Government Restraint and Limits to Economic Reciprocity in Women's Friendships

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the limits of reciprocity in women's friendships in the face of government restraint. It argues that Ontario government policy directions that assume a reliance on friends for support and assistance threatens the voluntariness of friendship relations and risks jeopardizing aspects of friendship that women identify as important.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article étudie les limites de la réciprocité dans les amitiés des femmes face à la contrainte imposée par le gouvernement. Il soutient que les directions de la politique de l'Ontario qui présume une dépendance sur les amis afin de trouver support et aide menace les amitiés volontaires et risque de compromettre les aspects de l'amitié qui sont importants aux femmes.

INTRODUCTION

Despite their importance in the everyday lives of women, there has been a relative paucity of feminist scholarship that considers women's friendship relationships with other women. This analysis of women's friendships is based on interview data with fifty-four women and examines the ability of these relationships to absorb the impacts of social policy devolution in the province of Ontario. Increasingly, Ontario provincial policy directions, in the context of neo-liberal economic restructuring, assume that friendships will play an integral part of a larger community response, that friends will be able to pitch in and assist when help is needed. While the women I interviewed understood friendships to involve complex and multi-layered skeins of obligations, the ability of friends to pitch in and help when needed, and the ability to accept this type of help from friends, was limited. Women's reliance on friends, in the ways that were being assumed in current Ontario government policy directions, not only threatened the voluntariness of friendships, but it also threatened the other important functions with which friendships provided women.

GENDER, VOLUNTEERISM AND ECONOMIC "RESTRUCTURING"

"Restructuring" has become commonplace in the everyday vocabulary of Canadians trying to understand how workplaces are changing, why it is difficult to find steady, well-paid employment, and why they are struggling to make ends meet. "Restructuring," Canadians have been continuously told, is necessary to compete in global markets.

Global competitiveness has come to be equated with the ability of states to maximize the movement of capital (Bakker 1996), an objective that has been presented as both necessary and inevitable. Various states, including Canada, have exploited the assumption of inevitability to implement neo-liberal, macro-economic policies (Cohen 1997, 30). These include liberalizing trade, maximizing exports, deregulating industrial, environmental and social standards, and reducing government expenditure, in particular expenditure related to social programmes.

The impact of these policies has eroded both the idea of, and the provision by, the social welfare state. This social welfare state has not always existed in Canada. It was built in the post-World War II era as a collective response to the need for policies, programs and legislation that

offered help, through social and income support programmes, to those facing hardship (Evans and Wekerle 1997). With its erosion, individuals are expected to seek out other avenues of assistance. They are encouraged to access fee-based, for-profit services made possible through increasing privatization and are expected to turn to voluntary organizations and to others for help.

Restructuring has been identified by feminist scholars as a process of both gender erosion and intensification (Haraway in Bakker 1996). On the one hand, gender is less considered as a factor in social and economic policy formation; on the other hand, it is increasingly a determining factor in the process of policy transformation (Bakker 1996, 7). Individuals who are expected to provide support to those in need are not identified specifically by their gender, yet this assumed avenue of support rests heavily on the unrecognized, unpaid labour of women. The private social reproduction of labour by women is considered to be available to replace what has traditionally been state responsibility.[1] Baines, Evans and Neysmith (1998, 4) note that economic structuring and social policy devolution have redirected this work toward women, while at the same time, ignoring the economic costs and consequences borne by women in calculations of government "savings."

In tune with this general climate of attack on the social welfare state, Ontario Premier Mike Harris's provincial Progressive Conservative government was elected in 1992 on a platform of increased global competitiveness. This was evident in the Tory slogan, "Ontario, Open for Business." Neo-liberal economic policies implemented by the Tories in Ontario have included, among other things, large reductions in government spending, made possible through the overhauling of the entire system of social assistance in the province. Neo-liberal economic strategies have been implemented alongside neo-conservative ideas about gender. It is assumed that services and care will be absorbed at the level of the individual household, and particularly by women in households (Bakker 1996; Brodie 1996; Evans 1996). For example, provincial cuts to health care have resulted in an increased number of same-day surgical procedures, shorter hospital stays and an increased demand for home care, often involving more complicated procedures. Women are understood as responsible for voluntarily providing this care, motivated by a "labour of love" (Armstrong and Armstrong 1996).

Closer examination of this government's assumptions shows that they are unique in that they also extend *beyond* individual households and the assumed familial relationships within them, to inter-household resources and extra-familial relations. A document from the Department of Social Services in Ontario suggested that "communities [sic] first responsibility is to themselves" (Toughill 1995a), and the May 1996 budget speech promised Ontario "a volunteer revolution" (Regimbald 1997, 48). The Premier of Ontario stated that social assistance recipients should be turning to their "friends, neighbours and communities for help" (Toughill 1995), and recipients of social assistance, to determine eligibility, are required to detail not only their financial ties, but also their social ties. "A close social relationship between housemates" can increase financial obligations toward one another (Toughill 1995a). In its draft version, the *Framework for Action on the Prevention of Violence Against Women in Ontario* report (1996) recommended that, in situations of violence, "friends and neighbours can be advised of the situation and asked to telephone the police if there are breeches of restraining orders." The Minister of Women's Issues is on record in suggesting that, for Ontarians in paid employment, friends offered a viable alternative to the licensed, state provision of childcare (Walkom 1995; personal interview, Minister D. Cunningham 1996).

In this article, I demonstrate that the group of women I interviewed do not share the Ontario provincial government's optimism about the ability of extra-familial and inter-household relations, and in particular women's friendships, to absorb retracted state services and assistance. They do not share the view that volunteerism within their friendships can and will replace social services. The strengths of their friendships are primarily affective, social, and based on and maintained through mechanisms of reciprocity. These affective and

social supports cannot address the pressing needs that have resulted from provincial cuts to social services, such as a living wage, adequate housing and good quality childcare. I examine three significant shortcomings implicit in policy directions about volunteerism: they fail to distinguish between chosen obligations and imposed obligations; they are premised on the erroneous assumption that women in households have equal access to the resources to be exchanged; and they overlook the legal, cultural and practical dominance of kin and institutionalized heterosexuality, by failing to acknowledge that most friendships operate outside of the mechanisms of legal and state recognition. Rather than popularizing a framework of community volunteerism, policy directions in Ontario further entrench a highly individualistic model of responsibility consistent with both neo-liberal economic strategies and neo-conservative ideas about gender. Finally, I suggest that feminist scholarship remain attentive to assumptions informing policy directions in Ontario and their gendered bases. Feminist scholarship must continue to expose the links between neo-liberal economics, policy directions and gender, as their intersection offers a site in which collective feminist resistance can be focused.

CONCEPTUALIZING FRIENDSHIPS

This analysis of women's friendships is based on women's self-reported friendship practices obtained through semi-structured interviews with fifty-four women in Ontario.[2] The women were contacted through snowball sampling. A brief profile indicates that they are not representative of the larger category "women." Approximately half of the fifty-four women were clustered in the age range 34-55 years; just over half had children of varying ages. Sixty percent were, at the time of the interview, employed on a full-time basis. The majority worked in gender-segregated occupational categories. Nursing, teaching and clerical work predominated. The women fell into various categories using the 1996 Census question on race; the majority were white. Approximately ten percent of the women identified themselves as lesbians. Just over ten percent of the women were determined to be working class, while the remainder were identified as middle-class.

Although these fifty-four women did not share a definition of the term "friend," there were some recurring ways in which they understood the term.[3] Friends were identified as voluntary relationships. Naming someone as a friend was a marker of a chosen relationship. Friends adhered to principles of reciprocity. Giving and taking between friends occurred in various forms, directly and indirectly, and over prolonged periods of time, but there was a shared assumption that reciprocity be maintained. There was a shared acknowledgment of the obligation to give and to receive. Friends were typically those women with whom there were mutual feelings of connection and affection and with whom a common history was often recognized. This common history was not consistently measured in terms of longevity; it was also measured in terms of the experiences friends endured together and in shared confidences. Sociability was an obvious basis of friendship, and women reported friends were those with whom they often laughed and had fun. Typically, friends offered some respite from the demands of everyday life. These recurring ways of understanding not only helped to determine who was a friend, but they also shaped the significant role friendships played in women's lives.

CONVERSATION, COMPANIONSHIP AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT: THE STRENGTHS OF WOMEN'S FRIENDSHIPS

Conversation, companionship and emotional support emerged as key aspects that women valued in their friendships and exchanged in the context of these friendships. Companionship, expressed in terms of presence, caring and affection, was often indistinguishable from emotional support, understood as assistance services and instrumental and expressive elements of care (Brannen and Arber 1989). Companionship and emotional support were, in many instances, closely connected. For instance, one woman attributed her

return to university as a mature student to the presence of her friend who supported her by attending classes with her. Another woman waited with her friend while the friend's partner, from whom she was separating, removed his belongings from their home. Two friends visited regularly after one friend's child died and spent hours going for long walks together.

Women perceived themselves, and were perceived by others, to be "good friends" when they exhibited emotionally supportive and caring behaviour in friendships. They often regarded themselves as "less than adequate friends" when they failed, whatever the reason, to provide this emotionally supportive and caring behaviour. A woman who had not offered support to a friend who was going through a difficult emotional crisis reflected on that particular period in time, saying, "I feel really bad that I was so involved in my own life that I didn't give her more support. I think I'm an awful friend that way" (Interview # 24).

Interestingly, women exchanged companionship and emotional support in their friendships largely through conversation. Conversation, Coates argues in her examination of talk between women friends, permits women to foster commonalties and to share and gauge their own experiences (1996). The importance of conversation for women's friendships was reinforced by the fact that it was, amongst the women I interviewed, often identified as the primary activity in their friendships with other women.

> It's interesting that we don't do things together, other than we might just meet for coffee or go to her place. Or she'll come to mine, or we'll have lunch together, or we meet at a restaurant, so we're not interrupted by our kids. (Interview #28)

Any on-going activities in friendships were generally considered secondary to the activity of conversation.

Overall, it was these key aspects of friendship, companionship, emotional support and conversation that women said they valued most. But like friendships themselves, they were voluntary and contingent. The pragmatism with which this reciprocity was maintained was central to the voluntariness of friendships. Conversation could be ceased and resumed as required. Unreasonable demands or expectations for conversation could be met with a withdrawal of availability and engagement, and/or a failure to reciprocate. Companionship was frequently balanced with a concomitant need for solitude and time spent away from friends. Emotional support was dependent upon women's ability to ask for it and/or perceive a need for it. Because emotional support was available, but not necessarily guaranteed, from friends, women were careful about to whom they opened themselves up. For some women, exposing personal difficulties, at the risk of not receiving support, heightened feelings of vulnerability. Friends did not have to be equal in their ability to provide and to receive companionship, emotional support and conversation. In fact, friends were rarely equal in these respects, but the nature of friendship presumed that existing inequalities would not be exploited.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE, CHILDCARE AND ACCOMMODATION: THE LIMITATIONS OF WOMEN'S FRIENDSHIPS

Underlying current Ontario government policies is the deeply entrenched belief that individual citizens are responsible, first and foremost, for themselves. The overall goal in enlisting friends as reliable avenues of support is consistent with the provincial government's desire for reduced expenditure in social welfare. Claims about the viability of inter-household forms of support, such as support between friends - whether they are actually present or not - lend themselves handily to this goal. A carefully constructed public campaign, much of it financed from collective tax dollars, has constructed individual responsibility not only as available to Ontarians, but also as a more socially and morally desirable option than state assistance (Bezanson and Side 1998). This public

campaign has multiple threads. They include contrasting an underclass, personally responsible for their own misfortune, with an individual model citizen-taxpayer who is personally responsible for his own good fortune[4]; an overly simplistic equation of provincial deficit with household deficit so that Ontarians will be less inclined to support public expenditure for social programmes; and the characterization of social programmes as "unaffordable" in their current state. These threads are designed to ease the continued introduction of further neo-liberal economic changes. If there are any social gains at all from these changes, they are presumed to be a trickle-down effect of neo-liberal economic policies.

The speed and the scope of recent cutbacks to the welfare state may well leave women in Ontario in need of emotional support.[5] Cutbacks in Ontario are equally likely to create very real needs for material forms of assistance, whether they are needs for financial assistance, childcare and/or accommodation. Consider that the promised personal income tax cut has meant relatively little in real dollars, except for the wealthy (Girard 1998).[6] The 21.6% reduction in the income of those receiving social assistance has deepened existing hardship. A steadily decreasing caseload has resulted from tightened eligibility criteria for social assistance, and the right to appeal decisions under the *Social Assistance Reform Act* (Bill 142) has been curtailed. Those appeals that are proceeding are currently queued in a two-year backlog (Boyle 1998). The provincial government has also eliminated funding for new non-profit housing in the province (Freed 1998), further privatized the operation of subsidized housing (Monsebraaten 1998) and lifted rent control (Freed 1998). Affordable childcare spaces, already sparse, have become increasingly difficult to find, with some municipalities unable to fund spaces for participants in Ontario Works, the province's unpaid-work-for-welfare scheme (*Toronto Star* 1998).

Despite government assumptions about the availability of communities to step in, these needs were, in the absence of state provision, unlikely to be provided on a regular and consistent basis in the context of women's friendships with other women. Although women valued their friendships with other women, and considered them to be important relationships, they also acknowledged that these relationships had their own limitations and boundaries. These relationships did not typically include the regular provision of financial support, childcare and accommodation.

Financial Assistance

One of the most obvious ways that women limited claims being made on their financial resources by friends was by avoiding detailed discussions about their financial circumstances. Friends spoke generally with one another about money, sharing, for example, whether or not they could afford an evening out or a short holiday together. But friends rarely discussed detailed financial information, for instance, how much came into and went out their households on a regular basis. Over half of the women said they preferred not to provide or to receive financial assistance within their friendships. Monetary transactions between friends were often viewed as "an imposition on the friendship" (Interview #36) and were infrequent occurrences. When they did occur, they were usually designated as loans, not gifts. They tended to be between friends with long-established histories, and there was an understanding that the loan was necessary and could not be easily obtained from other sources. In her study of family obligations, Finch reports a similar finding (1989), noting that money was more likely to be loaned when it was designated for a specific purpose and when that purpose was judged as legitimate.

A minority of the women (just over 10%) regarded monetary transactions as inappropriate altogether in friendships and avoided them. One woman stated, "I have never done it [borrowed or loaned money] and I'd prefer not to. I've heard some bad stories, so I wouldn't ask friends" (Interview #27). Other women couched their resistance in more passive language, but nevertheless expressed their opposition: "I guess I just personally don't feel comfortable with that [borrowing and lending

money], I think it's just something that's not right" (Interview #28), and "it's a sticky situation between friends" (Interview #23). There was no evidence to support the idea that women who opposed even occasional financial exchanges between friends had different types of friendships or valued them less. It is more likely that these women were cognizant, and adhered to, the dominant ideology that shapes and reinforces money as a private, individual resource.

Childcare

The presence of similarly-aged children and geographic proximity often fostered connections between friends. But women's on-going and regular needs for childcare were considered outside of the parameters of their friendships. Friends sometimes looked after each other's children on a voluntary, reciprocal and short-term basis without the expectation of pay. But "voluntary," "reciprocal" and "short-term" were the keys to understanding childcare in the context of women's friendships, and violating these aspects could potentially jeopardize the relationships. Women did not want to feel exploited by friends or feel as if they were exploiting their friends. They wanted to retain their own decision-making ability about whether or not it was convenient to assist friends in this way. A woman with two young children said that she and her friends sometimes watched each other's children for short periods, without the expectation of pay, but this was an arrangement that was willingly entered into. "I don't want to be summoned," she said (Interview #23). A stay-at-home mother who lived in a predominantly middle-class, suburban neighborhood recounted negatively her past experience, in which she had not retained personal decision-making ability:

> Because I was a mum at home other mothers will dump on you. You have to learn to be assertive and I didn't learn that for a long time. They would say, "Do you mind looking after so and so for a couple of hours?" and six hours later she comes back. I had about six kids in the house all the time. It was even Saturdays and Sundays and I got real tired of it. It was not reciprocated. Not ever. Even when I needed it, no one was available, and I found that difficult. And we still live on the same street and I still harbour some resentment when I see these people. (Interview #9)

Friends were not regarded as regular and consistent sources of childcare, if only because those women who regularly required this assistance - often those who were in paid employment outside the home - had friends who were similarly situated. Also, beyond direct payment, the busyness of women's lives made it logistically difficult for them to reciprocate in the ways that were required to maintain friendships. Women who were unable to reciprocate were expected to make other arrangements for the care of their children.

Accommodation

Like financial assistance and childcare, accommodation, and in particular accommodation required for an indeterminate period of time, was viewed by the women I interviewed as a matter of personal responsibility. It was not viewed as a matter to be entered into between friends. Explanations reflected a concern with privacy: "we like our own space and freedom" (Interview #16), and "people need their privacy" (Interview #44).

Amongst the women I interviewed, heterosexual women, residing with opposite sex partners and lovers, expressed the greatest overall reluctance to accommodate friends, suggesting that the ideology of the nuclear, privatized household prevailed amongst these women. This was not the case, however, for friends who lived together in arrangements that are also recognized as familial, for example between lovers or sisters. In these instances, joint accommodation was viewed as a permanent arrangement and joint investments in property were frequently made.

In situations where friends experienced crises, even good intentions of providing long-term

accommodation could prove difficult in ways that were unanticipated. This was evident in the accounts of two different women, both of whom had assisted a friend fleeing an abusive relationship. One woman took her friend and the friend's child into her own home, but commented:

> It was really frightening for me. The police had to come to my house and put special protection on it. I didn't want to be in that situation. I had young children and I was concerned about their safety. (Interview #3)

The recommendation in the draft version of *The Framework for Action on the Prevention of Violence Against Women in Ontario* report (1996) that proposed friends and neighbours could serve on the front lines in reporting breeches of restraining orders, was eventually retracted in the report's final version. Clearly, the dangers it posed, along with the complexities of enforcement, make it a highly unworkable recommendation.

ASSUMPTIONS IN SOCIAL POLICY DIRECTIONS

The Ontario government's assumption about the ability of individuals to rely on inter-household resources for regular forms of support and assistance fails to distinguish between chosen obligations and imposed obligations. Friendships were understood as voluntary relationships that involved a nexus of obligations that were primarily affective, social and characterized by reciprocity. Defining these terms of friendship gave women some agency in the construction, the maintenance and the demise of these relationships; the imposition of obligation stands to threaten this agency. One woman stated candidly, "I probably could depend on my friends although I don't like to. I don't like to inconvenience my friends, I mean, I really don't" (Interview #35). Existing feminist scholarship that examines the imposition of obligations is worth bearing in mind here. In Finch's study of family obligations (1989), those who perceived themselves to be continuously relied upon as sources of assistance, against their wishes, made themselves scarce. Women's friendships might operate similarly, and women who are perceived to overstep the expected boundaries of friendships by imposing on their voluntariness may find themselves without the help they need and, furthermore, without the companionship, conversation, and emotional support that they value.

Policy directions also premise this belief in inter-household assistance on the erroneous assumption that women in households have equal access to the resources to be exchanged. They presume that women act, at the micro-level, as equal players in households (Bezanson and Side 1998). Feminist scholarship has documented the gendered distribution of wealth, and in particular income disparity, between women and men (Phillips 1996). The inequalities that women face, as earners of household income, have been yet further exacerbated by provincial government policies in Ontario. The *Employment Equity Act*, designed to facilitate the move of systemically disadvantaged groups, including women, into paid employment, was dismantled shortly after the Progressive Conservative government was elected. While attempts to eliminate the proxy method of accessing pay equity settlements for public sector agencies were successfully challenged in court, the recent imposition of arbitrary and unrealistic deadlines for claims will likely result in a situation where few women will be eligible (Monsebraaten 1998a). On-going provincial cuts to health, education and social services stand to disproportionately affect women's paid employment (Luxton and Reiter 1997), as do legislative changes that weaken workers' ability to unionize (McCormack 1998).

Assumptions about volunteerism do not consider existing economic inequalities amongst women. Working-class women were found, as has been the case in other studies (Allan 1977, 1996), to report a smaller number of same-sex friends, relative to middle-class women. The smaller number of friends that working-class women reported may be an acknowledgment of their limited ability to reciprocate in friendships. Working-class women were most likely to befriend

those who were most like them - women whose needs were great, but whose resources were not.

Most friendships operate outside the mechanisms of legal and state recognition, something that is overlooked in the emphasis on inter-household resources as a form of "community" support. The practical, legal and cultural dominance of kin relations meant that, in all but a few instances, family, and not friends, were considered as regular sources of assistance and support. One woman unequivocally stated, "it's better to impose on your family" (Interview # 32). This dominance of kin relations was reinforced by institutionalized heterosexuality. While lesbians exchanged both affective and material resources in the context of their relationship, these exchanges are still less likely to be acknowledged by legal and state mechanisms.[7] Such an acknowledgment would leave the current Progressive Conservative government in Ontario in the tacit position of having to recognize same-sex relationships, something it has been loath to do.[8]

Family relations, in various forms, were cited by the majority of women as more consistent sources of help than friends were. Family relations were less likely to be regarded as voluntary, although women did exercise some decision-making ability in deciding which kin they recognized and to which kin they responded. Families were not necessarily subjected to the same expectations of reciprocity that friends were, and the life-course of families, it could be argued, is inherently non-reciprocal.

But calling on family members for help also had attendant difficulties. A woman whose mother-in-law cared for her children on a daily basis while she was in paid employment recognized this. She depicted their arrangement as less than idyllic:

> That was hell because every morning I had to face the fashion police. And if I did something wrong it was a big deal. It was just horrible: she'd [mother-in-law] inspect me every morning and I hated that. They [her in-laws] have no idea what it's like to lead the lives we lead today with children They have little understanding, little sympathy. (Interview #21)

While kin relations were likely to be practically, legally and culturally recognized, they were typically regarded as avenues of last resort. Finch and Mason reinforce this finding:

> Much of our data shows people trying to avoid relying on help from relatives, rather than routinely expecting to call on it. Many people go to great lengths to ensure that they do not become dependent on this form of assistance. (1993, 164)

Further entrenching familial obligations in social policy directions appears to offer no more a workable alternative to state support than does assuming an obligatory relationship between friends.

CONCLUSION

Based on the interview data, there is little evidence that attempts to build an unswerving public belief in volunteerism, specifically in the context of women's friendships, will be effective. The women interviewed valued their friendships with other women for the companionship, the emotional support and conversation that was exchanged within these relationships. Formal obligations of support between friends, financial support, childcare and accommodation, were regarded as impositions that threatened the voluntariness of these relationships and, as such, rarely occurred.

Assumptions about volunteerism in women's friendships must be critically examined for the ways in which they link broader, neo-liberal economic strategies, such as decreased spending for social services, with neo-conservative ideas about gender (Bakker 1996).[9] Additional studies are needed to lay open assumptions about the ability of inter-household and extra-familial relations to absorb, in the absence of alternatives, what have been, until now, state functions. The extent to which

these social policy directions rest on, and exploit, women's social reproduction must also be made transparent. While feminist scholars insist that these policy directions need not be seen as inevitable (Cohen 1997; Skipton 1997), the challenge remains in recognizing them, and resisting them, as they creep into personal relationships, including women's friendships with other women.

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ENDNOTES

1. Within public sector employment, women, who comprise the majority of teachers, nurses and social workers, also primarily do supportive work. These occupations are also experiencing a simultaneous erosion and intensification. Significant job losses detrimentally affect women in the one sector where they have experienced some gains in the post-World War II period; at the same time, as a result of this job loss, those remaining in this employment will find their workloads intensified (Luxton and Reiter 1997).

2. For further detail, see Side, K., "In the Shadow of the Family: Women's Friendships with Women" (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Graduate Programme in Women's Studies, York University 1997).

3. The often polarized categories of family and friends were less clear among the women I interviewed. Some of the women named lovers, sisters, aunts, cousins and mothers as friends. Over a quarter of the women counted a close friend as a family member, confirming the importance of the relationship and illustrating the limitations of language in conveying their various forms and intensities.

4. I have used "his" intentionally in this context because the model of the autonomous individual citizen-taxpayer in Ontario has been consistently constructed as male, single, able-bodied and employable. He also exercises some power, as the Ontario Premier has stated that "only taxpayers are shareholders in the business of running Ontario" (Bezanson and Side 1998).

5. In their report, *Act in Haste*, the Speaking Out Project of the Caledon Institute for Social Policy (1998) found evidence that individuals were concerned about the method and speed with which these changes were being implemented, as well as being concerned about actual legislative changes.

6. Under the current Ontario government's personal tax cut, a single person, less than 65 years of age with no children, will see $595 by 1999, the year the plan is to be fully implemented. A single parent with an income of $46,000 will see $845, while a two-income household with two children and a $60,000 gross income will see $1,385 by 1999. A two-income household, with no children and a gross income of $133,000, stands to benefit the most; they will see $4,065 by 1999 (Girard 1998). It is worth noting that this tax cut has not had the desired effect, even when judged in the context of conservative circles. The New York-based credit rater, Standard and Poors, cited the expense involved in implementing it as a primary reason for dropping Ontario's credit rating from an AAA rating to an AA- rating (Canadian Press 1998).

7. Gavigan (1997, 108) notes that Section 15, the equality guarantee of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, has been used by lesbians and gay men to seek redress for discrimination. It is the definition of spouse in lesbian and gay relationships, for its inclusion in legal familial status, however, that has proven to be the most litigious.

8. When Bill 167, concerned with extending legal recognition and responsibilities to same-sex unions, was before the Ontario legislature in 1994, some members of the current Ontario government vigorously opposed it. Kitchen suggests same-sex couples in Ontario are exempt from policies such as the "spouse-in-the-house" rule, reinstated in 1995, because "to apply the rule to them [same-sex unions] would in fact constitute an implicit recognition that they are a family" (1997, 109).

9. It is important to recognize here that government assumptions about volunteerism are not unique to Ontario. Other provincial governments have adopted similar tactics. Mullaly and St. Amand (1988) note that volunteerism has been a concerted government strategy to reduce government spending for over a decade in New Brunswick. As one example, New Brunswick recipients of social assistance, in February 1984, received letters from the Department of Social Services openly declaring, "[E]ach and every one of us has a responsibility to help ourselves and volunteerism is a good way to start" (Mullaly and St. Amand 1988).

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