

Good Work in Canadian Childcare: Complicating the Love/Money Divide

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ABSTRACT

Extended interviews with thirty seven experienced and student childcare providers in Vancouver, British Columbia, provide data for an analysis of the love/money dichotomy often used to understand work in childcare. Providers talked both about the pulls between "money" and "love" and about their desire for other rewards from their work. This article uses ideas of workplace democracy and feminist social justice theories to help articulate how childcare work can be understood and supported as good work.

RÉSUMÉ

De longues entrevues avec 37 étudiantes et travailleuses de garderie chevronnées à Vancouver, en Colombie - Britannique, fournissent les données nécessaires pour faire l'analyse de la dichotomie entre l'amour et l'argent qui est souvent employée pour aider à comprendre le travail en milieu de garderie. Cet article se sert des idées de la démocratie en milieu de travail et de théories féministes sur la justice sociale pour aider à articuler comment le travail de garderie fonctionne et comment il peut être compris et appuyé en tant que travail appréciable.

You know it's like, we do this because we love children but we don't do this totally out of the kindness of our heart. This is our job. This is our profession. We went to school for it. We paid dearly for it. We still pay dearly for it because we don't get paid what most people get paid but we like it so we do it.

(participant)

Maintaining and improving the quality of work and pay for childcare providers and the quality of children's care in Canadian childcare centres requires understanding the complicated work of childcare and explicitly creating and sustaining positive childcare work environments. Using the intertwined work of Iris Marion Young, with her concern that distribution not overshadow recognition, and Nancy Fraser, with her mirrored conviction that distribution and recognition are irrevocably connected, I examine the ways talk of love, money and "good work" intersect in the lives of some Canadian childcare providers (Fraser 1997b; Young 1990). I argue that if Canadian childcare is to be expanded and improved, as suggested (not for the first time) by a new national political and budgetary emphasis on childcare (Alphonso 2003), that expansion must be undertaken carefully and in a context that both increases the financial rewards to childcare providers and explicitly respects and protects what childcare providers now value in their work.

This extended ethnographic research project focused on childcare providers' experiences of their work. The theoretical frame for the work began with the feminist anthropological, sociological and economic literature of the 1980s and 1990s that argued that gendered dichotomies ("male" and "female," "public" and "private / domestic,"

"money" and "love," and "market" and "family") shape cultural meanings, market rewards, and family power. Rosaldo and other feminist anthropologists proposed the salience of the association of women with private domestic spaces and of men with public spaces of power and influence (see especially the classic edited by Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974). This debate continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s, gaining nuance and caution as it went (Collier 1992 and 1997; Kondo 1990; Lugo and Maurer 2000).

The central research questions that opened this research focused on providers' dichotomous ways of understanding, talking about, and defending the value of their work. Providing childcare in centres rather than homes, I argued, would present providers with increasing dilemmas about how childcare fits into standard notions of "work" and pressures providers to negotiate language and ideas about their work across the "public/private" and "money/love" divides. I wanted to be there as providers struggled with these symbolic and practical tasks and to watch how meaning developed in daily exchanges (Tom 1992).

Providers did indeed frequently wrestle with the opposing pulls of love and money as they described their work, but this was not the whole of the meanings and rewards they talked about. As they expressed both the good and the bad characteristics of their work, providers repeatedly took up a third theme centred on the quality of work. As the research and analysis progressed, it became clear that their specific working conditions and opportunities for growth and participation within their centres were critical to their experiences of, and satisfactions from, working in childcare. These conversations about the quality of work fit into another

literature about working conditions, skill, and democratic participation in the workplace. Adding a focus on work satisfaction and experiences helps explain how these childcare providers could argue so persuasively that they liked and enjoyed their jobs even while they spoke heatedly about how they resented their wages at both material and symbolic levels.

Some of the frame for understanding these experiences links to and expands literature on dichotomized, gendered meaning systems at work. In sociology, Nelson showed how family daycare providers and their client families constantly slipped between the language of the market and the language of the family as they negotiated their relationships and their expectations of each other (1990). Other sociologists investigated the ways emotion, social role and employment interacted in notions of skill and work (Ferree 1990; Gaskell 1986; Hochschild 1983; Hochschild and Machung 1980). Feminist economists demonstrated, among other things, how gendered and dichotomized notions of skill, deservingness, and place shaped demand and reward for women's labour inside and outside paid employment (Strober 1975 and 1994; Bergmann 1990; Nelson 1995).

Other helpful frames focus on quality of work and worklife experience (Gardner et al. 2001; Lowe 2000; Sennett 1998 and 2003). Lowe emphasizes the non-economic benefits and connections employees seek from work (2000). Gardner and colleagues investigate the values and expectations journalists and geneticists bring to their work (2001). Similarly, studies of "alternative" work environments demonstrate that many workers are willing to make economic sacrifices in order to secure satisfying and personally meaningful work. From organic farmers working in British Columbia (Egri 1994) to employees of the Body Shop (Martin et al. 1998), many men and women make positive and rewarding work environments a priority when offered such choices.

The literature on workplace democracy has likewise demonstrated the importance of working environments and processes, meaningful work, and the opportunity to engage in work that uses and expands workers' skills and sense of competence (Carnoy and Shearer 1980; Jones and Svejnar 1982; Livingstone 1999; Vallas 2003). David Livingstone has recently argued that there is an increasing need for democratic work structures, citing "widespread demand among an increasingly underemployed labour force for more opportunities to use their increasing knowledge in meaningful and rewarding work" (1999, 183).

These literatures move us beyond dichotomized frameworks for understanding work, but many studies of the rewards of skilled and meaningful work do not incorporate explicitly feminist critiques of workplaces nor of the ways caring labour is valued and undervalued. Scholars such as Joan Tronto and Margaret Nelson explore the contradictions inherent in "caring" work and show how

easy it can be to slip to frames that dichotomize love and money while sidetracking working experience in studying the work of paid caregivers (Nelson 1990; Tronto 1993). To move beyond genderless studies of the rewards of skill and over-gendered explanations of women's work motivations in caregiving, I expanded my theoretical frame to include the workplace scholars discussed above and political philosophers Iris Marion Young and Nancy Fraser, whose work addresses the complex interplay between democracy, economic inequality, and gender. These expanded frames move the analysis away from excessive reliance on "love" and "altruism" as the counterbalancing weights that explain providers' commitment to their work in the face of low pay and open the conversation to serious consideration of meaning-oriented working conditions in supporting quality childcare.

Young argues that the conversation about social justice has been reduced to the "distributive paradigm," a conversation about "the morally proper distribution of benefits and burdens among society's members" (1990, 15). The distributive paradigm distorts efforts to achieve social justice by focusing attention on the distribution of material goods and social positions (15); it also imposes the metaphoric language of things onto social relations and processes, thereby distorting understanding, discussion, and challenge (16).

Young believes that social justice demands attention to material equality and inequality and also to fairness beyond the distribution of goods. This includes opportunities for "... learning and using satisfying and expansive skills in socially recognized settings; participating in forming and running institutions, and receiving recognition for such participation; playing and communicating with others, and expressing our experience, feelings, and perspective on social life in contexts where others can listen" (1990, 37).

Nancy Fraser takes up arguments in the same territory as Young while also fiercely arguing the consequences of not focusing enough on distributive concerns in the face of continuing material inequalities (1997a). She, too, however, envisions arenas that make possible democratic institutional and political participation. "In self-managed workplaces, child-care centres, or residential communities, for example, internal institutional public spheres could be arenas both of opinion formation and decision making. This would be tantamount to constituting sites of direct or quasi-direct democracy, wherein all those engaged in a collective undertaking would participate in deliberations to determine its design and operation" (1994, 135).

Young and Fraser, in the context of the other studies on work satisfaction, offer a feminist framework for imagining that work and social life, as well as political institutions, might be structured so they provide material sustenance, opportunities to provide and receive care, and opportunities to participate in satisfying work. Money, love

and good work must be interpreted as intertwining and necessarily interconnected in the lives of these childcare providers and, most likely, most other workers as well. The small British Columbia not-for-profit daycares where these providers worked constituted a space where they could value not only loving children but also create satisfying workplaces.

METHOD

This paper is based in ethnographic research inquiring into the meanings of childcare, employment, education, and mothering in the greater Vancouver area between 1992 and 1996. It draws on participant observation and interview data from three distinct parts of that project: a six-month ethnographic study of a not-for-profit childcare centre, (pseudonym "Westside Daycare"); semi-structured interviews with experienced and well-respected practitioners working at not-for-profit centres; and semi-structured interviews with individuals who were simultaneously working in childcare and pursuing a college diploma in Early Childhood Education (ECE) at a program where we were doing fieldwork.

Across the three linked projects, we conducted 45 semi-structured interviews with 37 students and providers: five providers who worked at Westside, 19 providers selected for experience and reputation, and 15 students enrolled in the ECE program (eight students were interviewed twice). Three of our interviewees were men; 34 were women. Interviewees were fairly homogenous in terms of ethnicity and country of origin; the ECE students were more ethnically heterogeneous than the other groups. There were no obvious differences between the men and women we interviewed, but the small number of men in our sample makes this result unsurprising. We analysed the data to see how immigration history and ethnicity affected responses; the most striking differences were between the perspectives of European-descent caregivers and Asian-descent caregivers about whether or not childcare was good for, or harmful to, children, a topic beyond the scope of this paper.

The experienced childcare providers we interviewed were among the best-paid childcare providers in British Columbia. They earned an average of \$14-16 per hour (two earned as much as \$21 per hour) in comparison with provincial averages of \$11.48 per hour for "teacher directors." It was more difficult to gather information about hourly incomes from our student interview participants because students' employment was irregular. The five students who revealed their hourly wage rates received wages at or above provincial averages for their positions (Doherty et al. 2000).

We selected Westside Daycare for our ethnographic study because it represented the most common organizational structure for Vancouver-area childcare centres. Westside provides full-day care to 25

children between the ages of 2 ½ and 5 in one group. The centre was a not-for-profit organization headed by a volunteer board of directors. All members of the board were parents of children currently enrolled in the centre. Parents performed board duties only while children were enrolled in a centre, so the board had high turnover and low rates of expertise in key administrative tasks. In practice, the centre staff ran the centre amongst themselves in a highly cooperative fashion. The board's involvement was usually either perfunctory or required centre staff to instruct members on their duties.

Twelve of the nineteen experienced interview participants worked in similarly organized centres. Seven more providers worked in relatively small employer-sponsored centres where staff maintained authority over daily activities and most budget decisions. The few larger ones functioned with a central philosophy of respecting providers' autonomy in shaping environment and making daily decisions.

MONEY AND LOVE

Childcare has been an important fulcrum for the development of feminist analyses of work. The movement of both middle-class mothers and childcare provision into the "market" realm of paid employment challenges dominant dichotomies between home and public and between love and money. Not surprisingly, providers paid a good deal of attention to discussing both the pay and the love/altruism rewards they got from their work and clearly valued both. Providers were articulate and passionate about the practical and social significance of their earnings and equally articulate about how they loved caring for children. Providers' conversations about money fell into three themes. The first was about pragmatics - the practicalities and difficulties of living on their incomes. The second two were about meaning - comparing their incomes with others', and estimating the social value evidenced in pay rates.

MONEY

Providers said, often in almost wistful voices, that they loved their jobs but might have to leave them because of their low pay. This is consistent with Doherty and colleagues' survey of Canadian centre-based childcare providers; they found that twenty two percent "did not expect to be in childcare in three years' time. The most commonly cited reason was low wages" (2000, xx). An experienced provider questioned her ability to stay in the field:

I'm self supporting but I'm feeling like I can't put enough money away to even protect myself. The job insecurity if I have a medical, long term illness. I'm feeling insecure that way and this field won't give me the money to give me some

protection. I own nothing outside of a few household items. I don't have investments, I don't have an RRSP, I don't have a savings account so it's just economics.

Providers' conversations about their incomes also took on the meaning of the differences between their pay and the pay of other people they knew. Providers compared themselves to other providers in their centres, to other providers in British Columbia and Canada, and to people working in other occupations. Not surprisingly, they expressed satisfaction when they assessed themselves as being paid relatively well and dissatisfaction when they saw themselves as being relatively poorly paid.

The experienced providers all worked in settings where they could compare their earnings to other providers working in the same centre. A key area of satisfaction for most of them was the fact that pay scales within centres were relatively flat; this was usually interpreted as indicating that co-providers were equally valued. One provider commented with satisfaction, "there's no scale at our place, we all make the same amount ..." In contrast, in the few cases where there were significant gaps in pay (usually arising from differential funding for assistants working with children with disabilities and centre-based union wages), providers expressed discontent.

Experienced providers who, accurately, saw themselves as earning wages that were relatively high for childcare talked about feeling more valued because of their higher wages. They also expressed concern for other providers who were paid less. One provider remarked, "I think it helps where... I am right now that staff actually get paid well as well as getting this recognition and respect from parents. You know in the other places they may have been respected and appreciated but not um, financially given... maybe... professional recognition."

Receiving high wages for childcare was not the same as being paid well. This provider articulated the difference. "Now this is good for childcare, but whenever anybody says to me, oh you're making such great wages I'll say absolutely not. We are not making good wages for the work that we do. But I'll be the very first to acknowledge that for childcare it's a good contract." For this woman, wages thus simultaneously acknowledged and disparaged her contributions and accomplishments.

Other providers expressed similar resentment when they shifted their focus to how their wages compared to those in other jobs. This woman, comparing her pay to her husband's, made it clear.

When you think about [what it takes] to run a daycare centre, the responsibility on a day to day basis... My husband is a mechanic. He brings home double my paycheque every month. I'm not saying... it's not a noble profession but I just think to myself that people will pay more to have

their car fixed!

Providers' talk about their work and pay is contextualized not only by their awareness of the pay of other providers and of workers in other fields but also by their awareness of the overall lack of funding available to childcare in the province and in North America generally. Their low wages and the overall pattern of unfulfilled political promises for childcare funding (Mahon 2000; Teghtsoonian 1996) signal to them that childcare as a field is held in low social esteem. This element of providers' conversations about pay is signalled in this provider's argument about the link between social recognition and wages.

One argument we've had, well daycare should be affordable to everybody and if we can keep the fees down then that's what we'll do... If you don't increase the revenue coming in then how do you give your staff wage increases? How do you pay them for the work that they're doing? How do you recognize the value of their work?

Even those providers who thought their own wages were relatively good were clear that providers' generally low wages made it difficult to believe that childcare work was valued. One provider argued that low pay is inherently discouraging: "We are often valued in, on the way we're paid."

LOVE

Providers' talk about loving children was clustered in three main subthemes: loving children's characters and behaviour, the pleasures of daily life in the presence of children, and the satisfactions of watching and supporting children's development. When we asked them how they chose to become involved in childcare and why they stayed involved, almost all providers responded with an initial response that focused on loving children. "I really really enjoyed it because they are so dynamic and they are so exciting and they're so honest and they're bubbly and bright and wonderful and I just had a great time." Another talked about exploring other, better-paid options. "Now I wanted to totally change fields at one point because it's so underpaid... I looked at some other things and tried a few other things and then realized, well, no, I love children."

Providers not only loved children, they also loved the ways they could experience themselves when they were with children. This provider said, "When you work with kids you get to be outside in the sunshine... You get to play with glue and paper and paint. So you get to be yourself... I think it's work where you get to be very emotionally genuine."

In the interviews, love for children was usually quickly linked with both pleasure in participating in

children's development and a conviction that supporting children's growth is important. One provider put it simply: "I still find to see a child from young into adulthood a really fascinating thing." Providers repeatedly emphasized their conviction that children's development *mattered*:

I really feel that I'm participating in their life directly. When I was doing a lot of office work I didn't feel at the end of the day that I had accomplished much. I pushed a lot of paper. I did a good job and I did things that were worthwhile but I certainly didn't feel that same sense of fulfilment at the end of the day when I'm... actually helping a child grow and learn.

FROM LOVE AND MONEY TO GOOD WORK

The data discussed thus far present difficult questions, ones frequently taken up in the "carework" literature's focus on the many ways that care providers can be vulnerable to exploitation. Providers' engagement in the work and satisfaction of caring may make them too willing to sacrifice their own personal well-being for the welfare of those they care for and about; alternately, low-wage carework may be increasingly assigned to marginalized workers with few other choices (Aronson and Neysmith 1996; Foner 1994; Macdonald and Merrill 2002; Tuominen 1994). Providers did resent their low pay - both financially and symbolically. They loved the work of caring for children but were not oblivious to the costs of doing so. Of the thirty-seven people we interviewed, only two presented themselves as working in childcare because they lacked other choices; why then did they work in these jobs with low wages?

In this section, I offer an analysis of the third theme that became evident in our data. Using language provided by Young (1990) to incorporate both "social justice" and workplace democracy theories, I frame providers' discussions in three themes that express why they found their jobs rewarding. Providers valued their work when they had opportunities for egalitarian and effective democratic participation, when they had opportunities to use and develop their skills and to experience themselves as competent, and when they had opportunities to participate in relationships that were personally and socially meaningful.

EGALITARIAN AND PARTICIPATORY WORK STRUCTURES

Experienced practitioners in stable not-for-profit centres repeatedly described their satisfaction with the way their work was structured. Some student providers who worked as nannies and family daycare providers also spoke of feeling that their satisfaction rested heavily on being allowed to use their judgement. The ability to structure

daily work and providers' sense that they could have efficacious input into the overall decision-making and organization of their centres was central to almost all providers' sense of valuing their jobs.

In another part of our study, participants explicitly articulated what they called "the ECE way" - the idea that people who worked in childcare needed to work in mutually supportive and non-hierarchical ways (Smith 1996). The centres where the providers worked offered them relatively egalitarian working structures and opportunities to be directly responsible for setting policy, making decisions, and finding resources. Providers expressed the belief that genuinely good childcare demanded provider autonomy. Good childcare, they argued, depends on an environment of mutual respect where providers are authorized to make flexible decisions in specific children's best interests. Hierarchical organizations would have worked against mutual respect and equal power and prevented providers from responding appropriately and genuinely to individual children (Macdonald and Merrill 2002)

Providers working in small centres talked most clearly about being organized in what they called a "co-supervisory" system that gave every provider equal input and responsibility alongside egalitarian pay scales. Such equality was sometimes inscribed formally in the centres' structure and at other times one person was identified as "head teacher" for administrative and legal purposes but all providers expected the head teacher to enact this role in an egalitarian way. This provider described the ways decisions were made at his centre.

Any meetings that we have all four of us together [participate] while the children are napping...Any decisions about things... are made during the staff meetings...Any one person can veto anything pretty well. It's not written in stone that one person voting against something vetoes it but basically that's what we try to do.

Providers valued not only the opportunity to work in formal co-supervisory relationships, they also valued the independence they gained from working in centres that are not part of larger bureaucratic structures.

You actually have some control. You aren't working for a [big] daycare who basically says, yeah, we'll do the fundraising, we'll allocate the monies to you and basically you just be there and do this. What it means is that we get choices. If we want to buy toys, we go out and buy the toys. Someone doesn't go and do it for us. We have a chance for input.

DEVELOPING AND USING SKILLS

Contrary to a common public image that caring for children on a daily basis must be either low-skill or boring (Tom 1992), many of these providers spoke animatedly about the interest they find in their work and their opportunities to learn new things. Working with parents and colleagues, supporting and learning from the development of children, and organizing and providing resources for centres were all discussed as interesting. One provider tried to explain why she found a demanding centre an enjoyable place to work.

It's not boring...Maybe I'm an adrenalin freak, I don't know...We have a lot of children who are at risk. We have a lot of very demanding situations that come up in terms of children's needs. I think right now over 50% of our children are English as second language. And when I say English, I literally mean they walk into the centre with no English and it makes it very interesting. We get a lot of refugee families, new immigrants, we get a lot of single moms, a lot of native, aboriginal children, so there's a myriad of different experiences that come into the centre and an opportunity to meet an incredible variety of people.

For many providers, the pleasure of working with children and families combines a sense of interest, capability and social contribution.

Working with a child that's got dynamics to them, you know, a little girl that's really acting out and [having] temper tantrums and everything, it's great to talk to the parent and let them know that isn't this marvellous where a young woman [can] really be standing up for herself? The parent goes, "Oh, I never thought of it that way." Yeah, okay well let's help her to identify some places where she can use that energy in a more positive way rather than smash it out over here. Because you want to keep the spunk in them. You don't want to smash them all down into little pieces.

Providers also had a sense of using and developing their skills beyond their direct work with children. They talked about the interesting challenges of "training" parents to participate in centre boards of directors and the satisfaction of knowing that their centres' long term stability depended on their organizational skills. This provider said that she was surprised to discover that she enjoyed fundraising.

I enjoy fundraising. It's a lot of fun to find out, to figure out what it is you want or you need...and then go and see who you can get to give you the money to do the work...I try to set goals that will meet the needs of the group as a whole and the centre including staff, parents and children. So it improves, it can improve the quality of care, it can improve the...working environment.

DOING IMPORTANT WORK WELL

Providers talked about valuing their work because of meaningful relationships and because they believed that their work mattered socially. Providers are called upon to be respectful of many different family situations and values and to find ways to work with families when relationships are difficult or families are in trying times. This provider talked about relationships with parents being both critical and difficult, "I think that that is one of the bigger challenges and what I find, one of the most interesting aspects of the job is dealing with the parents. With the particular situation where you have a concern over a child, it's very delicate."

Providers, especially experienced providers who may have been working with the same colleagues for more than a decade, also presented their relationships with their colleagues as important. When teams work together well, providers indicated, the entire centre benefits, but teams that don't work together well undermine providers, the centre, and children's care. The idea of "the ECE way" and the link between what children need and what providers want in their workplace was clearly articulated by another provider. He argued that meeting children's needs and meeting adults' needs were linked and required similar conditions, blending the description of children and adults together into a global "we" at the centre.

Yes, and it's not [just] for the children, it's that we should enjoy ourselves. That we should be happy. That we should have a good time. We're not there to learn ABC's, we're not there to learn numbers and colours...We're there to be happy. The children should come there and enjoy themselves. The staff are there to enjoy themselves as well. When we look at things and... if the children are being miserable for some reason, we say "well what are we doing wrong here?" And we can do that...And if the staff get in the same way then we say we're not happy, what's happening here? We want to be happy at working here too.

Finally, providers valued their work because it offered them the opportunity to do work that they think is important and worth doing, and, in many situations, to do that work well. Providers spoke of actively wanting to care

well for children and to meet a broad range of their needs. Their satisfaction when this is possible can be framed in terms of helping children who are "more needy" than average, in terms of contributing to the community task of rearing children, or in terms of the individual pleasure they get from seeing children respond to them in healthy ways.

Yeah, we're a very needy area so I think,... we're all pretty well aware of we're not going to have our kids come perfectly clothed, perfectly clean like they do maybe on the other side of town. But to help that child if the child is coming not clean all the time, well there's certain things we'd have to do but I mean then I would work on giving that child, work on their own self, like let's wash up and wash your face and brush your hair... That's going to the root.

This extends to the idea that raising children is a community effort and that being a provider is contributing to that community effort. As one provider said, "Oh I know but you cannot raise a teenager on your own. One family can't do it. I know." Other providers spoke of the importance of participating directly in children's lives. At the least, childcare offered providers a sense that when they are giving, someone is appreciatively and directly receiving, and that their giving makes a difference: "I feel that I've been needed...I used to work in another job and I used to give and I was feeling frustrated because you give for nothing, it's just going in the air. But with the kids, you give and you see it, it pleases you all the time during the day, every minute of it."

DISCUSSION

As these glimpses of providers' beliefs illustrate, the providers we talked to were articulate and passionate not only about how much they loved children and loved caring for them but also about the significance of their earnings and about their desire for working in conditions that were meaningful and democratic and used their skills. Current frames for talking about caring work tend to focus on ways of valuing and maintaining "genuine" caring in the work (England and Folbre 1991; Folbre and Nelson 2000; Held 2002). Ironically, this focus perpetuates a kind of conceptual isolation in which caring work is evaluated by frames not applied to other kinds of work. There are dangers to marking childcare off as "special," as still preoccupied with caring for others at the expense of self, and as still outside the concerns that drive other workers. Such a frame leaves providers vulnerable to having to portray complex work motivations and rewards in the symbolic language of the love/money dichotomy and may continue to paint people who love into a corner of choosing between their love for their work or the ugly demands of "greed." Things are more complicated than this. Questions

of adequate provisioning, social connectedness, interpersonal and social giving, caring and commitment are not limited to caring labour and we should not consent to their ghettoization within these occupations. Likewise, we should not submit to conceptual frames that leave women's caring labor theorized primarily as altruistic giving-up.

This article demonstrates the importance of a frame that includes social justice theories and democratic working conditions as providers organize and advocate for what they value in childcare. It is not useful to continue to consent to an image - all too dominant in spite of actual working experiences of many workers within and beyond childcare (Lowe 2000) - of women and men who choose between the limited alternatives of self-sacrificing altruism and the selfish pursuit of material gain. Childcare work in Canada will be better served by clear calls for working structures that support childcare providers financially, that value and encompass the singular and highly individualized nature of caring (Macdonald and Merrill 2002) and that give proper attention to the ways childcare work *is* like other work. The deeper satisfactions of working in "good" workplaces are critically important and all-too-frequently overlooked in childcare and in many other kinds of work.

As ethnographic researchers must, I confine myself to explaining the occupational values and choices of these particular childcare providers working in the specific settings to which we had access. As ethnographers may, I suggest that what I have learned from working with these particular childcare providers can provide a way of investigating the work of other childcare providers - and of many other workers as well - within a frame that provides a way to talk not only about the otherwise-invisible element of love but also about the quality of the work experience itself. For researchers and activists in childcare, such a frame may help advocate for childcare strategies that provide good physical and emotional care for children, good wages for childcare providers, *and* working conditions that satisfy adults' needs for competence, connection and contribution. As childcare providers, advocates and government policy makers look ahead to the creation of a national childcare strategy these providers' experiences of valuing children, earning socially and financially adequate wages and working in democratic and meaningful workplaces should be remembered.

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