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# Affirming the voices of teen mothers: Exploring the influences of the reconstruction of the welfare state on teen mothers in Ontario.

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**Affirming the Voices of Teen Mothers:  
Exploring the Influences of the Reconstruction of the Welfare State on Teen Mothers in  
Ontario**

**by**

**Treana L. Clift**

**A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research  
Through the Department of Sociology and Anthropology  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
at the University of Windsor**

**Windsor, Ontario, Canada**

**2002**

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## ABSTRACT

**This thesis explores the influences of the reconstruction of the welfare state on teen mothers, a marginalized population in Ontario. It examines how the introduction of the LEAP programme, (learning, earning and parenting), a programme for teen parents on social assistance in Ontario, has influenced the identity of teen mothers. The analysis of this study shows how the teen mothers who have participated in the LEAP programme have experienced structural and ideological influences. These influences were determined through the voices of the teen mothers as they experienced both the power of the state and resistance.**

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**Chapter One:****INTRODUCTION**

Since the 1995 election of the Ontario conservative government, the reconstruction of the welfare state has been a major focus. This reconstruction has been comprised of new social policies and programming that 'target' populations on social assistance. Included in the 'targeting' of populations have been teen mothers. In reconstructing the welfare state, the conservative government has introduced social programming that has identified teen mothers as a 'target group', a population in need of social change.

My goal of this research is to present a contemporary study on the influences of Ontario's reconstruction of the welfare state on teen mothers<sup>1</sup>. This study will introduce the LEAP programme, a provincial programme that was developed specifically for teen mothers on social assistance, and provide an analysis of the influences of the programming on teen mothers. In addition, the methodological approach of this study is intended to empower the 'targeted' population of teen mothers as they provide insight and knowledge based upon their own experiences with the reconstruction of the welfare state.

In 1999, the Ontario government introduced a social programme specific for teen mothers, *The LEAP Programme: Learning, Earning and Parenting*.

As an Ontario Works Employment Assistance targeted strategy, LEAP is part of the overall vision of social assistance in Ontario - a vision that respects people's dignity, enhances their self-esteem, and fosters independence, self-reliance and community contribution and participation. LEAP focuses on parents between the

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<sup>1</sup> In reference to the LEAP programme, the Ontario government identifies 'teen parents' as the 'target population'. Without precluding the reality of 'teen parent - couples' within the LEAP programme, the population who participated in this study were teen mothers. Thus, I apply the term 'teen mothers' rather than teen parents in order to represent the actual population that participates in the programme.

ages of 16 and 21 and their children and identifies specific strategies to help achieve the overall Ontario Works objectives with this target group (Ministry of Community and Social Services, 1999).

The LEAP programme has been introduced under the regulations of *Ontario Works*. The

Ontario government defines *Ontario Works* as:

... an innovative programme dedicated to helping people break the cycle of dependency on the welfare system by focusing on Employability – not eligibility. The goal is simple – getting people back on the road to financial independence by individually choosing the most effective route to employment (Ministry of Community and Social Services, 1999).

*Ontario Works* implies that populations on welfare are 'dependent'. It implies that populations on welfare choose welfare over employment. Through the *Ontario Works* initiatives, the reconstruction of the welfare state identifies 'target populations' as populations with personal barriers that are preventing them from choosing to participate in the labour force. Introducing the LEAP programme as a part of *Ontario Works* reinforces the ideology that teen mothers are abusers of the welfare state, a 'dependent' population, that chooses a life on welfare over employment.

In this thesis I critically examine how the reconstruction of the welfare state has influenced the identities and realities of teen mothers. To critically examine the influences I have developed a case study of a LEAP programme in Ontario. The analysis of this study will represent the experiences and realities of the teen mothers as a 'target group', focusing on their 'situated knowledges' and how these 'knowledges' and realities may have been influenced by the introduction of the LEAP programme.

This paper is comprised of six chapters. Continuing with chapter one, I focus on the origin of the welfare state, including social policy with respect to the conceptions of the 'family', a description of the reconstruction of the welfare state in Ontario under the

Harris led Conservative government, including the transformation of social policy regarding single motherhood in Ontario as it changes to meet the agenda of the government in power, and an introduction of the LEAP programme in Ontario. In chapter two I discuss the conceptual framework of Donna Haraway's 'situated knowledges', focusing upon the utilization of the teen mothers' 'situated knowledges' to understand the contradictions that the teen mothers experienced. In chapter three I discuss the methodological approach, including the introduction of all the participants, and provide a discussion regarding the 'situated knowledges' of the teen mothers. In chapter four I discuss the influence of the power of the state over the lives of the teen mothers, including the practice of power language, the process of registration and the pressures of dependency that influence the teen mothers. In chapter five I discuss how the teen mothers challenge the power of the state through defying the rules, receiving personal gains, and creating group cohesion to sustain the constraints of the programme. The final chapter, chapter six, provides a conclusion regarding the influences of the reconstruction of the welfare state on teen mothers, a description of the value of the research, and a summary regarding the need for future research.

#### I. The Origin of the Welfare State: Challenging the Concept of 'Family'

Since Confederation in 1867, Canada has experienced important societal transformations, especially as it underwent industrialization. Unemployment, impoverishment and migration among Canadian families (Wallace, 1995) grew during the late nineteenth century. This period of transformation was accompanied by social policy that lessened government responsibility. The British North America Act (BNA) of 1867 "did not require provinces to establish public social welfare services" (Irving,

1978:327). The government's negation of responsibility produced societal ideologies that suggested that one's lack of 'success' and employability remained the individual's problem, not that of the state (Yelaja, 1978, Smardon, 1995, Wallace, 1995).

Ironically, even though the federal government during the late 1800s precluded fiscal measures for the provinces to address these economic transformations, the government continued to argue, "the state exists for the well-being of its citizens, and not vice versa" (Wallace, 1995:12).

In response to the economic crisis of the Great Depression, the Liberal government of Mackenzie King in 1935 challenged the Conservative ideologies by creating new state<sup>2</sup> policies. Among the new state policies was the introduction of universal social programmes including universal family allowances. "In July 1945, the Canadian government introduced a system of universal family allowances providing monthly cash payments to all families with children under the age of sixteen" (Blake, 1995:244). The family allowances programme was initiated to provide mothers, including single mothers, economic independence for their caregiver role and to reduce inequality among all families. The family allowances programme challenged the ideology of dependent families, and reduced the number of families living on or below the poverty line (Bakker, 1996). Through the introduction of universal programming, the liberal government produced social policies that addressed the impoverishment of families and developed new ideologies that increased the value of domestic labour and

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<sup>2</sup> I use the term 'state' as represented by Maureen Baker (1995). Baker, in her discussion on family policy, defines state as: "government departments and officials, agencies funded by government, and organizations implementing laws or government policy" (Baker, 1995:5).

created a 'liberal' understanding of 'family'. Single parent families were included within this state's understanding of 'family'.

In 1966 the liberal, universal programming was continued with the introduction of the 'Canadian Assistance Plan'. The Canadian Assistance Plan (CAP) was introduced by the Trudeau federal government with the realization that cost sharing between the federal and provincial governments was necessary for meeting the 'needs' of society.

The qualification for social assistance under CAP was simply "being in need" of social assistance; no longer were there to be any categorical programmes. In fact, CAP went even further to include people not at present in need but who would be if aid were not given (Ross, 1978:51).

CAP was initiated to reinforce a "no fault poverty" ideology to replace the ideology that "poverty is primarily one's own fault" (Ross, 1978:63). CAP was Canada's social safety net. It contributed to controlling poverty among Canadian families.

Unfortunately, Canada experienced an economic recession in the early 1990s. Using declining government revenues as a justification, Brian Mulroney's Conservative government of Canada in 1993 abolished the family allowances programme. Then in 1994 the Chretien Liberal government followed the lead of the Conservative government and abolished the CAP programme. In 1994 the federal government argued that the CAP "system inhibits integration and participation in the economy" (Government of Canada, 1994:73). Thus, the federal government introduced the *Welfare-to-Work* programme to replace the 'Canadian Assistance Plan' and introduced the child tax benefit programme to replace the family allowances programme.

The introduction of the *Welfare-to-Work* programme reinforced the ideology that childrearing was not a 'social responsibility'; each family should be self-sufficient (Bakker 1996, Gordon 1994, Luxton 1997). Under the *Welfare-to-Work* regime universal

childcare subsidies were abolished and unemployed single mothers become forced to job search. As a result, the equality of 'family' and income distribution that was reinforced throughout society by the family allowances and the CAP programme was abolished. This was the beginning of neo-liberalism in Canada as the liberal government began to follow the lead of the conservative ideology in regards to social policy.

The child tax benefit (CTB) was introduced by the federal government on July 1<sup>st</sup> 1998 in order to assist families who were in greater financial need, families whose income was \$25,921 or less (Bakker, 1996). Unemployed single mothers were eligible for the tax benefit on monthly basis, but not eligible for the year-end supplementary. In order to receive the year-end return (\$200 - \$500), single mothers had to be working in the labour force (Bakker 1996, Ferguson 1998).

Today, the Child Tax Benefit provides qualifying families, based on an income test, with monthly payments resulting in a basic annual benefit of \$1,020 for each child aged 17 or under, and additional benefits depending on the number and ages of children. All families with incomes under \$60,000 receive some child tax benefit payment. The total cost of the programme in 1994 is \$50.1 billion (Government of Canada, 1994:73).

Through gaining an understanding of the origin of the welfare state and the changes in policy and programming that have occurred at the federal level, we can observe how the 1990s reconstruction of the welfare state influenced the realities of impoverished families, particularly single mothers on social assistance; separate rules applied for their qualification. The *Welfare-to-Work* programme marginalized single mothers, as they no longer received the same rights as unemployed married mothers. This process reinforced the ideology that single parent families are not equally 'deserving' families and strengthened the ideology of single mothers as a 'dependent' population (Evans 1998, Gordon 1994, Luxton 1997).

Before we examine how the reconstruction of the welfare state in Ontario has influenced the experiences and realities of teen mothers, we need to understand what 'social policy' means within the context of governance.

## II. What is Social Policy?

The intent of social policy remains in the claims of the deliverer as they attempt to advocate in the 'best' interest of society. Shankar Yelaja defines social policy as:

"A tool used in planning welfare services, in setting priorities and goals for government spending, in distributing the benefits and rewards of an economic system and directing the socio-economic system toward certain desired ends and in justifying the lack of action for meeting social needs" (Yelaja, 1978:13).

However, both the conservative and the liberal understanding of social policy promote the importance of social change, even though they remain in opposition in regards to meeting social needs.

"While the conservative view point of social policy leans toward the preservation of established societal values, morality and responsibility of individual members of society to help themselves, the liberal viewpoint recognizes the need for change and reform in established social values" (Yelaja, 1978:10).

Traditionally, the conservative and liberal ideologies of social policy were in opposition. Today, the Liberal Party has introduced 'conservative' practices. The Liberal Party's use of social policy in the *Welfare-to-Work* programme remains indistinguishable from conservative reforms. For example, the reduced government spending on social assistance by the Reagan government in the United States and Britain's Thatcher Conservative administrations resulted in increased financial burdens on families and communities (Smardon, 1995). The impoverishment that resulted from the Reagan and Thatcher administrations can be identified as parallel to the outcomes



perpetuated by the neo-liberal programming of *Welfare-to-Work* in Canada (Wallace, 1995).

Neo-liberalism in all forms has revitalized the dominant pre-welfare state ideology of poverty and need as based on individual inadequacy, whether this is expressed in the genteel language of “skills deficit” or the welfare basing rhetoric of “lazy scroungers”(Morrison, 1997:70).

Since the introduction of the neo-liberal federal policy, the Ontario Conservative government has introduced a process of neo-conservatism that justifies provincial cutbacks to the welfare system through proclaiming democratic reform (Welch 1997). The following section will discuss the transformation of the welfare state in Ontario and the introduction of the ‘targeting’ of teen mothers within this process of neo-conservative social policy.

### III. The Reconstruction of the Welfare State in Ontario

A major reconstruction of the welfare state in Ontario began in 1995. With the election of the Progressive Conservative government, Ontario experienced massive cutbacks. This government came into power at a time of great financial deficit. However, rather than presenting the financial situation in 1995 as a result of NAFTA, (e.g. Ontario losing 20% of its manufacturing jobs (Ralph, 1997)), or the result of the loss of cost-sharing from the federal government (“cuts to federal transfer payments to health, post-secondary education and social assistance” (Dare, 1997:20), leaving provinces on their own to deal with their finances), or the Mulroney government’s reduction of the rate of inflation to zero (forcing “interest rates to rocket, thus aggravating interest on the debt” (Weinroth, 1997:58)), the Conservative government identified the welfare state and welfare fraud as the cause of the deficit. The Conservative government has yet to

produce documentation that provides proof of manipulation of the welfare state by Ontario residents (Moscovitch, 1997).

In order to justify the identification of social assistance as the contributor to the provincial deficit, the provincial government of Ontario introduced *Workfare*. The *Workfare* programme was represented under the 'Common Sense Revolution' of *Ontario Works*, "Ontario's mandatory welfare-to-work programme, providing participants with the supports they need to overcome barriers to employment and get ready for work" (Ministry of Community and Social Services, 2000). *Workfare* identified recipients of social assistance as "able-bodied recipients – with the exception of single parents with young children" who would be required "either to work, or be retrained in return for their benefits" (Ontario Progressive Conservative Party, 1995-9)" (Moscovitch, 1997:84). In addition, in 1995, single mothers received a 21.6% reduction in their assistance, reducing them to \$7000 below the poverty line annually (Kitchen, 1997).

In 1999 teen mothers were also placed under the umbrella of *Ontario Works* and thus became subject to the regulations and reductions that came with *Workfare*. However, in addition to the constraints of *Workfare*, teen mothers were also confronted with the introduction of the LEAP programme.

The purpose of Learning, Earning and Parenting (LEAP) is to help young parents aged 16-21 years old complete their education and them and their children become self-reliant (Ontario Works, 2001:5).

The LEAP programme was introduced by the Tories through the neo-conservative rhetoric of identifying teen mothers as a high-risk population in need of education and self-reliance. In many ways, this introduction of programming by the Ontario government remains indistinguishable from the neo-liberal federal reforms.

#### **IV. The LEAP Programme**

The LEAP programme, as already mentioned, stands for learning, earning and parenting. It is a mandatory programme for teen mothers under the age of 18 who are on social assistance. For teen mothers aged 18 to 21, the programme remains voluntary. However, regardless of whether the teen mothers' attendance is mandatory or voluntary, all three components (learning, earning and parenting) are compulsory requirements in order to maintain their assistance and graduate from the programme.

Participation in LEAP is a requirement for 16 and 17 year old parents who have not completed high school and who must participate in the three LEAP elements (learning, earning and parenting and child development). Parents aged 18-21 on Ontario Works are not required to participate in LEAP if they have not completed high school, but should be encouraged to participate (Ontario Works, 2001:5).

The learning component requires the teen mothers to attend school full time until they graduate with their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD). If they fail to obtain their OSSD they will not graduate from LEAP and may lose their access to social assistance. The earning component consists of gaining employment skills through finding employment, participating in a cooperative education programme or through volunteer experience. In addition, they have the option of fulfilling a co-op opportunity to gain work experience. The parenting component consists of parenting hours in which the teen mothers are obligated to attend group parenting classes. The minimum requirement of parenting classes is 35 hours. Therefore, the requirements for the LEAP programme include the mandatory graduation from high school, receiving their Ontario Secondary School Diploma, working to "develop employment skills and become job ready", fulfilling the requirements of the parenting programme, and maintaining the requirements of Ontario Works (Ministry of Community and Social Services, 1999). If

the teen mothers complete all the components of the LEAP programme they receive a \$500 graduation incentive. However, if they have over fifteen absences from school, miss a parenting session or have misused their assistance in any form, they will be subjected to the “Zero Tolerance” policy of *‘Ontario Works’* in which the participant becomes “permanently ineligible for social assistance” (Government of Ontario, 2001).

The objectives of the LEAP programme are justified through the rhetoric of the state as it identifies teen mothers as a ‘target group’ and suggest that teen mothers are their own barriers to success, ultimately contributing to the provincial deficit. However, to fully understand and conceptualize the experiences of the teen mothers in the LEAP programme and the influence of the policy and programming on their identity we need to understand their experiences from their positions. The next two chapters will introduce the theoretical and methodological frameworks I have employed to affirm the voices and experiences of the teen mothers.

**Chapter Two:****CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK****Introduction**

The Ontario government has identified teen mothers as a 'target group'. Through this identification, teen mothers have been exposed to the introduction of the LEAP programme that has positioned them under the rules and regulations of the state. However in response to the new rules and regulations the teen mothers have also begun to challenge the state. To understand how the changes in the welfare state and the introduction of the LEAP programme have influenced these mothers I needed to understand first how they perceive their individual positions and experiences within the LEAP programme.

In order to conceptualize the experiences of the teen mothers I employed the framework of Donna Haraway, (1996). Donna Haraway represents women's voices as unique individual experiences, accepting their positions and contradictions as 'rational knowledge'. Donna Haraway identifies her framework for understanding women's experiences as 'situated knowledges'.

To gain an understanding of the teen mothers' experiences with the reconstruction of the welfare state this chapter will include an introduction to Donna Haraway's 'situated knowledges', introduce the conceptualization of the power of the state through an analysis of the feminist theoretical perspectives that outline the possible positioning of single mothers against the state, provide a discussion regarding the teen mothers' experiences with challenging the state, and discuss the combination of these concepts, how they fit together to comprise the framework and development of this study.

## **I. Situated Knowledges**

To address the influences that the reconstruction of the welfare state has had on teen mothers, I grounded this study in the feminist theoretical approach of Donna Haraway. Haraway believes in conceptualizing women's voices and experiences as knowledge and promoting the empowerment of women through their unique understanding of their realities. To gain an understanding of how the reconstruction of the welfare state has influenced the realities of the teen mothers, I have applied Donna Haraway's concept of 'situated knowledges'.

'Situated knowledges' do not represent "the view from above, but the joining of partial views and halting voices into a collective subject position that promises a vision of means of ongoing infinite embodiment of living within limits and contradictions – of views from somewhere" (Haraway, 1996:259). Donna Haraway recognizes the problems that result in representing experiences of 'women' as a unitary position and homogeneous experience. Haraway acknowledges that this claim for 'situated knowledges' is not free of biases from either literary authority or from women's voices but proclaims that we need to hear and express women's voices from their present location.

Donna Haraway believes that as researchers we need to present women with a view from 'somewhere'. Haraway argues for "politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims" (Haraway, 1996:257). 'Situated knowledges' allows for non-universalizing experiences. Donna Haraway's 'situated knowledges' has enabled me to present each individual teen mother's experiences. For example, Alex and

Heather are both voluntary participants, both among the original participants in the programme and both have very similar views. However, they both have different perspectives of the programme that are the outcome of their individual positions and experiences within and outside of the programme. They each have knowledge based upon their own situations that will be validated as 'rational knowledge' even if their two perspectives do not coincide.

This perspective accepts people as people, with their contradictions, complexities and biases, allowing researchers to empower women through non-universalizing political positioning, and representing women's voices as a "view from a body" (Haraway, 1997:257). 'Situated knowledges' are not free of biases, but "a process of ongoing critical interpretation among 'fields' of interpreters and decoders... that of which is contestable and contested": (Haraway, 1997:258).

I believe Donna Haraway presents a non-universalizing ideology of feminist epistemology that is useful for this study. Haraway's epistemology of 'situated knowledges' has complemented this study as it allowed me to prepare for contradictions and unique and individual experiences, enabling me to represent the voices of the teen mothers. For this study I proposed three possible outcomes that included:

- a.) The LEAP programme would have positively changed their position or identity as a teen mother in the community
- b.) The LEAP programme has been a negative experience for their identity, reinforcing a worldview of being a social problem
- c.) Teen mothers would hold contradictory views on LEAP, reflecting their different roles and circumstances as teen mothers and as social assistance recipients.

The outcome that emerged was that the teen mothers held contradictory views on the LEAP programme that reflected both the power of the state and the mothers' own individual roles and circumstances. The following sections will outline theoretical

frameworks that represent the arguments regarding the contradictory experiences among the teen mothers with the power of the state.

## II. Reflecting the Power of the State

The teen mothers' experiences with the power of the state can be understood through an analysis of feminist insight into the reconstruction of the welfare state. Linda Gordon (1994), Meg Luxton (1997) and Patricia Evans (1998,1996) have provided feminist responses to the influences that the reconstruction of the welfare state has had on women, particularly single mothers. They have explored the influences of social policy on single mothers as a subordinate group and how social policy perpetuates and reinforces the power of the state over the identities of single mothers.

Linda Gordon (1994) focuses upon whether or not U.S. social policy directed towards single mothers "affirms the role of single parents as normative" or perpetuates the ideology of single mothers as delinquents and illegitimate mothers, regressing to the ideologies prior to World War II (Gordon, 1994:28). Gordon argues for the importance of understanding U.S. social policy, which resembles the LEAP programme, and how these policies and programmes return the ideology of single motherhood back to the ideology of the early 1920s, prior to the family allowances programme, when "conservatives were more likely to treat them as problem girls and delinquents" (Gordon, 1994:28).

Beyond the stigmas and morality of single motherhood, Meg Luxton (1997) explores how social policies for single mothers reinforce the justification for cutbacks on social spending, blaming single mothers as contributors to the deficit and thus as undeserving.



**Using the threat of the debt and the deficit to legitimate government spending cuts, and cleverly employing the language of the left and of social activists to argue for greater community “empowerment” and responsibility for the provision of social services, governments have been systematically eroding social programmes (Luxton, 1997:20).**

**This is the kind of erosion that has taken place in Ontario. As the welfare state continues to monitor the distribution of the CTB programme, introducing new social programming (LEAP), they claim to be initiating ‘independence’ while reinforcing dependency and negative societal ideologies, including labelling populations of single mothers as manipulators and dependents of the welfare state.**

**Patricia Evans (1998,1996) focuses on the contradictions that arise out of social policies directed towards single mothers. Single mothers are challenged at being ‘mothers’ as social policies and programmes compel single mothers to be ‘workers’ rather than mothers of a family. According to Evans, researchers need to explore “the discriminatory nature of state provisions and point to the powerful forces of societal control” (Evans, 1998:163). Evans argues that conservative regimes fail to recognize the importance of enabling single mothers to stay home with their children. She argues that through social policies single mothers on social assistance lose their parental right to be home with their children and are forced into employment.**

**The theories represented by Gordon, Luxton and Evans introduce concepts that remain applicable for understanding how the state enforces its power over teen mothers as the state ideologically identifies them as an ‘undeserving’ and ‘dependent’ population. I will continue my discussion on power language in Chapter Four.**

### **III. Realities of Resistance**

In this case, the possibilities for challenging the power of the state is best understood through an analysis of the “The Infrapolitics of Subordinate Groups”, a concept discussed by James C. Scott. James C. Scott introduces a theoretical approach that focuses upon how subordinate groups utilize anonymous and unobtrusive forms of resistance, “often expressed openly, although in a disguised form” (Scott, 1997:311) to challenge suppressors. Even though the power of the state remains, Scott argues that we often underestimate the power of subordinate groups as resistance can be portrayed in unobtrusive forms, “non-material and symbolic” (Scott, 1997:312). Scott advocates that where we recognize state power, there will be resistance, “both sides are continually probing for weakness and exploiting small advantages” (Scott, 1997:312). To understand the ‘infrapolitics’ in this case study, the overt and covert experiences of the teen mothers need to be addressed, as challenges can be initiated through means of vocalized resistance, in addition to more unobtrusive measures. For example, failing to attend a mandatory parenting class, enrolling in part-time schooling and/or refusing employment represent challenges against the expectations of the state. I will discuss the forms of resistance that are presented by the teen mothers’ ‘situated knowledges’ in chapter five.

### **IV Combining Concepts**

In order to gain an understanding of how the introduction of the LEAP programme has influenced the identities of the teen mothers, I needed to learn how the teen mothers perceive their own individual positions and experiences. To conceptualize these experiences, I employed Donna Haraway’s concept of ‘situated knowledges’. The

concept of 'situated knowledges', with all of its complexities, complemented the study for it enabled me, as the researcher, to claim not the empirical demands of 'truth' and objectivity, but to accept the biases and contradictions in women's realities.

Gordon, Luxton and Evans introduce arguments that suggest the need for understanding the influences of the power of the state as social policies that may marginalize populations, especially single mothers. These feminist theoretical approaches highlight the importance of identifying the role of the state in influencing the identities of single mothers. James C. Scott, on the other hand, introduces a theoretical approach that helps to identify the possible challenges and unobtrusive forms of resistance among subordinate groups. The 'Infrapolitics of Subordinate Groups' that is presented by Scott reinforces the idea that resistance may occur among teen mothers through either overt or covert measures. Both theoretical approaches help to provide a context for the 'situated knowledges' of teen mothers in the LEAP programme.

With Haraway's 'situated knowledges' the teen mothers' realities are presented and given authority in the way they perceive their own realities. Teen mothers are able to voice their 'rational knowledge' as they experience the power of the state and resistance. To understand the role of 'situated knowledges' through the experiences of the teen mothers, Chapter Four will present the teen mothers' experiences with the power of the state and Chapter Five will present their experiences with resistance as suggested by James C. Scott. I have presented the contradictions in divided chapters (Chapter Four – The Power of the State and Chapter Five – Challenging the Power of the State) in an attempt to develop a clearer understanding of the teen mothers' positions and to represent all the voices of the teen mothers within the context that they are discussed. However,

before we can understand the contradictions in their experiences we need to meet the teen mothers. The next chapter will introduce the methodological framework that I employed in this study and introduce the participants in the research.



The case study approach provided the opportunity to conduct interviews. For this study I participated in active interviewing, which consisted of conversation style interviewing with open ended questions, which enabled the teen mothers' to express their realities and experiences as teen mothers participating in today's welfare state (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995). The active interviewing approach goes beyond the questions and answers of the interview. I was able to conduct in-depth interviews and gain an understanding of how each teen mother became exposed to the LEAP programme and I was able to adhere to their individual concerns and accept their contradictions.

Through conducting a case study, with the active interviewing approach, I was able to gain an understanding of the position of the teen mothers as they were exposed to both structural and ideological influences of the LEAP programme. The LEAP programme structurally influences the teen mothers through the programme regulations and their positioning as either mandatory or voluntary participants. Ideologically, the teen mothers have been influenced as they begin to perceive themselves according to their defined position in the programme. In what follows I introduce all the participants in the study.

## II. The Participants

The participants in the study included the Municipal Director (a municipal government representative), the Program Coordinator (responsible for the administration of the programme), and six teen mothers (participating in the LEAP programme), all of whom have been identified with fictional titles and names. Altogether, I conducted eight, semi-standardized, in-depth, face to face interviews.

The 'Municipal Director' was interviewed in order to gain an understanding of the LEAP programme from the perspective of the state. The interview of the Municipal Director provided ideas on the state's objectives for LEAP, and the opinions of the government in regard to single teen mothers. In order to begin the research process I sent out an information letter to the Municipal Director and introduced myself to the Program Coordinator. They accepted the idea of participating in an interview and the Program Coordinator accepted the idea of leaving my information letters in her office for the teen mothers to read. I interviewed the Municipal Director and the Program Coordinator the following week. The interview with the Municipal Director was a challenge; it was the morning following the resignation of the Mike Harris, the Ontario Premier, whom the Municipal Director remained a supporter of. The Municipal Director had little to say and completed the interview in thirty-five minutes.

The Program Coordinator has been working with the LEAP programme for approximately six months. She was quite excited about the research. Her answers were very detailed and expressive. During the interview with the Program Coordinator I became aware that she was the second coordinator for the programme in this location. However, it was not until I interviewed the teen mothers that I realized the significance of that reality, which I will discuss in Chapter Four. Nonetheless, the present Program Coordinator, whom I interviewed, remains passionate about the programme.

Program Coordinator: "Well, you know, I can't stand the Ontario Conservative government, but I do have to give them credit, this is a really cool programme. In this municipality, it is a good programme". "I mean ultimately, the government wants them to get off of social assistance, so identifying them early, by making them participate in these components, the government's perspective is 'well, then they will get off of assistance early'. Fair enough. You know though, the government doesn't realize the really great things that can happen. They just see getting off of assistance".

**I did not interview the first Program Coordinator as my central focus remains understanding the current experiences of these teen mothers.**

**My interviews with the Municipal Director and the Program Coordinator occurred within the first week I began the interviewing process. Unfortunately, I waited approximately three weeks before I heard from my first teen mother. Not until I interviewed the Program Coordinator did I realize that the components of the LEAP programme were not held in the Program Coordinator's office building. For this reason, I did not have direct access to the teen mothers. The entire interview process lasted approximately three months. Throughout the three months I was able to interview six teen mothers.**

**The teen mothers I interviewed consisted of three voluntary participants and three mandatory participants. In order to maintain confidentiality and anonymity among the LEAP participants, I have used fictional names. The participants in the LEAP programme include Alex, Heather, and Marnie, who are voluntary enrollment, and Abbey, Mandy, and Jane, who are mandatory enrollment. Voluntary participants are teen mothers on social assistance aged 18-21 who have enrolled in the LEAP programme voluntarily. The mandatory participants are teen mothers on social assistance aged 16-17 who have been mandated by the state to enroll in the LEAP programme. The contention of the voluntary and mandatory positions will be explored in Chapter Four.**

**In an attempt to gain an understanding of the individual positions of the teen mothers, I needed to consider their mandatory or voluntary status, the age of the teen mothers, their living situation (where they living on their own, with their family, with the father of their child), whether they see their family, how much emotional support they**



receive and from whom, how they perceive their own situation, and how much bearing these considerations have on their 'situated knowledges'.

Alex was not only my first teen mom interviewee, but she was also the most extensive and passionate about her experiences with the LEAP programme. Alex was a voluntary participant. She takes a political stand accepting the LEAP programme but not without criticisms. Alex was married and divorced before she entered the programme. She had intentions of going to University to take engineering after she graduated from high school. Alex found out about LEAP through her childcare facility. Before LEAP Alex's mom was her main source of childcare. Alex's parents were accepting of her situation as a teen mother and remain very emotionally supportive. Alex has taken a very active role in the LEAP programme. She believes that the LEAP programme needs greater opportunities for the participants and believes that 'the LEAP programme does not meet everyone's needs by far'. Alex and her two year old son lived alone during her participation in the LEAP programme. She has now graduated from the programme, is in college, living with her partner, who is not the father of her child, and they are discussing family planning. Alex was 18 when she entered the LEAP programme and is now 20 years of age.

Heather was also a voluntary participant. Heather found out about the LEAP programme through the day care facility where she took her daughter. Like Alex, Heather was attending school full time before she entered the programme. Heather got pregnant at 15 years of age and now has a 4 year old daughter. The father of her daughter (her 'boyfriend') found full time employment out of the province. They will be reuniting once Heather completes her last semester of high school. At the time of the interview,

Heather had recently graduated from the LEAP programme and had enrolled in college. Heather lived on her own with her daughter and had emotional support from her parents. Heather felt empowered by the LEAP programme, particularly by the parenting component, as she 'wants a bunch more kids now'.

Both Alex and Heather portrayed pros and cons of the programme. They both believe that LEAP can be a very successful and positive experience but believe it does not meet the needs of all the teen mothers. Both Alex and Heather were two of the original participants of the LEAP programme so they have experienced many of the changes that have occurred in the programme and have ideas as to what changes the LEAP programme needs.

Marnie was also a voluntary participant. At the time of the interview, Marnie had only been in the programme for 3 weeks. She was at a parenting class, on her own, when the Program Coordinator came to introduce the LEAP programme to non-LEAP, teen mothers. Marnie was going to school, finishing her grade 12 and attending parenting classes before she enrolled in the LEAP programme. Marnie has fully intended to go to college to take either real estate or to become an insurance broker. Marnie has a 2 year old son and is expecting her second child. Both Marnie's mom and dad are emotionally supportive of her situation. At the time of the interview, Marnie was unaware of the stipulations of the programme. Her understanding was ill informed. Nonetheless, Marnie was totally impressed with the LEAP programme. She is optimistic, believing that the government created the LEAP programme in order to introduce positive acceptance of teen motherhood in Ontario. She believes society is much more accepting

now of teen mothers. She believes that this acceptance and the introduction of the LEAP programme are the result of “more and more people... having children at a younger age”.

None of the three voluntary participants, Alex, Heather or Marnie, had heard about the LEAP programme from their social assistance caseworker. In addition, before becoming voluntary participants in the LEAP programme all three participants were completing high school full-time, living on their own with their child, and all of them had full intentions of going to college when they graduated both from high school and the LEAP programme. Marnie was even pursuing parenting classes. What is interesting about the voluntary participants is that these moms, once they registered for the programme (more specifically Alex and Heather, as Marnie had only just heard about the programme), recognized the power of the state and its influences on teen mothers. They recognized the power that the state had, or attempted to have, over the LEAP parents, which was not questioned by the mandatory participants. Nonetheless, all three remained optimistic regarding the possible potential for the LEAP programme in the community.

Abbey was a mandatory participant. Abbey had her son at 15 years of age. She initially lived with the father of her child until her son was 8 months old, then separated as a result of domestic violence. Abbey is now 17 years old and her son is age two. They are living in a government subsidized apartment complex, which is across the city from her high school and her son’s childcare facility. When she separated from her son’s father Abbey quit school since being a single mom and living in a distant area from her school without family contact was too much to handle. Her parents are divorced and both live out of town. Unlike the voluntary participants, Abbey’s caseworker told her that she ‘would have to join the LEAP programme’. Abbey accepts the LEAP programme for its

structure, as it required her to finish school, provided her with a bus pass for transportation and put her in contact with other teen moms who provide her with the emotional support she needs. Abbey said that she is not ready for college but is enrolled in college for September 2002. Her reason for applying to college was to receive a student loan, as she has been unable to find employment that will enable her and her son to survive.

Mandy was a mandatory participant. Mandy speaks highly of the LEAP programme as it has provided her with counselling and put her in contact with other teen moms. Mandy, like Abbey, does not have emotional support or acceptance from her parents. Mandy's parents are divorced. When she became pregnant with her daughter her parents abandoned her. Mandy was already going to school full time and living on her own with her daughter before she entered the LEAP programme. Mandy was 15 when her daughter was born and is now 17 years old. Mandy is now expecting her second child from the father of her first child. He refused the use of contraception knowing that Mandy does not take birth control. They are not in a 'relationship' although he prevents Mandy from seeing other people. Mandy appreciates the friendships and guidance she receives from the LEAP programme; she 'never wants to leave LEAP'.

Jane and her boyfriend are mandatory participants of the LEAP programme. They both have a grade 10 level of education, live together in government subsidized housing with three children, all under the age of 4, and their dog. Jane just turned 21 years of age and has been a LEAP participant since she was 18. She does not speak very positively of the LEAP programme, as she has no desire to finish school and attend parenting classes, but she believes that 'it's good' for the younger parents. Jane does not

believe she should be mandatory. However she does believe that the programme should be mandatory for the younger moms. Jane's boyfriend's family lives in her community. They have contact and emotional support from both of their families. Jane would rather be working as a hairdresser. Jane blames the government for her situation as she says that there is nothing else for teens to do so 'they are going to do something'.

Out of the mandatory participants that I interviewed, Mandy and Abbey are planning on going to college, although they both have undecided majors. Both Mandy and Abbey struggle with the demands of the programme as they both believe 'it is a lot of work', but they believe they need the structure, guidance and programmes that LEAP has offered them. Jane and her boyfriend have no plans for post-secondary education, nor do they intend to graduate from high school. Jane was the oldest participant that I interviewed and the least motivated to finish her Grade Twelve and work full time. She would rather be home with her children while they are young.

Now that I have introduced the teen mothers and provided an understanding of their 'situatedness', I will introduce their experiences. The following two chapters comprise a description of the mothers' experiences with the power of the state (Chapter Four) and with challenging the state (Chapter Five).

**Chapter Four:****THE POWER OF THE STATE****Introduction**

From the perspective of the Ontario government, the LEAP programme was designed to provide teen mothers the skills they need to become better parents, to graduate from high school and to find employment (Ministry of Community and Social Services, 1999). The Conservative government 'targeted' teen mothers, as the Conservative government understands teen motherhood as a contributor to inter-generational welfare, creating an ideology of 'dependency' that is significantly gendered. Thus, through the mandate of the LEAP programme, the state has gained power over the individual lives of teen mothers as the programme "outlines how and when she/he will access all three LEAP elements, based upon individual needs and circumstances" (Ministry of Community and Social Services, 1999:4).

The power of the state is justified through underlying ideologies of social policy. For example, the LEAP programme is justified through the government's claims that teen mothers are a 'target population' and a population in need of 'independence' from the welfare state. This approach reinforces the subordination of teen mothers as they become subjected to the power of the state through the application of power language. I define power language as language used by the government to implement policy changes and to reinforce their political agenda. Power language contributes to the strength of social policy in positioning teen mothers in a subordinate role under the power of the state.

In addition, the teen mothers experience the power of the state through the process of registration. The power of the state is employed throughout the entire registration process, from the first step of introductions to the final step of signing the LEAP contract.

This process of registration uniquely exemplifies the differences in experiences among the mandatory and voluntary participants. The teen mothers also experience the power of the state as they become dependent. The teen mothers become financially dependent and dependent as the programme absorbs all their time and energy, and dependent for the reason that if they breach the contract, they are forced into the disciplinary actions of *Ontario Works*, the *Zero Tolerance* policy.

In this chapter I focus on the power of the state over teen mothers' lives. It is in the following chapter that I discuss challenges to the programme by the teen mothers. This chapter is organized in the following way: First I discuss the influence of power language through examples of the government documents and other publications, including the interviewing forms; then I discuss the use of power language by the Municipal Director and the Program Coordinator. Secondly, following the discussion on power language, I introduce the process of registration that is practiced by the state in registering the teen mothers for the programme. Thirdly I discuss the increase of dependency of the teen mothers on the welfare state, as they are forced to abide by the rules and regulations of the LEAP programme.

#### I. Power Language

Power language, as previously defined, is the terminology used by the government for justifying changes in social policies and for representing the people subject to the changes. The provincial government justifies the implementation of the LEAP programme and maintains its direction through the use of power language. Power language has been exercised predominately throughout the relevant government

documents on welfare and is used by both the Municipal Director and the Program Coordinator of the LEAP programme.

#### A. Government Documents

Power language is exhibited in the rhetoric of government documents. The language reinforces the power of the state through identifying 'target groups' and implementing social policies for the 'target groups'. The government documents I examined for this study include Ontario Works Publications, and the Interview Forms (also referred to as the 'individual service plan' or 'contract').

##### 1. Ontario Works Publications

In an attempt to create a successful business plan that would be supported by the people of Ontario and in preparation of targeting teen mothers the provincial government introduced government documents that glorified the platform of the provincial government mandate: *Ontario Works*. The *Ontario Works* publications justify their mandate and the need for the reconstruction by indicating that 'research shows' or stating that 'research also indicates' (Ministry of Community and Social Services, 1999:Appendix A), without actually showing the data or sources. In an attempt to justify targeting teen mothers the Ontario government produced statements that read:

Research shows that teen mothers often have multiple problems and multiple needs. Many come from dysfunctional homes and may have suffered abuse or neglect. Teenage mothers are more likely to come from families that are poor, have been on welfare for more than a generation and whose mothers gave birth as teenagers (Ministry of Community and Social Services, 1999:Appendix A).

These statements provide language that suggests 'truth'. The state reinforces the ideology through power language that teen motherhood is a result of dysfunctional families and that they are dependent on the welfare system.



*Ontario Works* publications describe the LEAP programme as a programme that “provides teen mothers with the supports they need to finish school, learn parenting skills and find a job” (Ministry of Community and Social Services, 2001) and mandates that read:

The purpose of Learning, Earning and Parenting (LEAP) is to help young parents aged 16-21 years old complete their education and to help them and their children become self-reliant. Participation in LEAP is a requirement for 16 and 17 year old parents who have not completed high school and who must participate in the three elements. Parents aged 18-21 on Ontario Works are not required to participate in LEAP if they have not completed high school, but should be encouraged to participate (Ontario Works, 2001:5)

Statements such as these are products of power language. The provincial government has transformed traditional conservative reforms of claiming single mothers as dependent and undeserving populations to a population in need of ‘help’ and ‘independence’, justifying their introduction of the programme and financial cutbacks in the welfare state through conservative rhetoric.

The government documents, even though they are public and can be reviewed on the Ontario Government Internet website, are not discussed by the teen mothers themselves. However, these documents provide an introduction to the state’s agenda in gaining power over the lives of the teen mothers. For example the power language of Ontario Works documents clarify the repercussions for teen mothers who fail to abide by the rules. The ‘Learning, Earning, and Parenting (LEAP) Directive 39.0’ states that:

(5) No person shall be considered to be in attendance in an education or training programme if the administrator determines that he or she has been absent from that programme, unless the administrator is satisfied that the absence was justified. O. Reg, 134/98,s. 10 (5)”. “(6) If a person’s assistance is cancelled or reduced as a result of an unjustified absence under subsection (5), it shall not be reinstated under this section. O. Reg, 134/98,s. 10 (6) (Ontario Works, 2001:4).

According to this statement, once a teen mother misses a day of school, she will be subject to losing her social assistance.

Through the *Ontario Works* publications, the government assumes the right to maintain power over teen mothers. The provincial government advocates, through the use of power language, that they are creating a more 'independent' and 'self-reliant' population as the role of Ontario Works is to provide people with 'The dignity of work and the pride of independence' (Ministry of Community and Social Services, 1999). However, these provincial policies are creating a more dependent population among teen mothers.

## 2. Interview Forms

The interview forms are introduced during the intake process of the LEAP programme. These forms include the 'LEAP Individual Assessment Interview Form' and the 'LEAP Individual Intake Form'. Both interview forms reinforce subordination as they define the teen mothers' barriers as individual problems and reinforce their need for change.

The 'LEAP Individual Assessment Interview Form' uses power language to imply a sense of failure. The language applied in this form reinforces to the applicant that they need change or improvement. "What aspect of your present situation would you like to change or improve?" This question suggests that their present situation is not acceptable and they are unable to make it on their own. The question "What are your most urgent needs?" provides options that suggest individual barriers rather than structural barriers. The options include: "the need to pay bills, the need to be independent, the need for

personal growth, the need to be active outside of the home, the need for child rearing know how, etc.”.

The ‘LEAP Individual Intake Form’ is a contract. This contract is individual to each LEAP client. It outlines their individual barriers and provides an outline describing how they will complete each component (learning, earning and parenting). In addition, the contract provides short term, mid term and long term goals that are to be achieved by the teen mother throughout her enrolment in the LEAP programme. This contract is the greatest signifier of how the programme contributes to the powerlessness of the LEAP participant. If the contract is broken, or if the teen mother fails to comply, it can be used against the teen mother as a determining factor as to whether or not they receive their social assistance. In addition, the contract determines the amount of funding that is to be allotted for that teen mother while they are in the LEAP programme. I will continue my discussion of the ‘LEAP Individual Assessment Interview Form’ later in this chapter.

#### **B. The Municipal Director as a Representative of the Power of the State**

My first introduction to the LEAP programme was through the Municipal Director. In his explanation of the LEAP programme, the Municipal Director emphasized the provincial government’s ideology that the LEAP programme should be a mandatory programme for all teen mothers without their Grade Twelve.

Municipal Director: “Locally we wanted to make it mandatory for everybody that hasn’t completed their grade 12 up to the age of 21 who are on social assistance. The province wouldn’t allow it. It’s a legislative thing. The legislation says it’s mandatory for 16 to 17 year olds; 18-21 are voluntary”.

Municipal Director: “Without it being mandatory, people don’t see the benefit; they don’t see it as an opportunity to help themselves”

**In this programme, out of 47 teen mothers, 42 are voluntary participants. These numbers indicate the idea that voluntary participants may see benefits in the programme.**

**The Municipal Director describes the LEAP programme on the basis of his own knowledge and beliefs.**

**Municipal Director: “The benefits are huge because you’re in a situation financially already, social assistance, so your quality of life is not that good and you have some hope that you’re gonna get out of this and now you have a child and your focus now is to take after that child and you probably don’t foresee yourself ever getting off social assistance and how can you cause you don’t have any Grade Twelve, you don’t have any job skills, you don’t even know how to parent cause you’re still a child yourself. And then this programme comes along and it’s given these people a lot of hope and guidance and direction”.**

**The Municipal Director suggests that the teen mothers are a population already on social assistance before they become pregnant. These types of statements create class assumptions. When I questioned the possibility of the educational system being a barrier, or a contributor to teen motherhood, having in mind both the inequality that may prevail in the school system, and the lack of health education, the municipal director added:**

**“The educational system has been fine, all these people that have dropped out because they were pregnant or whatever”.**

**Not only does the Municipal Director echo the power of the state he reinforces his beliefs through using his position to justify the state’s agenda with the LEAP programme.**

**“Being 16, 17, 18 years old on assistance and having a baby - there has been some research that indicated that those without a grade 12 education were less likely to get off social assistance so LEAP is to get the person their grade 12 education and it’s a bonus. The earning component is more of a job skills, provides them with some of the skills that they will need to perform the job and the parenting is a mandatory component with a minimum of 35 hours of the mother involved in the programme, parenting classes to help them become better parents”.**

**The Municipal Director fails to accept the possibility that these young teen mothers are able to make decisions on their own and he is critical of the fact that they get**

a financial incentive for graduating from the LEAP programme. The LEAP programme provides a \$500 bonus for graduating from the LEAP programme. The Municipal Director believes that the state should determine the allocation of that money. For example, the Municipal Director believes that it should be placed in a savings bond for the child under the government direction.

Municipal Director: "The one thing we've tried to do is write that cheque towards a college not to the client. Legislation doesn't allow us to do that, or an RESP, we can't do that, it's the client's cheque and they can do what they want. We have no recourse".

The Municipal Director takes full responsibility for the 'success' of this particular programme, as he was responsible for its development and its financial maintenance.

Municipal Director: "This was the fastest piece of legislation to get through in the history of this government. This was rammed down us. It was announced in like April or May and it was up and running by January 1, the following year (2000). Usually it takes three years for something to occur".

Following his taking full responsibility for its success, the Municipal Director immediately distanced himself from the origin of the programme. For example:

Municipal Director: "This government, that's their platform. Do I personally believe that... I don't think so, some people are problems, some aren't. I don't think you can group everybody into that". "The politicalness behind some of the messages of calling this group a social problem is some of the politicalness of the message of making this a successful programme".

The Municipal Director distanced himself from the connotation of referring to the teen mothers as a 'social problem' yet admits that this language contributes to the program's success. At the same time he argues that the LEAP programme is going to give the teen mothers 'hope', 'guidance', and 'direction'. The neo-conservative agenda is reflected in views of the Municipal Director. Yet, when I questioned the Municipal Director in regard to where he thinks the idea of teen mothers being a social problem stems from, this was his response:

**Municipal Director: “You know what I think is a result of this? I think it was the result of the media. You do not sell a newspaper when you tell people that 99.5% of the people on social assistance do not rip off welfare”.**

**The Municipal Director has inadvertently pointed to the possibility that the programme is a conservative strategy to put money back in the hands of the government.**

**C. The Program Coordinator as a Representative of the Power of the State**

**As a representative of the power of the state, the Program Coordinator reinforces her position of control through her practice of power language. The Program Coordinator’s use of power language was expressed through her belief that the LEAP programme should be a mandatory programme, her reinforcement of the mandate as the teen mothers experienced the transition between the previous Program Coordinator and herself and through her belief that she is contributing to the self-esteem of the teen mothers.**

**Through facilitating new policies and procedures and positioning the teen mothers the Program Coordinator uses power language to advocate for a complete mandatory programme.**

**Program Coordinator: “I have 5 mandatory compared to the other 42 who are voluntary. Some of the voluntary are ‘iffy’. I am not seeing anything. I think there needs to be some accountability, some structure, and I think that (being mandatory) is motivation. If they have that motivation, equalling accountability, then that really helps”.**

**Program Coordinator: “There are some children that should be in a day care setting because the parents don’t have the life skills or the parenting skills and I will say that with no hesitation. I mandate sometimes that some children be in day care because the parent needs to be out getting some life skills, some parenting skills and some schooling, and I don’t want to see those children home all day. So again, individual case by case, but that goes for all parents. You don’t have to be a single mom on assistance to be a bad mother or a good mother”.**

**The Program Coordinator, following the mandate of LEAP, not only believes that the programme should be mandatory, but she also provides mandatory child care for parents**

who wish to enroll in home studies in order to complete their OSSD. The Program Coordinator enforces very tight surveillance on every aspect of their lives.

Program Coordinator: "Ontario Works requires that they submit by the 16<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of each month an income statement, so when they are in LEAP they, as well as submitting their income statement, they have to submit their school attendance, as well as the parenting record. We give each new participant a parenting tracking sheet and that allows them to track their parenting hours in the programme".

In addition to advocating the 'need' for a complete mandatory programme, the Program Coordinator reinforces the power of the state through echoing the power language of the LEAP program's mandate. The teen mothers express the influence of this power language that is practiced by the Program Coordinator as they experienced the transition between the original Program Coordinator and the present Program Coordinator.

#### 1. Participants' Relationships with the Program Coordinator

For three of the teen mothers that I interviewed, the Program Coordinator remains a topic of distress. The present Program Coordinator conducts the programme following the mandate of the programme. When she came into the programme, three months into the fiscal year, the first Program Coordinator already spent the budget. Thus, the present Program Coordinator was forced to revise the programme to meet the agenda or the budget of the government. Unfortunately, these changes were the determining factor in how the reconstruction of the welfare state has influenced teen mothers because now the teen mothers are forced to follow and abide by the regulations of the programme. This was a reality check for the teen mothers who were accustomed to the freedoms that the original Program Coordinator provided.

Distressed over the transition and introduction to new language, three participants, Abbey (Mandatory), Alex (Voluntary) and Heather (Voluntary) revealed their experiences during the interviews.

Abbey reiterates, in her own words, what she was told about LEAP, first by the 'old' Program Coordinator, then by the 'new' Program Coordinator.

Abbey (Mandatory)“(First Program Coordinator), ‘LEAP is here to help you, you are going through a really tough time in your life and we know you have a lot of adjusting to do so we’re here to help you’. And now it’s like, ‘this is only something you should fall back on if you have a problem, this is something you shouldn’t be relying on’ which I don’t think many people did rely on. I don’t know. The attitude has completely changed. ‘Well, we’re not going to be here when you graduate so get used to it’ (referencing the present Program Coordinator), kinda attitude and I really don’t like it. And a lot of people are unhappy about it”.

Alex expresses her opinion of the change of Program Coordinators.

Alex (Voluntary): “There has been a change in administration. The programme has changed quite a bit, but I mean it is evolving, to begin with. I mean, it was a new programme so changes are going to happen. Unfortunately, when the new Program Coordinator took over there were a lot of policy changes handed down. My take on it is that it is not going as well”.

T.C.: “In what ways?”

Alex: “ Clients mostly. There has been a really long adjustment period is what it comes down to”.

Alex believes that the teen mothers who have enrolled with the present Program Coordinator have not taken positively to the programme due to the power and constraints that are reinforced by the Program Coordinator. Once they are registered, the new teen mothers are exposed to the ‘true’ objectives of the LEAP programme, including their financial and time restrictions, which I will discuss in the dependency section, leaving the teen mothers in a position of subordination.



Heather made a similar argument to Alex. Heather believes that the Program Coordinator facilitates the programme on the basis of control in which she provides for the teen mothers when they meet her personal expectations. This power is perpetuated by the Program Coordinator's use of power language.

Heather (Voluntary): "I think originally (for parenting hours), it was all the same, everybody needs this amount of hours, but now, it's pretty much, (conveying the words of the Program Coordinator) "I feel, 'you're a good parent, you don't need to take parenting classes". Based on favourites. It's like, "if I like you, you don't need to do as much parenting hours as the rest of them, and I'll give you what you want and you don't have to work for it". Before, it was based on individual need, but there was more structure".

The 'situated knowledges' of Abbey, Alex and Heather provide examples of the Program Coordinator's use of power language. The Program Coordinator uses power language to individually assess the teen mothers of the LEAP programme and determine their position and 'needs' for them, reinforcing her position of power. The Program Coordinator's use of power language positions the teen mothers as mandatory or voluntary; she determines their required hours for each component and determines their access to social assistance, reinforcing the power of the state.

In amongst this control, the Program Coordinator believes she increases the self-esteem of the teen mothers that remains an ideal of the LEAP programme.

LEAP... a vision that respects people's dignity, enhances their self-esteem, and fosters independence, self-reliance, and community contribution and participation (Ministry of Community and Social Services, 1999:1)

An important element of parenting activities is to bring young parents together and make them feel part of a community. The resultant improvement in self-esteem is in itself an important factor in being an effective parent (Ministry of Community and Social Services, 1999: Appendix A).

The Program Coordinator perpetuates the state's claim that it is increasing the self-esteem of the teen mothers. Her claim is justified and perpetuated through her practice of power language as she claims that her facilitation of the programme increases self-esteem.

T.C.: "Do you think that the programme is providing dignity and self-esteem for its members?"

Program Coordinator: "It depends on the deliverer of each LEAP programme, and if they are giving the individuals dignity I think the programme does have the potential to do that, but then again, it depends on how it is delivered and so I feel that I am giving the programme dignity. I wouldn't be doing it if I didn't".

Program Coordinator: "Dignity would mean to me the ability to hold your head up high. To be proud of who you are and whether you are 17 and had a baby or 33 and had a baby, for any young parent to walk into a doctor's office, the Health Unit, the mall, and hold you head up high and say, 'I'm a mom, I'm a parent and I'm proud of it'".

The Program Coordinator, like the Municipal Director, echoes the power language of the state with regards to suggesting that the LEAP programme enhances self-esteem and dignity among teen mothers. The Program Coordinator believes that her facilitation practices increase the teen mother's self-esteem. However, the Program Coordinator never did say how she increases the teen mothers self-esteem or provides them with dignity. The Program Coordinator uses power language to promote the idea that she provides the teen mothers with self-esteem and dignity even though she was unable to provide me with examples. Alex, who is voluntary, questions the programme's ability to address their self-esteem directly.

T.C.: "Do you think it is effective?"

Alex (Voluntary): "I think it can be. It is a really delicate balance though. You have your learning, earning and parenting and that really doesn't include much of the 'self aspect', it focuses on our parenting and our children, our children and our education and it's never just us. So that was a really hard aspect to face because a lot of people were

facing that, and I mean of course you're a teen parent, you got a whole bunch of things facing you so and no one is dealing with you".

When comparing the voices of the teen mothers to the assertions of the Program Coordinator it becomes apparent that there are two sides to every situation. The role of the Program Coordinator is to facilitate the daily administration of the programme. This daily administration consists of registering teen mothers for the programme, building their contracts, which will be discussed in the following section, positioning the teen mothers as mandatory or voluntary and determining their expectations in the programme. These duties of the Program Coordinator were exhibited throughout the transition process. So where in this role of power does the Program Coordinator increase self-esteem and dignity?

Power language is reinforced by the implementation of government documents, the 'echoing' of the Municipal Director, and the facilitation practices of the Program Coordinator. The government documents remain the first indication of power language. They deliver rhetoric that justifies the state's intent and positions teen mothers into dependent roles that are perpetuated by power language. The Municipal Director and the Program Coordinator perpetuate power language as the language is filtered from the top-down, used as a tool to increase the power of the state and in the marginalization of the teen mothers.

## II. Processes of Registration

Through the registration process the teen mothers are influenced by the power of the state. The registration process determines each teen mother's individual position in the programme and the state's expectations. The concern here is that all the teen mothers end up under the same rules and regulations of the LEAP programme and have very

different experiences that reflect their position as either mandatory or voluntary.

Through the 'situated knowledges' of the teen mothers, this process influences their realities. The mandatory mothers are told they 'have to' register for the programme, while the voluntary are persuaded of the 'benefits' of the programme. This section will discuss the steps experienced by both the mandatory and voluntary teen mothers as they become subjected to two completely different forms of introductions to the programme and become exposed to the signing of the contract, which reinforces their subordinate position with the power of the state.

#### A. The Introductions

Regardless of their mandatory or voluntary status, all teen mothers on social assistance, under the age of 21 are told about the programme. Mandatory teen mothers on social assistance are not provided an option regarding their desire to participate. The voluntary participants, on the other hand, experience a totally different introduction. They are enticed with the 'benefits' of the programme.

#### I. Mandatory Participants

I interviewed three mandatory teen mothers out of the total five in the programme. They were all introduced and mandated to the programme by their *Ontario Works* social worker.

T.C.: "How did you find out about the LEAP programme?"

Mandy (Mandatory): "The social worker".

T.C.: "What did she say about it?"

Mandy (Mandatory): "She said that I had to do it".

T.C.: "Are you mandatory?"

**Mandy (Mandatory):** “I was”.

**T.C.:** “Did the Program Coordinator tell you any details?”

**Mandy (Mandatory):** “She said it’s about teen moms and helping them out with things they need. She said that it wasn’t going to be so bad. ‘She’ (Program Coordinator) said the purpose of the programme was to get teen moms back on their feet”.

**T.C.:** “How did you find out about the programme?”

**Jane (Mandatory):** “When we first moved down here we had to go to the *OntarioWorks* Centre and they told us we had to go into LEAP because we were young parents and that LEAP would have more benefits to help us out”.

**T.C.:** “What did they tell you about LEAP?”

**Jane (Mandatory):** “You have to participate in most of the stuff they have offered. They will help in any way that you needed, like if I needed new clothes or a stroller for the kids they would provide it”

**T.C.:** “How did you feel when they told you that you were mandatory?”

**Jane (Mandatory):** “Well I was planning on doing it anyway, I knew it was going to happen eventually”.

**T.C.:** “How did you find about the programme?”

**Abbey (Mandatory):** “The case worker didn’t really tell me anything about it. All she said was you are going to have to go into the LEAP programme. You are going to have to be going to school, take parenting classes”.

**T.C.:** “Did the Program Coordinator tell you about all the rules and regulations up front?”

**Abby (Mandatory):** “She went over most of them, but she said ‘as you go if you have any questions, ask me. And if I feel that there is anything I feel you need to be doing I will let you know”.

The introduction of the programme to the mandatory teen mothers reflects the strongest influence of the power of the state. Being told that they will have to participate and that they are mandatory leaves these teen mothers in a completely subordinate position to the state. Even the voluntary teen mothers perceive the influence of the power

of the state over the identities of the mandatory teen mothers. Here are Heather and Alex's 'situated knowledge' of the mandatory requirement.

T.C.: "What were the pros and cons?"

Heather (Voluntary): The pros and cons go with how it is structured and how it is run. You can get a lot out of LEAP, and out of the programme, if you want to. If you are mandatory, and you're being told you have to, you don't want to, and you are only going to get out of it what you want".

Alex takes Heather's thoughts a step further.

T.C.: "Do you think LEAP should be mandatory?"

Alex (Voluntary): "No. I don't. LEAP is very invasive, very invasive. They want to know everything you're doing and when you're doing it. You have to justify all your actions. Like if you can't make it to this Y thing, why didn't you come? Which is good for some people, but not for others. I was already going to school; I was already doing everything I had to do. I could have gotten subsidized childcare without LEAP; I just would have had to pay \$2 per day, which is not that bad. If you don't know what to do and they realize that you are not participating they will hold your cheque for 3 months. So, if you don't know that? When you are younger (like 14 or 15) you don't know, you don't want to be there. When you get older you're like OK, I gotta start doing something here. I can understand why LEAP is mandatory for a certain age, but it shouldn't be an age. It should be individual. LEAP met my needs, but I don't think it is meeting the needs of everyone, by far".

Even though Alex realizes that both mandatory and voluntary teen mothers are exposed to the same rules and regulations, she realizes that the mandatory participants have a different experience as compared to the voluntary teen mothers that can be attributed to the introduction process. Keeping in mind the influence of the introduction on the mandatory teen mothers, we will now take a look at the experiences of the voluntary participants.

## 2. Voluntary Participants

During the intake process, the voluntary participants are introduced to the benefits of the programme. Unlike the mandatory participants, the voluntary participants

introduction to the LEAP programme is comprised of advertising their access to government subsidized childcare, a bus pass, funding for school supplies and school or interview clothes, and a \$500 graduation incentive. The voluntary participants are encouraged to believe that the LEAP programme would benefit their situation. Here are examples from the voluntary teen mothers.

T.C.: "What were you told about the programme?"

Heather (Voluntary): "She told me about the YMCA membership, the \$500.00 incentive when you graduate, parenting classes, they will help you with your resume, you can get a clothing allowances, well, I am not sure if you can get a clothing allowance for you, school supplies are paid for, bus pass to school and that's all really good stuff and that's basically it".

Marnie: (Voluntary) "LEAP is geared to people who have kids and who are trying to get themselves established into the schools and living or whatever they need help with, I guess. I think it is really good because they never had anything like that before. And now if you need help and if they know you are going to take the help seriously then they are there for your benefit. She told us everything they offer".

It is interesting how the process of registration varied between the voluntary and mandatory participants. For the voluntary participants, the programme was introduced to them on the basis of the benefits, the 'perks', especially the bus pass, for which all the participants were thankful. However, the mandatory teen mothers' experiences reflected being told that they would have to participate in the programme. The voluntary teen mothers perceive the influence that the power of state has over the mandatory teen mothers and disagree with the mandatory component of the LEAP programme. The power of the state becomes apparent when comparing the 'situated knowledges' of the teen mothers. Ironically, both the mandatory and the voluntary teen mothers end up under the same rules and regulations of the programme. However, they hold different positions and as a result, perceive the programme differently. The next section, 'Building

the Contract' will continue the discussion of the registration process and the influence of power of the state on the identities of both the mandatory and voluntary teen mothers.

#### **B. Building the Contract**

Building the contract is comprised of two steps. The first step is filling out the 'LEAP Individual Assessment Interview Form'. This form identifies, as already mentioned, each teen mother's individual 'barriers' and 'needs'. The contentions of this form are particular to question six: "What is the main reason why you are out of school and/or unemployed?" It identifies their barriers as their own personal barriers; for example, the options include: 'I lack motivation', 'I have no interest in returning to regular high school', 'I have no interest in working', rather than suggesting social issues or structural barriers (transportation, accessible child care on evenings and weekends if they wanted to work outside of the home).

The second step is the introduction to the individual service plan or the 'contract'. This contract is titled 'LEAP Individual Intake Form'.

Individual service plans form part of the Participation Agreement and sets out the specific activities for each of the three LEAP elements. Service plans outline how LEAP participants access these elements, based on individual needs and circumstances" (Ontario Works, 2001:6). "It is important to identify barriers to school attendance and academic success, and ensure that the plan contains measures to address these barriers to promote full time attendance and no unjustified absences (Ontario Works, 2001:7).

The Program Coordinator is responsible for registering each teen mother. It is her objective to determine the needs of each teen mother and set limits on their expectations for each component of the programme.

Program Coordinator: "If you don't complete 35 hours you're done. I don't tell them that there is a minimum requirement. I just tell them that as long as they are in LEAP they are going to be involved in some kind of parenting programme. I always try to say that I'm not making them participate in the parenting because they are a bad



parent, if anything I think you are doing a great job, but, we all need parenting skills, and this is a great opportunity for you and I always try to sell the benefits of it”.

At this point, the potential participant has been ‘sold’ on the benefits of LEAP, and has been subjected to being told that she is in need of change, which leads to the obligation of registration. Once this contract has been signed, regardless of the mandatory or voluntary status, the participant becomes subjected to the power of the state.

Municipal Director: “That sheet is then sent to us and our staff approve it because what they do, they look for anything in there and the dollar amounts allotted to those things. Our staff look at that and approve it that the funds could be accessed under another regular social assistance programme, because we free up more money to do more with others”.

Once the contract has been signed by the teen mother and accepted by the Municipal Director, the state gains full control over how much funding will be available to the individual teen mother, based upon the state’s perceived idea of the participant’s ‘needs’.

This contract reinforces the power of the state as it provides the state full control over the daily lives of the teen mothers.

T.C.: “How many hours do you put in?”

Heather (Voluntary): “That is just dependent on your individual service plan. It is based upon your own individual agreement. I think you have to be in two parenting classes at once, about four hours a week. I know some days, you wake up for school, go to school, and then come home have a snack and go to parenting, or some days don’t even go home because you don’t have time, and you can’t go straight to parenting from school fast enough. And since I was doing two parenting classes I would come home from school, have dinner and then go to parenting from 6:30 to 8:00pm. Come back home, put my daughter to bed, do my homework until 3 am and go to bed. In normal high school, there is a lot of homework and reports due the next day”.

This process of registration process has been a signifier of the power of the state as the teen mothers lose control over their daily lives. Once the teen mothers have signed the contract, regardless of whether they are mandatory or voluntary, they are unable to withdraw without repercussions. If they choose not to finish the programme they may

lose their access to social assistance. Alex, through her 'situated knowledge' puts into context the whole registration process. Even though Alex is voluntary, she remains critical of the registration process as a result of the influence of the power of the state.

Alex (Voluntary): "I went in to see the Program Coordinator for the initial intake and that is when you fill out all the forms and find out all the barriers you have. And she briefly tells you what LEAP can do for you. And you go away feeling, 'O.K. that's not so bad!'. Then you have to come back again to fill out your participation agreement. Which is weird because then they tell you that you need to be doing this and this and this and all of this parenting and explaining the earning and doing all of that, and then you sign your life away".

"The back and forth thing really didn't work. It was very intimidating and challenging. I mean you had to sign everything right up front. They need a better information package, just so you know that the information is geared to get you there; doesn't tell, you know, 'if you don't follow through, and you're voluntary and you can't stop there, or we'll take your cheque away'".

"They don't tell you both the 'ins' and the 'outs', they just tell you the 'ins'".

Once they signed the contract, their voluntary or mandatory status becomes irrelevant for the reality that the same rules apply to everyone. The different experiences with registration are the result of power language. Through the power of the state, the teen mothers become completely dependent upon the state. This aspect will be further discussed in the following section on dependency.

### III. Dependency

The final aspect of the power of the state to be considered is dependency. Even though the mandate of the LEAP programme argues that the LEAP programme will provide 'independence' and 'self-reliance' for teen mothers, it becomes apparent that the LEAP programme has increased a sense of dependency. Dependency occurs not only through the programming obligations as the teen mothers become subjected to a loss of financial independence and free time, but also reinforces a gendered notion and stigma of

dependency in regards to single mothers. This programme was designed and justified under the assumption that these teen mothers were and are completely dependent on the state. This section on dependency will first focus upon the challenges of financial dependence upon the state in which the teen mothers are unable to determine their financial 'needs' and will second, evaluate their experiences with a loss of free time as they are forced to meet the expectations of the LEAP programme.

#### A. Financial Responsibility

According to the Municipal Director, the LEAP programme "is a part of a Provincial government restructuring of social services and ultimately it comes from Mike Harris's part of the Blue Book Plan, 'Common Sense Revolution'". The 'Common Sense Revolution' remains an incorporation of business plans, including both the economic expectations for municipalities and the economic intentions of the provincial government to alleviate the deficit and attempt to conduct "business like a business" (Government of Ontario, 2002:1). The idea of the 'common sense revolution' was to become more 'efficient' in spending ('efficient' in terms of economic value). The provincial government began tightening the availability of funds for the welfare state in order to 'reduce' the deficit while attempting to meet the most needs with the least of expense.

The LEAP programme was a product of this approach. The funding for the LEAP programme comes from the teen mothers' Child Tax Benefit, which is approximately \$200 per month, depending on the individual. The teen mothers, once they register for the LEAP programme, lose access to their CTB. This money is given to the municipality and controlled by the Municipal Director who determines the spending for each teen mother.

**According to the Municipal Director:**

**Municipal Director: “The funding comes from the province based on the number of participants at \$3500 per client. If we only spend \$2200 that’s all we get. The money is above and beyond all regular social assistance so they are at a certain level and this is an extra \$3500 available to eliminate barriers to their programmes”.**

**The Municipal Director explained that once the teen mothers deposit their social assistance cheque, the CTB is taken away and absorbed by the provincial government into a LEAP account. This accumulation of CTB deductions enables the government to spend up to \$3500 for each teen mother while they are in the LEAP programme.**

**However, even though this potential \$3500 is more money than the accumulated CTB, the teen mothers do not have daily control over access and spending of this money. In addition, not all the teen mothers achieve access to the full \$3500 while enrolled in the programme. The Ontario conservative government argued that the CTB would be better put to use with social programming for teen mothers, rather than letting teen mothers receive and spend their CTB.**

**Municipal Director: “The LEAP programme for this population, they are still getting their National Child Benefit but the provincial government does take that away but on the other hand the provincial government gives us up to \$3500 extra money to help these people”.**

**Thus, the teen moms are in fact, paying for this programme without the freedom to choose how they wish to spend this income.**

**T.C.: “How does the LEAP programme differ from the universal family allowances programme?”**

**Municipal Director: “In actuality, when the federal government created the NCB, this province decided that because social assistance clients are now receiving that form of baby bonus that that was too much money for someone on social assistance to receive so for somebody that receives NCB allowances it gets taken off their social assistance cheque. The difference from the programmes, federally and provincially, is that the NCB you can go and play bingo with it if you want. This money (LEAP) you cannot, we set**

up an individual plan with you and how it's going to occur and it's towards LEAP activities”.

As for the CTB paying for the LEAP programme, the Municipal Director argues that the ‘needs’ of the teen mothers are better met with the LEAP programme for the reason that LEAP puts teen mothers in touch with other services in the community.

**Municipal Director:** “This programme fits well into that because we did not create activities, we did not create parenting activities, we did not create a new school for these kids to go to. What we did was tap into all the community resources and utilize them, which exposes these young mothers to a whole range of opportunities and activities, things going on that they had no idea and so now they are exposed to it and they are more involved in the community”.

However, this exposure is not by choice. These young parents do not have the time to be attending school full time, fulfilling the parenting and earning requirements, making regular medical check-ups, buying groceries and completing their homework never mind having to travel with their child, book bag, diaper bag and stroller, on the bus, across the city to inquire about what is available in the community. The LEAP participants are dependent on the programme as they are forced to exhaust community programming to meet their needs (i.e. food bank or counseling)<sup>3</sup> rather than having the right to determine their own ‘needs’ and expenses. This claim for greater ‘benefits’ for the teen mothers remains self-gratifying for the state. Even the Municipal Director admits that these teen mothers were a ‘targeted group’ “because they have readily available funding, the Child Tax Benefit”. Heather provided me with a breakdown of her monthly finances.

**Heather (Voluntary):** “The federal part of child tax is removed, and child support is removed, so I get \$725 from O.W., minus \$500 for rent and the rest is for living expenses. I rely on the food bank to eat. I rely on child care subsidy, but they won't cover you while you are looking for work, only if you have a job”.

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<sup>3</sup> The funding for counselling is granted through Ontario Works, as is the number of sessions a parent is granted.

There is no extra time or money available for either. Unfortunately for the teen mothers, the state argues that the \$3500 will only be considered on the basis of request (which is expected to remain confidential) and will go towards:

Childcare, transportation, school supplies, school clothing, educational trips, graduation fees, tutoring, counselling, fees for recreational activities, and other measures which provide positive reinforcement and recognition of achievements (Ministry of Community and Social Services, 2001:9).

The LEAP programme will only pay to address the barriers that challenge the completion of their secondary education. If the teen mothers do have a financial requirement that is relevant to their education (which may include, for example, needing a childcare provider on a weeknight in order to study for an exam or if they need money for prom), the LEAP programme may provide for that. However, if the teen mother fails to request money ahead of time and spends money with hopes of reimbursement, she will not be refunded.

Municipal Director: “If they need a babysitter that they need for a couple of hours because they need to study for an exam the next day, we pay for that. If they need \$10 to go on a school bus trip cause the rest of the class is going we pay for that. All kinds of little things like that. It’s never after the fact though”.

The financial dependency of the teen mothers occurs with the absence of the CTB and the state determining their individual financial needs and how they choose to spend it. The Municipal Director believes that the government is being too lenient with the financial ‘benefits’ believing that the LEAP programme could increase dependency because teens might get pregnant for the benefits they receive from LEAP.

Municipal Director: “The big concern is that this would promote teenagers to get pregnant and get on social assistance cause you could get all this money and get you your grade 12 and teach you how to be a parent and you’ll get a job. So go and get pregnant, that was a big fear when we started the programme. We looked at it and said, is this government nuts? This is gonna promote kids to get pregnant; we are giving them \$3500 a year to get pregnant. Fortunately that hasn’t happened”.

This statement reinforces the Municipal Director's assumptions regarding the position of teen mothers. This concern that teens would 'get pregnant' reinforces the conservative ideology that teen mothers are deviants. The Municipal Director believes that the programme allows too many 'benefits' for the teen mothers, especially the \$3500.

However, not all the teen mothers are able to have access to the \$3500 as it depends upon their contract and proposed needs. Alternatively, if the Program Coordinator and the Municipal Director don't perceive the teen mother's need as a real need then she will not receive the money. Through the LEAP programme the power of the state is perpetuated through assuming the needs of the teen mothers, rather than addressing what the teen mothers perceive their own needs to be.

T.C.: "What do you think are some of the biggest barriers you face today, not only as a mother, but also as a teen?"

Jane (Mandatory): "Money. Cause you have to have food and clothing all the time. You have to have money saved up to do laundry all the time. Have shoes with no holes".

Mandy (Mandatory): "I never have money for myself; I don't have any free time, it all goes to her [daughter]".

Abbey (Mandatory): "Money. You can't afford a babysitter to go out. It would be nice to go out every once in awhile. I know a lot of LEAP clients don't have family around".

The reality for these teen mothers in the LEAP programme reveals their financial dependency on the state. Not only are the teen mothers barely able to make ends meet; they are unable to satisfy their own financial needs.

## B. Loss of Time

Another avenue of dependency is arguably represented in the mandate of the LEAP programme. With the expectations of the individual service plans these young mothers lose sight of their individuality as they no longer have the time to be a family, or

to be teens, and they become exposed to the state's regulations of the LEAP programme. The state reinforces the ideology that they are 'babies having babies' and therefore, are not 'families'. The LEAP programme is intended to be a source of disciplinary action for the teen mothers. They are overloaded with obligations as their decision to attend school full time and find employment is determined for them.

When it comes to free time, the possibilities are slim. These young mothers have very little time to themselves. When I inquired about the pros and cons of the programme, the teen mothers suggested that the required time involved was a disadvantage.

T.C.: "What would you say the pros and cons are?"

Alex (Voluntary): "The pros were that it was pretty flexible and really individual, like if something wasn't working for you, you could just say, 'you know what, this isn't working for me, is there anything else?'. And then start something else. The cons are that there was a lot of time involved and I didn't always appreciate that."

T.C. "What are the biggest problems you face as teen mothers?"

Heather (Voluntary): "Free time: We have a support group and we will pay \$7 for babysitting and that is our free time, which is spent with other people."

T.C.: "What are your weekly requirements?"

Mandy (Voluntary): "I go to parenting classes every Wednesdays. And I am involved with the Mom support group that we have every Monday."

T.C.: "How many hours a week?"

Mandy (Voluntary): "Two or three hours."

These teen mothers do not receive the same rights and opportunities as single parents outside of the LEAP programme. Their 'situated knowledges' demonstrate that the LEAP program determines how they spend their income and time with their children.



## Summary

In this chapter I have shown that the power of the state over the lives of the teen mothers of the LEAP programme has been produced through three practices. First, the power of the state is perpetuated through the practice of power language as it is displayed throughout government documents, 'echoed' by the Municipal Director and practiced by the facilitation of the Program Coordinator. Second, the teen mothers become exposed to a process of registration that reinforces state power over their lives. Third, dependency is enforced in order to control the financial decisions, free time and the options for being a family.

The power of the state is maintained through the top-down use of power language. Power language has been exhibited through government documents and the interview forms and through the power produced by the Municipal Director and the Program Coordinator. This use of power language positions the teen mothers in a role of subordination as they become subjected to the ideologies of the state. The power language reinforces the subordinate position of the teen mothers as they are forced to accept and identify the barriers they face as their own individual problems. The power language reinforces the position of these young parents as a population in 'need' of state intervention and a population that remains undeserving of family status.

The power of the state has also been reinforced through the process of registration. These teen mothers of the LEAP programme are convinced that the LEAP programme is a positive programme. The process of registration reinforces the power of the state as the state determines their 'needs' and determines how many hours they are to be spending in the programme and determines how much of the \$3500 they will be able to access. The

voluntary participants are wary of the process as they are 'sold' into the programme by the 'benefits' and then they 'sign their life away'. Ironically, only five out of forty-seven are mandatory, so forty-two participants were convinced into believing that the programme would benefit their situation. However, once the contract is signed, the teen mothers become wards of the state, losing the ability to make financial and childrearing decisions.

The last component of the power of the state is the perpetuation of dependency that occurs throughout the teen mothers' enrolment in the LEAP programme. The teen mothers are forced to rely on the LEAP programme in order to access their social assistance and access money in order to meet their individual needs. However, all 'needs' are to be questioned by the state as the Program Coordinator and/or the caseworkers can decide whether or not the proposed need is a real need and determines how that need will be met. Unfortunately, there is no reimbursement policy so the state maintains full control over their spending as the decisions to spend money are validated before the event occurs. In addition, the teen mothers become dependent upon the LEAP programme in that they no longer have access to free time. Unfortunately, until they graduate from the LEAP programme their free time will be monopolized with parenting hours, earning hours and learning (going to school full time).

The reconstruction of the welfare state has clearly influenced the lives of these teen mothers. As Gordon, Luxton and Evans would argue, state policies have transformed their position in society from mothers to potential workers in the labour force. They become a population subjected to the 'politicalness' of social policy and transformed into undeserving people. Through a feminist approach the influence of the

**power of the state over the lives of single mothers becomes evident as they are increasingly drawn into dependent state-controlled relationships.**

**However, even with all the state's practices of power language, the process of registration, and their forced dependency, these teen mothers have quietly challenged the programme. The next chapter focuses upon how these teen mothers have participated in challenging the power of the state as they try to resist the constraints and regulations of the programme and gain personal benefits from the programme.**

## **Chapter Five: CHALLENGING THE POWER OF THE STATE**

### **Introduction**

As a consequence of Ontario's reconstruction of the welfare state teen mothers have been confronted with structural and ideological influences of the LEAP programme. In response to these influences the teen mothers have not always fully accepted the power of the state. To gain an understanding of these teen mothers' challenges to the power of the state I examined James C Scott's 'Infrapolitics of Subordinate Groups'. Scott's concept of the 'Infrapolitics of Subordinate Groups' contributes to the understanding of the 'situated knowledges' of the teen mothers of the LEAP programme as it introduces the possibility that subordinate populations can resist without formal organization or overt protest. Scott implies that resistance can be employed through indirect means of daily survival.

Through an analysis of their 'situated knowledges' we can identify how the teen mothers of the LEAP programme have challenged the power of the state. First, the teen mothers have challenged the state through individually disregarding rules and regulations of the programme. This disregard for certain rules has resulted in reinforcing a leniency in policies. Second, the teen mothers have challenged the state through developing personal gains from the programme in opposition to the programme's intent. Third, the teen mothers of the LEAP programme have challenged the power of the state through developing group cohesion. This chapter will include discussions of these three concepts of regarding the teen mothers' experiences with challenging the state.

## I. Leniency of Policies

As the teen mothers of the LEAP programme face the power of the state, including the pressures of control in meeting the state's expectations, the teen mothers have challenged the power of the state through pushing the administration to develop a more lenient approach toward policy. This new adaptation of policies has been a product of the teen mothers' resistance against the regulations of the programme as they attempt to meet their own needs.

### A. Attendance Policy

Each month the teen mothers are required to hand in a statement that verifies their attendance. If they have over fifteen absences in school they are in breach of their 'Individual Service Plan' or 'contract' and are subject to penalty. However, the average number of absences from school was around thirty absences and a penalty has yet to occur.

Alex (Voluntary): "School supported me. I had thirty absences and there is a fifteen-day policy. After fifteen days you have to pay for your child care yourself."

Jane (Mandatory): "Right now I only go twice a week to school. I only go twice a week because I am not too sure on putting my kids in day care."

Heather (Mandatory): "If I didn't have a child I would be expelled by now."

Marnie (Voluntary): "My absences are high, but they (the school) understand."

At the time of the interviews, the Program Coordinator did not provided consequences for the increased absences among the teen mothers. She recognized the absences as legitimate absences.

If the schools begin to give the teen mothers a difficult time, they enrol in the Adult Learning Centre (ALC). The Adult Learning Centre is a registered educational

institution, but attendance is not required; it is structured on the drop-in basis and enables the teen mothers to participate in home studies.

**Alex (Voluntary):** "I started at 'a local high school' and then went on to the adult learning center because they were more flexible. I could go to school all summer if I wanted to or do another programme, 'the earning component'. The adult learning centre had it set up that you could go and sign yourself in and then do your work there, your independent study, and then sign yourself out."

The teen mothers', through their persistence in breaching the fifteen absence allowance, and their personal decisions to attend ALC, assisted in pushing for a leniency in policy, as the Program Coordinator accepts the attendance records and grade reports without repercussions for the teen mothers.

#### **B. The Earning Component**

As a part of the 'Individual Service Plans' or 'contracts' the teen mothers are required to participate in an earning component. This component consists of:

...the development of employment skills through school co-op programmes, youth apprenticeship and job shadowing, as well as part-time and summer employment (Ministry of Community and Social Services, 2001:7).

The earning component of the LEAP programme requires the teen mothers to be working part time, especially during the summer months in order to maintain their access to social assistance. In response to these state expectations the teen mothers have resisted the earning component requirements. Out of the teen mothers I interviewed only Mandy (mandatory) worked part time, approximately three hours a week. According the Program Coordinator the majority of the teen mothers do not have employment. The resistance among the teen mothers has occurred through refusing employment altogether or for some teen mothers, participating in an employment programme in order to maintain their social assistance over the summer months. Heather and Mandy, both

mandatory, participated in the eight-week employment programme that focuses upon job search strategies and employment maintenance, even though they were not really interested in employment. The Program Coordinator allowed them to participate in the programme and still receive their social assistance.

As a result of the teen mothers' resistance, the Programme Coordinator developed some empathy towards the young moms and enabled the teen mothers not to be employed or fully complete their earning component until they were ready.

Program Coordinator: "About a percentage are working. There are quite a few that would be open to part-time opportunities, but if they're attending school full time, they really want to be with their babies. So they really struggle with that, which is really normal for any parent."

T.C.: "Do you think it should be a priority for single mothers to be employed?"

Program Coordinator: "It depends on the age of the children. I think it ultimately should be up to parents of children who are under school age to determine whether or not they want to be at home or not. Day care costs and availability are very limited in our area, and transportation, I mean if the government is going to mandate that these parents have their children in day care and employed, then the government needs to provide transportation, accessibility and spaces and if that is not available, then it shouldn't be mandated."

Abbey insisted that she did not have the time for fulfilling the demands of the earning component. In response to her demands, the Program Coordinator enabled Abbey to complete the component following her graduation.

Abbey (Mandatory): "I was told not to worry about the earning component until the end. They told me that I could leave my earning until after I graduate school and then I would participate in the 'employability' programme which is employability for youth, which will go towards my earning."

These forms of resistance occurred both unobtrusively and overtly or covertly, as some teen mothers just did not have time for employment or job searching. Their resistance has influenced the Program Coordinator into believing that it is important for

these teen mothers to want to spend time with their children outside of the programme's obligations and if the need and desire is there for 'quality time' with their children, the Program Coordinator, depending on the individual situation, would support it.

### C. Personal Gains

The strongest challenges against the power of the state remain in the personal gains of the teen mothers. All the participants that I interviewed had accepted the LEAP programme for its benefits, some being more open to the programme than others. Nonetheless, all have been very tolerant of the government and tentatively appreciative that the programme exists. The personal gains include the material gains of the programme, such as the city bus pass, the subsidized childcare, the school clothing allowance, and the \$500 graduation incentive, in addition to the structure (which only two moms appreciated) and opportunity of meeting other teen moms.

During the interviews, the teen mothers vocalized the positive aspects of the programme.

#### 1. Alex - Voluntary

T.C.: "Do you feel you have benefited from the programme?"

Alex: "Yes, I benefited from the programme."

T.C.: "How do you feel your life has changed since the programme?"

Alex: "I went to college."

T.C.: "Would you have gone to college without the programme?"

Alex: "Yes, but LEAP helped out along the way. There is a transition period after you receive your \$500 in which you can still maintain a bus pass if they believe you are in need. However, I withdrew from the programme at that time because I wasn't receiving any of the benefits that were available."

T.C.: "How do you feel about the programme?"



Alex: "When I first started the programme, I didn't want to be able to trust anything. I didn't believe a single thing the Program Coordinator said. It was so bad, and now, Yay LEAP!! When I was in it (Alex has now graduated from the LEAP programme), it (her schedule) changed a lot because I had to meet my requirements. I was really, really leery of that in the beginning because I thought I was doing enough. In the beginning it was really challenging because I didn't like it, but then you start getting into a couple of good parenting classes and it works out, it gets better."

Though positive about the programme, Alex demonstrated that the main reason that the voluntary participants joined LEAP was for the material benefits. Once all of the benefits are satisfied, including the \$500 graduation bonus, the participants withdraw from the programme.

## 2. Heather - Voluntary

T.C.: "Has LEAP helped you deal with being a single mom and accept it more than you would have before you became a parent?"

Heather: "Yes, I'm sure it has, but the programme itself needs a lot of work. They get a lot of people in, like the budgeting course, people that really kinda makes us feel like outcasts, because everybody may be mortgage and car payment and we are diapers and formula. But LEAP helps you fit into society and makes you feel confident with new clothes and new supplies and gives us something to strive for."

T.C.: "So how do you feel about the programme?"

Heather: "You can get a lot out of LEAP, and out of the programme, if you want to. If you are mandatory, and you're being told you have to, you don't want to, and you are only going to get out of it what you want. So, you get a lot of things for your kid, and school supplies for you, child care, the bonus, they also pay for extra things, like they pay for prom, so that you can participate, they pay for school field trips. I took a college course and they paid for that. So it is benefiting you, and it was education. I think it has made me grow as an individual. LEAP helps you live. LEAP offers cooking classes if you want. A lot of the clients don't want the stuff you can learn through LEAP. A lot of them just want the stuff (bus pass and YMCA membership)."

Heather is a strong believer in LEAP as she appreciates the material gains it provides for the participants but believes LEAP needs more structure. Following the interview, she said that someday she would 'love' to start up a LEAP programme of her own with the changes she believes are needed.

### 3. Marnie - Voluntary

T.C.: "How do you feel about the programme overall? Do you feel you are benefiting from the programme?"

Marnie: "Yup, I do. I think that as many people who can get into the programme should. It's incredible. The government never used to help single moms as much as they are with this programme. If you need anything they are there. As long as you don't take advantage of it I think it is really good. She gives us money for school supplies, diapers, anything. They can help you with it. I am so glad that this programme is available for people."

T.C.: "What do you think the pros and cons are?"

Marnie: "I don't think that there are any cons. But, like pros are everything I already said and more."

T.C.: "Do you think it is an effective programme?"

Marnie: "Yes. I haven't really been in it that long, but everything that they do is so positive. I never thought that there would ever be a programme like this. I was always so depressed and so low because I needed a ride here or needed groceries. If I needed diapers then I know that 'the Program Coordinator' would be there to help me. I don't know of anything that I could change. I think it is all really good".

T.C.: "Do you consider yourself to be a family?"

Marnie: "Yup! My mom and I were a family too. My mom was a single mom".

T.C.: "Did you feel this positively about your situation (as a single teen mom) before you entered LEAP?"

Marnie: "No. Well, I did think positively, otherwise I wouldn't be able to do it if I didn't. LEAP gave me reassurance. Before I joined LEAP I didn't think as positively about my situation as I do now. But I always thought society was getting a little bit better."

T.C.: "Do you think LEAP has changed the way you understand teen parenthood?"

Marnie: "Yup, I think I am more confident now."

At the time of the interview, Marnie had only been in the programme for three weeks.

Marnie was "impressed that a programme like LEAP exists", a programme to promote the acceptance of teen mothers in society. However, Marnie also believes that the

earning component consisted of a monetary reward for completing parenting hours, such as receiving a new stroller or a material item.

#### 4. Abbey - Mandatory

T.C.: "How do you feel about the programme?"

Abbey: "My schedule has been enhanced, definitely enhanced, because now I am going to school and I wasn't before, and I am doing parenting, which I wasn't before, and the child care comes in really handy. And I do the mothers support group every other Monday. It sounds confusing, but it's not!"

T.C.: "So, how do you feel about the programme overall?"

Abbey: "I like it!" "The Program Coordinator actually explained to me the whole thing. Which was pretty good because I wanted to go back to school. She told me about all the little bonuses you get and I was like 'yay!'"

T.C.: "Have you had any discrimination in society for being a teen mom?"

Abbey: "The odd case. I found it worse when I was pregnant. I get looked down on as irresponsible, a rebellion. I found it a lot when I was pregnant. But now, even older people are really good to us."

T.C.: "Do you feel LEAP as helped you?"

Abbey: "Yes, for both meeting new moms, I love having people say 'they totally understand what I am going through', and LEAP gives us a lot."

Abbey supports the LEAP programme for the reason that she believes that it is 'good' for her. She believes that if it weren't for the programme she would not have gone back to school. In addition to the structure Abbey appreciates the programme for enabling her to meet other teen moms.

#### 5. Mandy - Mandatory

T.C.: "Do you feel you are benefiting from the programme?"

Mandy: "Yes, I like it a lot."

T.C.: "What would you say the pros and cons are?"

**Mandy:** "Pros: They take care of everything, like counselling, they pay for that too. Bus passes, childcare, that's really good. Because I am in school it is paid for. And it is fun, they give you a lot". "It helps you feel better about being a mom because you get to meet other moms that are your age". "Cons: If you could change anything, what would it be? That's a toughy. I don't know. They help you out a lot."

**T.C.:** "So overall what are your thoughts of your situation as a teen mother?"

**Mandy:** "It's been good. I like it."

**T.C.:** "Do you consider yourselves to be a family?"

**Mandy:** "Oh, yeah, we are!"

Throughout the interview, Mandy remained reserved in her description of the programme. She commented that 'it is a lot of work but that she likes to be busy'. Mandy justifies the government's objectives in believing that she is in need of the programme; she 'never wants to leave LEAP'. She was going to school full time and working part time before she was mandated into the LEAP programme. Nonetheless, Mandy believes the programme is positive for the reason that it enabled her to meet other teen moms. For both Abbey and Mandy the personal gains included the idea of meeting other teen moms. Both Abbey and Mandy are without family in area so they rely on other teen moms for the support they need.

#### 6. Jane - Mandatory

**T.C.:** "What are the advantages and disadvantages?"

**Jane:** "Well, at first I didn't like it because I was forced to put [daughter] in day care. I didn't like it at first because they were forcing me to go to school. But now it is not so bad. Now I'm used to it. And now my daughter is starting to like day care so, it's pretty good."

**T.C.:** "Do you think it is an effective programme?"

**Jane:** "Oh ya. The kids have fun. They help you get a job and I would rather be working than in school."

T.C.: "If you could make any changes to the programme what would they be?"

Jane: "Nothing really; it is pretty good."

T.C.: "Do you think participants should be mandatory?"

Jane: "Ya. There are a lot of teenagers out there that are too dumb to ask for help."

T.C.: "Where do you think all of this negative attitude towards teen parents stems from?"

Jane: "The government. They downgrade teen mothers saying that all this is out there for you, don't have kids, but there is not. There is nothing out there at all. There is no programmes out there for kids so there is nothing else to do. They are going to do something."

T.C.: "So do you think LEAP has improved the situation of teen mothers and the way people think about teen moms?"

Jane: "Ya, they have parenting programmes for us to go to. They get us out and doing stuff. I see a lot of teen moms going back to school."

Jane was the oldest teen mom I interviewed. Jane blames the government for teen parenthood. She suggests that teens are going to have children if nothing else in the community is available for them to do. She believes that our community needs some type of recreation area that is free of charge for youth. Jane believed the programme was positive for the reason that it encouraged teen moms to return to school and graduate with their OSSD. However, Jane remains opposed to the idea of having to return to school.

Another source of personal gain was expressed by graduating participants and their intentions for the near future.

Program Coordinator: "We've had a number of graduates go on to college. So far as childcare they still qualify for subsidized childcare because they are students. We do have some LEAP participants who have just graduated and that's it, there was no motivation to continue on with education, there really was no motivation to get a job, to get employment right away, and as long as their little ones are under school age some of them just want to be at home with them. I do notice at some of the young parent drop-ins that we have that they are continuing to attend; they have built relationships with maybe other young parents or the people running the drop-ins so they continue to do the

parenting component, which, in my view, is number one anyway. They have every right to choose to stay home.”

The parenting component that was experienced by Alex and Heather had a major, positive impact on them. The skills they learned increased their desires for having another child. Alex is 21, and now has a partner. At age 21 they are discussing family planning for her second child.

T.C.: “Do you like being a mom?”

Alex: “I do, I like being a mom! It’s different when you are a teen mom though, because you are not supposed to enjoy it. You’re a teen on welfare. You’re evil!! That’s really hard to get used to. And like now, everything now is great. Financially things are great. I have a partner now that just finished college and has a full time job. And we are now discussing family planning (intent to have another child) and through the eyes of society, we are not supposed to and that is hard.”

Heather, now that she has graduated and is on her way college, is moving in with the father of her child who lives and works out of town. She is also considering ‘family planning’ as a result of the parenting classes. The parenting classes have increased her confidence about being a parent.

T.C.: “How do you like being a mom?”

Heather: “I like it! I wouldn’t do it again at 15, for sure, but I feel really confident. Like, I want a bunch more kids now! I am that much more confident as a parent now, where I can say ‘I can do it’! I have taken my parenting classes I know the parenting styles that I have. I think LEAP parents are more educated than other parents! We get infant massage courses. We get the scientific methods of development like ‘cognitive development’. Other people are like ‘what’s that’. We get a lot of child development. It makes me feel special to know all of this. I like it!”

Unfortunately the parenting component that was offered by the original Program Coordinator that both Alex and Heather experienced is no longer being offered. The parenting sessions attended by the other teen mothers were not as positive. The attendance is very low.

The major consensus among the teen mothers is that each parent has experienced a personal benefit. Against the power of the state, the teen mothers were able to define their own needs in response to the state restrictions: they were able to graduate from secondary school, have their child care paid for, receive a city bus pass which increased their freedom and, most importantly, they have learned to find the positive in some situations and resist other situations that undermine their identity. The next section will discuss the contributions of the teen mothers as they have come together to challenge the power of the state.

### III. Group Cohesion

The participants of the LEAP programme introduced and created, on their own, a personal support group. Through this collective action, the teen mothers were able to find a donated location for their meetings, have LEAP subsidize their childcare, and create a group meeting where these young moms are able to be themselves. Through the personal support group they are able to address their needs that are not addressed in the LEAP programme, including makeovers, holiday decorating and cooking classes.

The personal support group is very new. At the time of these interviews, the attendance for the support group was low as the new LEAP participants were apprehensive about putting more time and energy into the programme. The support group provides an opportunity for the teen mothers to regain control over their identity against the influences of the power of the state. The members of the group have a chance to discuss the 'needs' and concerns regarding the LEAP programme and gain strength through their power in numbers. The support group enables their voices to be heard and accepted without the threat of repercussion.

But most importantly, the personal support group provides these young teen mothers the opportunity for friendships, and a chance to feel 'normal' and accepted as they share similar experiences<sup>4</sup>. The personal support group provides the teen mothers with reassurance and the chance to learn that someone else understands what they are going through. As Abbey (Mandatory) says: "I love having people say they 'totally understand what I am going through'."

### Summary

The teen mothers in the LEAP programme, in their own individual way have been able to resist some of the influences and pressures that derive from the power of the state. Through the transformation of the rules, the teen mothers have attempted to define their own needs as families as they attempt to spend time with their child(ren) outside of school, and challenge the regulations of the programme. With the different and unique forms of resistance, the teen mothers challenged the policies and their contracts in order to meet their own individual needs and the needs of their child(ren).

Through the reinforcement of the leniency in policy, the teen mothers pushed for policy modification or found other means to meet their own personal needs and the needs of the state (e.g. enrolling in ALC). The teen mothers challenged the state through failing to meet the demands of the programme intentionally and unintentionally, including the increase in absences and or changing school systems to avoid the repercussions of attendance. In addition, the teen mothers challenged the state through assuming the material benefits as personal gains. I argue that this form of challenge remains 'infrapolitical' for reasons that the actions were not always intentional. The teen mothers

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<sup>4</sup> Following this research I became aware that the support group had been terminated as a result of influences from the Program Coordinator and Municipal Director.



participated in all that they could and focused on where their individual needs pertain (schooling, parenting or employment).

The teen mothers in the programme began collaborating in order to share stories and concerns about their lives as teen moms in the LEAP programme. This cohesion enabled the moms to begin a support group. This source of 'infrapolitics' satisfied the emotional needs of the teen mothers, as they were able to generate support and power among themselves. It remains a pattern of successful overt resistance. Heather summarizes her experience in the words that are expressed by all the teen mothers.

Heather (Voluntary): "My overall experience has been pretty good."

T.C: "Has LEAP helped out with that?"

Heather: "Yes, because I got to meet other teen moms, and you know you're not alone; a lot of friendship supports."

**Chapter Six:****CONCLUSION**

In Canada, the early 1990s was a period of social change as both the federal and provincial governments began participating in the reconstruction of the welfare state. This process of reconstruction was comprised of the introduction of new social policies and programming that reshaped societal ideologies as the government claimed the need for deficit reduction. In order to reduce the national deficit, the Chretien government dismantled the cost-sharing policies between the federal government and the provinces, dismantled the Canadian Assistance Plan, introducing 'Welfare-to-Work', and replaced the family allowances programme with the CTB programme. These policies have reflected ideologies that identify impoverished populations, particularly single teen mothers on social assistance, as a 'undeserving' and dependent population and contributors to the national deficit.

Following the lead of the federal government, the Progressive Conservative government of Ontario, which was elected in 1995, began reconstructing the welfare state in Ontario introducing neo-conservative policies that revived societal ideologies similar to those of the nineteenth century. During the period of Confederation, state representatives argued that through industrialization all citizens would have an opportunity for success, "that work was available for everyone who wanted it, and that those who would not work had no claim on society" (Wallace, 1995:16). The state argued that impoverishment was not the responsibility of the state but the responsibility of the individual. Similarly today, "the traditional conservative doctrine of individualism has even suggested that public subsidization to the poor stifles their initiative, robs them of their sense of self-responsibility, helps create parasites and destroys the moral fiber of

society” (Yelaja, 1978:8). Thus, the traditional conservative rhetoric has been reinvigorated by *Ontario Works*, following the lead of the federal government’s *Welfare-to-Work* initiative.

The social policies derived through *Ontario Works* remain appropriate to the ‘common sense revolution’, or the ‘blue book plan’ in which the Ontario government has introduced the idea that all people on welfare are ‘able-bodied’ workers in need of employment justifying cutbacks to the welfare state. Thus, *Ontario Works* identified the ‘1.3 million, able-bodied’ individuals on welfare (Canadian News Wire, 2001) as a population that should be working in the labour force. Among the identified populations were teen mothers. In order to justify the reconstruction to the welfare state and the need for programming for teen mothers, the provincial government introduced teen mothers as a ‘target population’ in need of ‘independence’, ‘dignity’ and ‘self-reliance’. Through incorporating the neo-conservative language to justify their reconstruction, the conservative government announced their willingness to *spend* ‘25 million dollars’ to enable teen mothers to achieve a life free from social assistance (Ministry of Community and Social Services, 2000).

In 1999, Ontario’s teen mother population was confronted with the LEAP programme. Teen mothers, on social assistance, under the age of 18, are mandatory participants. If they choose not to participate they will lose their access to social assistance/welfare. Teen mothers, aged 18 –21, on social assistance are voluntary participants. However, once the contract is signed, the voluntary participants are subject to the same rules and regulations as the mandatory participants.

So how has the LEAP programme influenced the lives of the teen mothers? What implications does the introduction of the LEAP programme have on their lives and their identity? In order to understand how the reconstruction of the welfare state has influenced teen mothers, I needed to understand teen mothers through their 'situated knowledges'. Donna Haraway's concept of 'situated knowledges' enabled me to gain an understanding of how the reconstruction of the welfare state has influenced the identities of teen mothers, based upon their individual experiences, contradictions and biases, and individual realities -- their 'rational knowledge' (Haraway, 1997).

In order to gain access to their 'situated knowledges', including the contradictions and biases, I conducted an 'instrumental case study' (Berg, 1998). The 'instrumental case study', along with 'active interviewing' (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995) enabled me to interview the Municipal Director, the Program Coordinator and six teen mothers and interpret their 'situated knowledges'. Through combining the theoretical framework of Donna Haraway's 'situated knowledges' and the 'active interviewing' I discovered the influences that the reconstruction of the welfare state has had on teen mothers. I learned the contradictions of the 'situated knowledges' that included the teen mothers' experiences as a subordinate group under the power of the state and their experiences with challenging the power of the state.

Through the interviews I found that the teen mothers experienced three major influences of the power of the state. One, they have experienced the power of the state through the state's application of power language, which I have defined as language used by the government to implement policy changes and to reinforce their political agenda. Two, experienced the power of the state through the process of registration. And three,

the teen mothers have been exposed to the power of the state through the increased dependency that was perpetuated by the LEAP programme.

The influences of power language were determined through an analysis of the language used throughout Ontario Works documents and the language used by the Municipal Director and Program Coordinator who both echoed the language of the state. For example, the teen mothers of the LEAP programme are perceived by the Municipal Director to be 'bingo players', that this population comes from inter-generational welfare families, and he believes that with the introduction of the LEAP program 'teen girls' would become pregnant on purpose. Being a representative of the state, the Municipal Director reinforced the state's perception of single mothers and justified that teen mothers are a dependent on the welfare state. He believes the LEAP programme should be mandatory for all single parents on social assistance up to the age of 21, rather than being mandatory for teen mothers under the age of 18 on social assistance. The Program Coordinator also believes that it should be a mandatory programme for all teen parents up to the age of 21 on social assistance. The Program Coordinator determines the teen mothers' barriers, and their required expectations while in the programme and makes sure that each teen mother is complying with the regulations of the programme.

The influence of the reconstruction of the welfare state on teen mothers was experienced with the process of registration. The voluntary teen mothers registered in the programme out of self-interest. They were informed about the material gains, for example, the bus pass, school supplies, school and employment clothing, childcare subsidies, and a \$500 graduation bonus. The mandatory teen mothers were forced into registering for the programme by their Ontario Works caseworker, they were told that

they would “have to register”. This difference in the introduction of the programme exemplifies how the state manipulates their position over targeted populations in order to succeed in their goal; the greater number of participants, the greater amount of funding the municipality receives.

The LEAP programme was intended to create self-reliance and independence among teen mothers on social assistance. However, the programme perpetuates dependency. The lives of the teen mothers in the LEAP programme are controlled by a contract that is filled out and approved by the Program Coordinator and Municipal Director. This contract determines how many hours of each component (learning, earning and parenting) the teen mothers require and how much funding will be approved. On top of having to attend school full time, these young mothers are forced to participate in parenting hours, and employment or employment training, and if they need money they need to ask for permission from the program coordinator. In order to receive access to the \$3500, which is an accumulation of the CTB’s that are taken off the checks of the teen mothers on social assistance, the teen mothers need to consult the Program Coordinator for her validation that the chosen spending is ‘appropriate’. If they fail to comply to the regulations of the programme, for example, if the teen mothers had more than fifteen absences in school, missed a parenting class or failed to find employment or gain job experience, they could become subjected to losing their access to their social assistance. In addition, once they have registered for the programme, and signed the contract determining the amount of hours required for each component of the programme, both the voluntary and mandatory teen mothers are controlled by the state until they graduate from high school, which for some, may be indefinitely.

In response to the power of the state, the teen mothers have resisted. This resistance remains unobtrusive, as the teen mothers do not fully accept the programme. They took a pro-active approach to resist against the goals of the programme in order to meet their own needs. They resisted against the hours required for the programme, and their loss of independence. As a result the teen mothers had over fifteen absences in school, refused to find employment and did not attend all their required parenting classes. These micro forms of resistance needed to be addressed as the teen mothers did not fully comply to the demands of the programme, they did not fully accept it. The teen mothers in this municipality transformed their participation to meet their own individual needs by focusing upon the positive aspects of the programme. The teen mothers found positive aspects in the LEAP programme beyond the material gains. They had the opportunity to meet other teen mothers, they felt more confident to have more children, and two have gone off to college. Two of the mandatory teen mothers, Abbey and Marnie liked the structure, as they did not have family or emotional support outside of the programme.

Overall, the teen mothers liked the idea that the government has created a programme for them. However, they also believe that the programme is in need of change and re-evaluation. As Alex puts it "the programme is not meeting all of their need by far". Alex and Heather addressed their interest in opening up their own LEAP programme some day. Their idea of a LEAP programme is intended to meet the needs of all parents, a programme that is open for all families without the restrictions and regulations of Ontario's LEAP programme policies. Alex and Heather believed in a more universal programme that has both administrators and counselors available to meet the needs of all parents and families. These results are important because in my opinion, it

**exemplifies how neo-liberal policies and programs are created without hearing the voices from the population, which the policies are directed towards. If the government approached the population in attempt to address their needs before implementing the policies, the chances of meeting the needs of the population may be that much greater.**

**I heretore, through the voices of the 'situated knowledges' we have learned that the introduction of the LEAP programme into the lives of teen mothers has had both structural and ideological influences on their identities. They have experienced the structural influences of the LEAP programme as they are forced to participate in the learning, earning and parenting components, losing their financial freedom and time and the ability to make their own decisions regarding their daily needs. Ideologically the teen mothers have been influenced as the state informs them of their needs and barriers and places them in a subordinate position in which they hope society transforms their opinions of teen motherhood. Regardless of whether the teen mothers are mandatory or voluntary, the reconstruction of the welfare state has influenced the identities and realities of teen mothers both positively, as they receive material gains and gain contact with other teen mothers, as well as negatively, as they have become subjected to being placed in a subordinate position against society and the state.**

**I proposed that this study would create new knowledge regarding the implementation of the LEAP programme in Ontario and its influences on teen mothers, and that the knowledge would be based upon the voices of the teen mothers who were participating in the LEAP programme. The value of this study is the knowledge that has been gained through the voices of the teen mothers of the LEAP programme.**



This study produced knowledge that is based upon the 'rational knowledge' of the teen mothers who participated in the research. The 'rational knowledge' increased the value of the study as the voices of the teen mothers reinforce the sociological contentions of social stratification and inequality that exists throughout our society in respect to single motherhood. As a result, this research has produced knowledge that can be influential not only for the discipline of sociology as it points out the reality of gendered 'dependency' in government rhetoric but also in affirming the voices and the 'situated knowledges' of the teen mothers as 'rational knowledge'. This study is valuable insofar as it provides the marginalized population of teen mothers a positive space in which to speak out about their experiences in the LEAP programme and reinforced my belief that programming and policy needs to be delivered from the bottom up, grassroots, in order to meet the needs of populations. The voices from targeted populations need to be considered in order to educate policy makers on their real needs and desires, which will help in breaking down negative ideologies and discrimination.

Regarding the need for future research, it would be useful to hear from the mandatory teen mothers whom I interviewed after they have graduated from the programme. The teen mothers who were mandatory were the most influenced by the LEAP programme. They were unable to perceive their situation outside of the programme; Mandy and Jane didn't realize that they were working towards graduating from the programme. It would be interesting to hear from these teen mothers following their graduation from the programme once they were no longer constrained by the dictates of the programme.

Finally, since the LEAP programme has only been in progress for two years, there are no reports available regarding the success or failures of the programme in other parts of the province. At the time of the interviews, the programme had not been under review. It would be important to see, provincially, how many teen mothers are participating in the programme across Ontario, including the number of mandatory over voluntary participants. A study of the LEAP programme in other municipalities would put into perspective the need for the mandatory programme, the different ways in which the programme operates, and the variation in experiences of the teen mothers in the province.

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