital (Bourdieu, 1993). While hierarchical structures of power, class and gender influence such interactions, they are not necessarily deterministic; agency and mobility are individually and socially actioned within these arenas. Some of the most pertinent issues facing single mothers are material disadvantage, stigma, marginalisation and personal dislocation. However, these external (structural) influences can be mitigated by employing other 'forms of capital': social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

A central theme of this thesis was material survival: access to financial support from WINZ and alternative strategies of survival from official (extra assistance) and unofficial sources (the grey market). All of us had, at times, experienced discriminatory treatment from WINZ caseworkers, and morally imbued interactions, which left us feeling stigmatised, helpless and worthless. In reflection, these interactions conveyed a strong sense of paternalism; namely, that single mothers are morally and fiscally irresponsible and in need of the firm guidance, regulation and remediation of the state. The discretionary nature of WINZ policy meant that, in practice, personal attitudes and prejudices also come into play, with both positive and negative consequences. As our stories suggest, securing structural assistance was often dependent on individual effort: tenacity, researching policy and legislation documents, self-advocacy and knowledge of the system (social and cultural capital).

In addition, most of us were dependent on other forms of income: extra forms of assistance (such as TAS and SNG) and under-the-table employment to meet basic living costs. For some women this meant cash-in-hand (unofficial) work, while for others temporary or casual part-time (official) employment was used to secure their immediate survival. For those who worked part-time in the official sector, any extra income was usually offset by high effective marginal tax rates, a reduction in extra assistance and increased employment costs, such as transport and childcare. For those women engaging in the unofficial economy (e.g. cash work and contra trading) this presented a veritable Pandora's Box. In addition to being vulnerable to legal scrutiny and prosecution for benefit fraud and tax evasion, undertaking this type of work also posed other social and personal consequences for the single mothers. They were, legitimately, fearful of official and unofficial surveillance, policing and punishment: moral regulation. Many of these fears became a lived reality.

All of us who had been involved in the family law process experienced feelings of trauma, disempowerment and injustice. Interactions with family law professionals were particularly contentious and stressful. These interactions expose the vulnerability of single mothers to systemic gender and class inequalities. Our social location permitted those invested with greater structural power to exploit extant systems of power and advantage. In addition, we felt unable to disentangle ourselves from a powerful institutional nexus where both formal (legal) and informal (extra-legal) mechanisms of moral regulation were, invariably, enacted on us with devastating consequences. In essence, we were being held accountable to higher standards of moral responsibility than the fathers' of our children and other mothers further up the 'mothering hierarchy'.

Lack of unconditional social support was also a key feature in our lives; the need for instrumental support was particularly problematic for some of us which led to insecure and, sometimes, unsafe social dependencies. Social support was very often conditional engendering complex relationships and expectations of reciprocation. Furthermore, negotiating instrumental and practical assistance proved time consuming work, fraught with interpersonal tensions and sub-textual understandings about the nature of help and support. However, interpersonal social relationships also played a pivotal role in making our lives manageable, providing much needed mechanisms of survival where structural system of support failed to meet our material and emotional needs.

Being a 'good mother', and wanting to be seen as good mothers, was a central narrative in our stories, one which is inextricably linked to our sense of self-identity and our responses to social stigmatisation. Having the power to subjectively define our everyday worlds created a barrier against negative stereotyping, hierarchical power and material hardship. Furthermore, through

hardship and necessity, we were able to unlock internally located sources of empowerment and agency within our day-to-day practices and living environments. This was particularly significant for those of us who had experienced domestic violence or were continuing to experience dominance and control from ex-partners. Moreover, we often experienced stigma and policing from other mothers within the 'mothering hierarchy' and, in fact, because interactions with other mothers were highly frequent – usually through everyday practices of mothering such as schooling, socialising and domestic chores – many of the regulatory practices we experienced were insidiously enacted on us, on a daily basis.

However, being highly cognisant of our social location helped us to redefine, and reconfigure, the parameters of our personal location. Our sense of identity and self-assurance in our mothering abilities gave us strength and resilience to rebut some of the negative public and mediated attention we are exposed to on an almost daily basis. Moreover, there are many positive aspects to be found in the everyday life practices of single mothers, which are largely overlooked in favour of dominant descriptions regarding the (morally) dangerous and immiserated worlds we inhabit. I argue that these myths can, and will be, transformed through ventilating the subjective realities of single mothers.

From this study we can see that there are many sites of moral regulation which constrain and disempower single mothers. Moreover these regulatory practices socially, politically and personally disenfranchise single mothers. Indeed, the time each of us had spent on the DPB as poor single mothers meant that the process of inculcation was stronger in some than others. This was also mitigated by the ability to successfully employ social and cultural capital, and institute agency and mobility in our lives. Therefore, the length of time spent on the DPB had both positive and negative effects on our experiences of single motherhood as this diagram shows:

More time spent on DPB:

Positive factors

Better knowledge of the benefit system;

Creative ways to circumvent or overcome financial problems;

Better alternative survival mechanisms i.e. knowing the game and how to play

   the game;

Decreased social isolation by developing social support networks.

Better coping mechanisms and tactics of resistance;

A sense of pride and achievement from their mothering practices.

Negative factors

Feelings of pessimism and loss of hopes and dreams;

Increased poverty debt and loss of material possessions;

Increased accumulative effects of material disadvantage;

More incidences of psycho-social illnesses and mental health problems.

Less time spent on the DPB:

Positive factors

More energy and emotional resilience;

Less poverty debt and material disadvantage accrued over time;

Fewer negative institutional interactions which contributed to feelings of stigma

   and marginalisation;

Experienced less interpersonal discrimination and prejudice.

Negative factors

Did not have insider knowledge of welfare system;

Knew fewer single mothers or had access to fewer social networks;

Not as adept at playing the game and impression management;

Lacked confidence and resilience i.e. sense of self-actualisation.

In summary, I draw attention to six key points generated from this study: 1) single mothers are subject to powerful set of regulatory and oppressive practices from formal and informal sites in New Zealand which contributes to their stigmatisation and marginalisation as a social group; 2) the welfare state and its agents (e.g. WINZ) are key sites of both structural support and moral regulation in New Zealand which effect employment, education and health outcomes for single mothers; 3) interpersonal relationships with ex-partner and other mothers within the 'mothering hierarchy' are key sites of conflict, coercion and regulation for single mothers; 4) single mothers are more vulnerable to ideological, institutional and interpersonal exploitation and discrimination along interesting systems of oppression (class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality *inter alia*); 5) single mothers in New Zealand lack political representation and voice and, legitimately, fear regulatory practices such as surveillance, policing and

punitive treatment and thus are required to enact forms of self-discipline and identity management; and, 6) in the face of political and public vilification and structural disadvantage, single mothers are still able to mobilise many forms of agency within their everyday practices, thus helping to secure material and emotional survival.

In short, despite some advances in social equality and better recognition of the needs and rights of marginalised populations, single mothers are still politically underrepresented by way of structural support and advocacy, and overrepresented negatively by the media and in political discourse relating to problem populations. Moreover, single welfare mothers are exposed to moral regulation and discriminatory practices on many intersecting levels – ideological (exo), institutional (macro) and interpersonal (meso/micro) – in their day-to-day lives. However, within their everyday practices, single mothers also mobilise many forms of social and individual agency, thus succouring their material and emotional survival.

Coda: Dreams

Single mothers are not passive victims of their circumstance. Although regulatory and discriminatory practices operate to subjugate single mothers on multiple, intersecting levels, we can mobilise agency, resistance and praxis within our everyday worlds. However, this also poses a problem by disrupting existing power hierarchies which positions single mothers at the bottom of the social strata. The current government has no qualms in utilising divisive shaming tactics in attacking those who speak out against welfare reform and the material conditions in which single mothers live. Single mothers are justified in their fears of this vituperative and punitive climate. Single mothers need to be vigilante of political and public scrutiny for their own, and their children's, protection.

The history of punitive treatment levelled at single mothers warrants these concerns. As individuals we have too much to lose from being subject to state oppression and public derision. I suggest, therefore, that more collective resistance is needed to combat the vilification of single mothers; that more disciplinary informed research is needed to articulate the needs of single mothers and develop better policy; and that a political platform is required to promote the rights and needs of single mothers and their children. In addition, I suggest that a public forum is needed for single mothers to voice their concerns and opinions on topical issues, such as welfare reform, without fear of prejudice or punishment.

As I stated in the preface, writing this thesis was challenging and, at times, overwhelming. I experienced both financial and emotional crises, as well as crises of confidence, along the way which made me feel that I would never meet the challenges of completing this research project. While I was writing about the moral regulation of single mothers, I was also experiencing many of the issues under discussion. I opened this discussion by locating social mothers within a cultural and political backdrop of the liberal welfare state. I also made specific reference to the parliamentary speech given by Paula Bennett MP in the thesis introduction and title; it is upon these sentiments which my final words reflect. While those in the establishment can attempt to ideologically and morally regulate the lives of single mothers with political prejudice, they cannot suppress our hopes and dreams for a better future. The dreams we hold for our children are what make us endure; the dream is *not* over.

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