

## Poverty and Power

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### The Moral Regulation of Single Mother University Students

*The university was designed with the traditional student in mind. Students who are sole-support parents often have difficulties negotiating their experiences and expectations as a student with those that arise as a parent. This paper uses institutional ethnographic interviews conducted in the summer and fall of 2011 with eight single mothers who are postsecondary students in order to better understand the barriers that they face while obtaining a postsecondary education. This paper explores the theme of power and moral regulation from the interviews. I begin by describing the concept of moral regulation and use this concept as a theoretical base to explore the experiences of shame, violence, scrutiny, stigma and resistance that arose throughout the interviews and in the literature.*

Kimberly Rogers, a woman from Sudbury, Ontario, was convicted of welfare fraud for collecting from both Ontario Works and the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) at the same time (Chunn and Gavigan 329). When she began college in 1996, many students received assistance from both social assistance and student loans at the same time. She continued to collect both forms of assistance after these policies were changed in 1997, making it illegal to access both programs simultaneously. She pleaded guilty to fraud and was put under house arrest and deemed ineligible for further assistance, leaving her without any form of income and no way to earn money. When her benefits were reinstated, she was left with only eighteen dollars a month after rent (Chunn and Gavigan 329). The conviction resulted in a criminal record, making it difficult for her to find work in the social services field. Kimberly Rogers died during a heat wave on August 11, 2011; she was eight months pregnant at the time (Yourk).

According to the coroner's inquest, the official cause was a prescription drug overdose (Chunn and Gavigan 329). Locating the problem with Kimberly Rogers as an individual, the inquest's findings removed her death from its relational context. The fraud conviction and house arrest were important factors in her death, as was the perception of her being a criminal perpetuated by the media.

In Ontario, until 1997, single parents could attend college or university while obtaining student loans to pay tuition and social assistance to pay for their living expenses such as rent and groceries. Fifteen years after Rogers' death, the two programs remain incompatible despite the Ontario Works and the Ontario Student Assistance Program's inability to provide for the needs of many students, especially those with dependent children.

In this paper, I describe the concept of *moral regulation* and use it as a theoretical base to show how it impacts the everyday lives of single-mother university students. I discuss some of the consequences of moral regulation described by single mother students including their experiences of violence, criminalization, and isolation. I then discuss the construction of the *welfare mother* and the stigmatization of single mothers living in poverty. From here, I move to the idea of empowerment and critique neoliberal notions of escaping poverty if one works hard enough. I show empowerment as a complex form of power where single-mother students negotiate and resist moral regulatory notions of what it means to be a "good" mother from within and beyond academe. I will also discuss strategies that policy makers and university administrators can use to make obtaining a degree more accessible to single mothers.

I used institutional ethnographic methods in this research, as developed by Dorothy Smith (2005). I interviewed eight single-mother university students in the summer and fall of 2011. Interviews lasted up to four hours each. The participating women enrolled in university while they were the sole-support parent or primary caregiver to at least one child. Participants ranged in age from early twenties to late forties and all considered themselves to be low income, although that was not a condition to participate in the study. Five participants had one child, two had two children, and one had three children. The children's ages ranged from two to nineteen years old at the time of the interviews. All but one of the participants identified as Caucasian; the other identified as Aboriginal. Out of all the children, two were Aboriginal and three were Black. Two of the women identified as LGBTQ and two had disabilities, which they disclosed in the interviews.

I use quotes from the interviews throughout the article to support the theories and literature. This research was approved by the Laurentian University Research Ethics Board.

## Moral Regulation

Moral regulation combines disciplinary power, which produces families in specific ways, (Foucault) and more repressive forms of power and punishment (Brock). Glasbeek describes it as the “modern, secular equivalent of religious fervour in maintaining social order” (2). Moral regulation establishes “disciplinary regimes, including a system of rewards and punishments” (Brock xxvi) to encourage certain behaviours while discouraging others.

In establishing specific policies—from the Poor Laws of England, which legislated workhouses in the early nineteenth century (Swanson), to the Harris government’s *Ontario Works Act*—state and class relations have effectively perpetuated inequalities in order to maintain a certain moral order: middle-class nuclear families are held as standard, and those that do not fit are punished (Little). For single mothers, “the language used when describing nonmarital birth—illegitimacy, out-of-wedlock pregnancy/birth, and unmarried or unwed mother—indicate both the character of the norm-violation and the strong social disapproval attaching to it” (Hunken 22).

Hunken describes a culture of single motherhood based, not on the lived experiences of single mothers, but on the negative stereotypes that surround them. For example, single mothers are believed to be sexually promiscuous, dependent on welfare, and responsible for various social ills. They are often portrayed as “lazy, unwilling to work, and as bad parents” and accused of “purposely giving birth to more children to increase their welfare checks” (Hunken 25). These perceptions tell mothers that they are not deserving of going to college (Hunken 27), which not only legitimizes the inadequate funding of education but also reveals a two-tiered system of social programs in Ontario. Programs tied to employment in the paid workforce provide more funding and less stigmatization than Ontario Works or OSAP programs (Evans).

Capitalism has a vested interest in upholding a standard where the poor are seen as morally dubious and not deserving of help. For instance, poverty effectively maintains pool of workers willing to work dangerous jobs for low wages (Little 239). By bringing moral character into question, the focus shifts from an unjust system to flawed individuals. This ideology encourages low-income individuals to conform to the middle-class ideal, regardless of whether this ideal is attainable.

## Moral Regulation through Welfare Snitch Lines

Moral regulation at works through the use of crime-prevention phone lines, or snitch lines, which encourage neighbours to report on each other. Bob Rae’s NDP government implemented telephone lines to report suspected cases of welfare

fraud in the 1990s. They were further expanded under the Harris government's austerity regime. Anyone suspecting that a person on social assistance might be committing fraud can anonymously call these lines (Little 250). The most common use for them is reporting a single mother for having a man in her home because if she is having a sexual relationship with a man, the belief is that he should be financially supporting her (Little 250-1).

Single mothers need to regulate how they present themselves all the time. If their children are not clean, their parenting skills become suspect. But if they are dressed too nicely, it is assumed that they are not disclosing all of their income to the welfare office, or that they must be living with a man who is supporting them (Little 174). Several participants shared experiences with these reporting lines:

*I got a phone call one night from [children's aid]. Apparently, the daycare called and said that I was neglecting [my child] because his face isn't clean. His face wasn't clean because he eats breakfast in the stroller on the way to daycare because we are too rushed in the morning to do it at home, I mean, at least you can tell he is fed, right? So now I have to buy these expensive wipes and wash his face outside before we go in. I don't think this would happen to a doctor's kid.*

Another participant had a similar experience:

*My son was outside for five minutes on a school day, he was on part days and a neighbour called children's aid and told them my kid was home playing outside all day when he should be at school. Children's aid had to call the school to make sure I wasn't keeping him home.*

Through forms of normalization and surveillance, as symbolized by these snitch lines, we learn to discipline ourselves, which is even truer for low-income families.

### Poverty as Violence

There are real consequences for people who do not conform to this middle-class standard that go beyond the perception that they are morally dubious. The levels of poverty forced upon single mothers can be described as *violent* considering the toll that hunger takes on people's bodies and minds. Social class is inscribed on the body of poor single mothers. Adair compares this experience to getting a higher education. She describes how poverty remained *written* on her body, and how that changed through the process of obtaining a PhD. Just as Foucault shows that discipline often produces docile bodies, Adair de-

scribes examples of how “poor single mothers and their children are physically inscribed, punished, and displayed as the dangerous and pathological Other” (28). She lists many examples: the scars resulting from unaffordable health care; the crooked and sometimes rotting teeth appearing from a lack of accessible dental care; the twisted, misshapen feet developing from not having the right kind of shoes; and the ill-fitting clothing and unkempt hair—which do not conform to middle-class standards—stemming from a lack of time and money.

Several participants had similar experiences:

*I need braces but I still cannot afford them. My daughter’s teeth are growing in crooked, and it pains me to know that I may not be able to afford to get her braces, either. I feel like our teeth scream out to tell the world that we are poor.*

Another participant said:

*I have a hernia that I can’t have fixed because of my weight. [The doctor] said they can’t operate unless I lose weight, but I can’t lose weight because it hurts too much to exercise and the specialists are too expensive... I don’t know what I’m going to do.*

Poor bodies mark the poor as distinct from those who present as middle class, and those same bodies are interpreted as proof of an inner pathology and immorality, suggesting a need for further discipline (Adair 35). Five of the eight women participants mentioned violent experiences with a male partner without my even asking about domestic violence. One participant mentioned needing an education in order to leave her spouse:

*I felt like I needed to [go to university], in order to break away from [ex], it was going to be contingent on me getting more education so I could get a better job to support myself.*

Another participant expressed a real fear that she would have to return to an abusive partner if she had a problem with her benefits:

*My ex was really abusive, emotionally, verbally, financially, physically. In counselling, they showed us this wheel with eight points of violence and he had them all covered. Before I had an education, I was afraid that if welfare cut me off, if I lost my OSAP, if I had a health issue I couldn’t afford, I would have no choice but to go back to him. Now, I have a degree. I feel like I should be able to support myself and my kids.*

A vast literature on violence against women and poverty-related violence against women exists, but none connects violence and poverty to the experience of being woman students. Women living in poverty have more difficulty living apart from abusive relationships, and student poverty is so prevalent that it is often romanticized. This reality creates significant barriers for improving the safety of single-mother students and their children.

### Welfare as Fraud

If social assistance is too comfortable, as commonly believed, recipients will not look for paid work (Swanson 75). According to this belief, paid work needs to be rewarded using the principle of less eligibility: benefits must be no higher than the lowest-paid jobs (Little 2). This way of thinking is based on the assumption that needing welfare *is* fraud, which acts as a means of disciplining people living in poverty. According to Chunn and Gavigan, “the restructuring of welfare has shifted and been shifted by public discourse and social images . . . welfare fraud became welfare *as* fraud. Thus poverty, welfare and crime were linked. To be poor was to be culpable, or at least vulnerable to culpability” (220). The notion of welfare as fraud affects access to a postsecondary education for single mothers. As morality and poverty become increasingly intertwined within the dominant discourse, it becomes too easy to believe that poor families deserve to be poor and thus do not deserve further assistance. These programs, such as OSAP, currently in place are not designed to fit the needs of families: poverty is a systemic, and not an individual, problem.

The perception that many people illegally claim benefits has become so widespread that “merely needing welfare . . . is abuse” (Swanson 79). The actual statistical rates of fraud and the meagre welfare benefits are never acknowledged. The word “abuse” is often associated with drugs, alcohol, and violence—making it a perfect term for disparaging the poor.

From 1998 to 1999, the Ontario government had 747 fraud convictions out of a 238,042 caseload, which is a fraud rate of 0.3% (Little 254). This number is likely inflated as those alleged to have committed fraud are often asked to sign a repayment agreement where a portion of their monthly cheque is withheld until the fraudulent amount is repaid. If the recipient refuses to sign, their benefits can be indefinitely withheld (Swanson 79).

I began this paper using the experience of Kimberly Rogers, a student who had collected from both Ontario Works and OSAP at the same time. As previously mentioned, she was ordered to repay the fraudulent amount of approximately thirteen thousand dollars, which she obtained over the course of several years. For her, this money was the difference between having a home and continuing her education and having to leave school because of lack of funding.

With regards to these statistics, what activities constitute fraud, and how little money some of them cost, is never discussed. One participant had an experience that elaborates this point:

*I helped my ex cash a cheque so he could pay me child support. I deposited it in my bank account and withdrew the entire cheque right away and gave him the money. He gave me my fifty dollar support payment. He didn't have a bank account and didn't want to lose money at a cheque cashing place, so he said that if I didn't do this, he would not pay me my support which comes off my welfare cheque whether I actually get it or not. So I didn't have a choice. When this money showed up on my bank statement, [my caseworker] said it's fraud and they are making me pay them back this eight hundred dollars by taking sixty dollars off per month off my cheque. So now, I have to keep paying them back money that I never saw.*

Another participant discussed the small bursary she received that covered the cost of tuition for one class, allowing her to take a night course while on Ontario Works. “But,” she said, “this was welfare fraud. This was Kimberly Rogers. Even going to the food bank without claiming what might be the equivalent of the food you collected is welfare fraud.” The criminalization of poverty goes beyond only affecting those receiving higher rates of assistance than they would normally qualify for; it makes anyone who receives welfare benefits suspect. These regulations make it a crime to receive a cash birthday gift from a family member or to sell children’s outgrown baby clothes, without claiming the money and then having it then taken away from the next month’s benefits.

In 1988, the Social Assistance Review Committee in Ontario argued that fraud rates for welfare were no greater than fraud rates in the tax system or the unemployment insurance system (SARC). On this subject, Chunn and Gavigan write, “because public confidence in the social assistance system depends in large part on the belief that the funds are being well spent and that abuse is being kept to a minimum, we accept that some of the measures adopted to control social assistance fraud may need to be more extensive than they are in other systems” (229). This regulation includes but is not limited to the following: snitch lines where people report suspected fraud; home visits where a welfare worker comes into the home to make sure that the recipient is living under the conditions claimed in the application; and annual assessments where recipients must show documentations such as bank statements, rent receipts, and tax return information to document a continuing need, despite the fact that they must declare their income and expenses every month.

Smith-Madsen discusses her experience with home visits while on social assistance:

I was investigated. I was spied on. A welfare investigator came into my home and, after thoughtful deliberation, granted me permission to keep my belongings... Full-fledged citizens have the right to deny an officer entry into their homes unless they possess a search warrant; mothers on welfare fork over citizenship rights for the price of a welfare check. (139)

Middle-class families would not tolerate home visitors showing up to inspect their living arrangements before deciding whether they qualified for tax deductions based on Registered Retirement Savings Plan (RRSP) contributions. Ontario Works recipients should not have to tolerate these visits either.

### **Isolating Mothers from Experiences of Class Consciousness**

Selma James and Mariarosa Dalla Costa find that because women often work alone—given the privatized character of domestic labour—in the home, they are largely denied the chance to share their experiences. James and Dalla Costa write that “with the advent of the capitalist mode of production, then women were relegated to a condition of isolation, enclosed within the family cell, dependent in every aspect on men” (12), and because of this “women are robbed of the possibility of developing their creative capacity” (14). Within capitalism, women’s isolating role as a housewife kept them separate from each other, which denied them the possibility of developing class-consciousness.

By using moral regulation and thinly veiled threats of criminality, welfare offices work to keep women isolated from one another, as Adair shows:

“Welfare Fraud” signs covering the walls at the welfare office remind her, when waiting to talk to a worker about her benefits not to trust anyone with the details of our life, for fear of further exposure and punishment. And so, like most poor women, I had remained isolated, ashamed, and convinced I was alone in, and responsible for, my suffering. (46)

These institutions keep impoverished people divided from one another, and along with moral regulation and shame, prevent the formation of solidarity and class-consciousness, stopping the poor from fighting back. Even when recipients realize that they are not to blame for their own situation, the stereotypes surrounding poverty are so pervasive that they might think they are the exception to the rule. When my participants received Ontario Works, they often felt the need to defend that decision whereas participants who accessed



insurance benefits they had paid into, such as Employment Insurance, never felt the need to justify that decision: “I don’t want to be on [Ontario Works]. I wish I could be working now but because of medical reasons and not enough money to go back to school to do the work I want to do I can’t do it.”

Clearly recipients of Ontario Works programs want to work for wages. Another participant, and former recipient of Ontario Works, discussed this as well:

*I always felt like I had to justify my decision to be on welfare when I couldn't hide it from people. People didn't know my situation, where I came from, and walking into the welfare office, I figured they would all just think I was too lazy to work, so I would keep my head down, never make eye contact with anyone, and hope that nobody recognized me walking into or out of the office.*

She was concerned that if she had been recognized, people wouldn’t have known the circumstances leading to her receiving assistance, upholding the idea that receiving social assistance is a problem in and of itself.

### The Welfare Mother

Moral regulation also scrutinizes the parenting skills of single mothers. Mothers on social assistance feel ashamed at both the acquiring of the paltry benefits and the living off them. Their poverty is seen as an individual flaw, not as a result of the broader social context. This has real consequences not only on the self-esteem of single mothers living in poverty, but also on the self-esteem of children. When children in these households have difficulties, their behaviour is often dismissed by professionals as products of bad parenting. Many of the participants who had received social assistance expressed feeling shame, and several talked about how it impacted their children:

*That's another thing, when he was born, the shame. I felt shame.... And [son]'s paying the price for it, in and out of jail and everything else because I kept asking the school system, over and over, they dismissed me because I'm a mom on welfare, single, dumb.... I went to parenting classes and everyone was just so ready to blame, and, you know, like there wasn't ... any help.*

Her son had an undiagnosed disability and she could not access help. Another woman had a similar experience:

*[Son] has been on waiting lists for years for [autism] testing. Every time I think we are getting close, there is another complication—another hoop*

*to jump through or another wait list to transfer to. I don't always know how to handle him.... Sometimes when he has a meltdown in public I feel like everyone is judging me because we look poor and I can't "control" my kid. Or I feel like teachers and daycare workers blame me.*

Testing for learning disabilities and autism is expensive; quotes for initial testing and a diagnosis range from about fifteen hundred to three thousand dollars. Follow-up costs for specialized tutoring, specialist appointments, or medication can be much higher. These services are sometimes offered through community services for free, but they have long wait-lists and require support from teachers and social workers. If the mother is blamed for the child's behaviours, these will be difficult to get.

Blaming the mother is not a new phenomenon. In the 1940s and 50s, for example, it was common for professionals to blame mothers for children's autism, schizophrenia, and homosexuality (Garey and Arendell). These myths have been debunked, but still children's problems "are often linked to the social situations of their mothers—poor mothers, unmarried mothers, divorced mothers, employed mothers and so forth" (Garey and Arendell 1). If poverty does, in fact, cause a higher incidence of problems for children, systemic causes of poverty should be addressed as the root cause, not blaming individual mothers.

## Empowerment

In *The Will to Empower: Technologies of Citizenship and the War on Poverty*, Barbara Cruikshank (31) describes how empowering the poor is typically thought of as getting them off government funding and forcing them to find paid employment. In this view of empowerment, the poor become "defined by all they lacked, the poor needed help, but it was to be given in the form of a stimulus to act for themselves" (Cruikshank 36). This meritocratic viewpoint allows for the illusion that those who work hard enough will become employed and will live above the poverty line whereas those who remain poor did not make the effort and are not deserving of assistance. This is the premise behind social programs like Ontario Works. Switching to OSAP forces people in poverty to act for themselves and to fall in line with the rhetoric of "taking a hand up and not a hand out." For instance, the Ontario Works Act mandate recognizes "individual responsibility" and promotes "self-reliance through employment" (*Ontario Works Act*). In order to even try to get a postsecondary education, recipients need to be determined that they are capable of it as the consequences of not succeeding include high debts and the loss of any medical benefits offered by provincial welfare programs. Every one of my research participants enrolled in university had debt ranging from \$17,000 to \$56,000.

The poor are blamed for their own poverty. It is assumed that adequate jobs or educational opportunities exist for those willing to make the necessary sacrifices. But no consideration is given to the impact that these sacrifices will have on the families or whether these opportunities are a viable solution or even attainable for some people. This assumption is seen in Ontario Works policies. No exceptions or accommodations are made based on circumstances like having sole responsibility for children. One participant discussed some of the problems she had trying to access these programs that made it impossible for her to obtain an education:

*I had OSAP and because I had to leave school due to illness I can't get it again... I've tried [Ontario Works], they don't help ... which I think is crap because I'm trying to go to school to get a job to get things done and be off Ontario Works.*

Another participant had to drop out of school because she could not access OSAP:

*I wasn't eligible for OSAP. I had an outstanding amount with them... I think it was less than two thousand dollars, may as well have been a million dollars ... I went to my bank, called OSAP a number of times, I called the school, I contacted the Knights of Columbus, my church, I mean, anyone that I thought could help ... it got to the point where it was very clear that I was out of options, there was no help. You have to be in a very ideal situation to get OSAP. The policies currently available to single mothers do not necessarily help anyone who wants an education, making this notion of empowerment completely unattainable for most people.*

### **Empowerment as Complex Forms of Power**

Margaret Little (165) wrote that “power is not static, nor is it an attribute or possession; instead it is relational, an ongoing process of human interaction.” Rather than fixating on power as something that the dominant group has all of and single mothers lack altogether, she looks at some of the complexities between individual’s relationship to and experiences of power. A fixed power dynamic exists in certain aspects of the lives of single mothers as they are not in control of the degree and types of interventions that they may receive, such as legislation dictating Ontario Works, OSAP, and even child support and alimony amounts. However, “single mothers creatively manipulate, stubbornly refuse, and strategically argue with social workers in an attempt to get the help they require” (Little 165). Single mothers actively negotiate their way through

and sometimes against the system rather than just passively accepting what little help they are offered.

Moral codes are not accepted by everyone. Sometimes they are merely followed without being completely internalized; at other times, they are met with resistance. The distinction between moral regulation and social control lies in this difference. Social control relates to the dichotomy between the powerful and powerless: those making and administering social policies are all-powerful, and those using the social policies are powerless. Moral regulation insists “that this set of moral rules and regulations can and will be challenged” (Little 239). One participant told me an amusing story about how she thought about challenging power:

*I got pregnant. And I had this kind of job that wouldn't have really worked out.... I decided to go through with the pregnancy, I decided that I would go on the then, pre-1995, pre-Mike Harris, “contract” from the government ... and that offer from the Ontario government was something like, I don't remember, maybe \$1100 a month that they would give you as a new parent ... and I actually considered suing the government for breach of contract because it wasn't until the cuts came that I realized I had to do something. So, 1995 rolls around, [my child] is a year old, and I thought they're going to cut my benefits down to eight hundred dollars and something dollars, with workfare, and you know, whatever else.*

The quote is powerful because it looks at social assistance rates as a contract with the government, not as something that the government does for the recipients. Although the recipients do not have a lot of say in what the terms of the contract will be—relations of power are at play as the parties do not come to an agreement on equal footing—the idea of a contract is still a way of understanding this experience that does not represent recipients as powerless or as ashamed of their circumstances.

Holloway makes an important distinction between *power-over* and *power-to-do*: “our power-to-do is perverted in capitalism into a power-over, the power of capitalism to tell us what to do with our lives, but it exists not only in power-over, but also as the drive against-and-beyond power-over” (199). The power that single mothers have to do things—such as to get an education, to learn, to make use of their creative capacities—is transformed by capitalism into a power-over relationship. Capitalist social relations require that single mothers return to school to get an education in order to get a job. But this dynamic also leads to a situation where people can struggle against the power-over relationships.

Several recipients talked about ways of fighting back including participating in antipoverty rallies, giving public talks about their experiences, talking to other single-mother students about available programs, writing letters to newspapers, and subverting policies in subtle ways. I’ve had very powerful experiences of struggling together with other single mothers. When my daughter was born, I started attending a weekly support group for young single mothers. We quickly became friends, celebrated our children’s birthdays together, started a clothing swap, and a community kitchen. Most of us received Ontario Works assistance, and we often discussed our experiences with social workers. Together, we helped a mother with diabetes get additional funding in the form of a special dietary allowance, and I tutored a few people through math and English classes until six of us received our high school diplomas. This group of women also helped me to leave an abusive relationship, to receive help for a severe panic disorder, and to eventually relocate to Sudbury so I could return to school.

Educating single mothers, especially within post-secondary institutions, is “an act of subversion with the potential to liberate communities and individuals and to radically alter static and hierarchical systems of power” (Adair 47). Adair said that her education gave her a voice and an authority with which she can now use to talk about these issues (47). Similarly, for the women whom I interviewed, being on welfare was often disempowering, but obtaining a postsecondary degree weakened the power of the moral regulatory discourses surrounding single motherhood. However, only half of the women were able to complete their degrees. Four women dropped out by their second year of undergraduate studies despite having good grades. Three years later, two of the participants have received master’s degrees and two are currently enrolled in PhD programs. The barriers to obtaining a postsecondary education for single mother students need to be addressed, in part through reforming the Ontario Works and OSAP programs.

## Supports

The women participants identified many supports that would enable them (and others) to get a postsecondary degree. Six mentioned the importance of support from their families. All of them mentioned financial support, especially in the form of non-loan-based programs, such as grants and scholarships. Many of them suggested that combining student loans with other support programs would allow them to finish their education with a smaller debt load. Student loans could cover the cost of tuition and books while programs like Ontario Works or Employment Insurance could cover the costs of rent, food, medical needs, and other day-to-day living expenses. Funding amounts for these programs would also need to be increased.

There are barriers within institutions that need to be addressed to help single mother students finish their degrees. Several participants mentioned mandatory attendance policies and evening-scheduled classes as barriers as well. Some even had to attend exams on Saturdays when there was no childcare available. A little bit of flexibility with respect to deadlines, attendance and even cellphone policies would go a long way towards helping single-mother students. Also, participants wanted a family-friendly atmosphere on campus, such as family housing, a support group for students with dependents, the ability to bring children to class when childcare falls through, and child-friendly outdoor spaces, such as a playground. This would help mitigate some of the incompatibilities in their roles as parents and students.

## Conclusion

The moral regulation of single mothers has implications on social policies, perceptions on what it means to be poor and how single mothers view themselves. Having to live up to a middle-class standard while living in poverty has negative outcomes for single mothers and their children, and this happens whether mothers are on social assistance, OSAP, or working for low wages. Using the voices of my participants, I have shown how this stigma creates barriers to accessing a postsecondary education that go beyond the obvious financial barriers. And finally, I have shown that power is not merely concentrated within one group but struggled for among many groups and single-mother students contest and negotiate this power in nuanced and multifaceted ways.

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