

An Approach to Canada's Child Poverty Problem... or Not

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Abstract

Childcare is one possible response to the problem of child poverty and in Canada, after years of unsuccessful attempts to eliminate (even lower) child poverty, the Liberals proposed a universal childcare program. They had done the necessary negotiations with the provinces and it looked like they were serious. However, they did not win the election and the Conservatives backed away from universal childcare, implementing instead an allowance of \$100 per month to mothers of pre-school aged children. This study examined three national newspapers over four years and three federal elections in an attempt to understand the social discourse with respect to universal childcare in Canada. What was learned is that the discourse continues to reinforce women's role as primary care providers, sidestepping the research on the benefits of early learning programs for children as a way out poverty.

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Introduction

In his farewell speech to the House of Commons, Ed Broadbent managed to unite all parties in a concerted effort to address child poverty in Canada. Broadbent's 1989 speech resulted in a parliamentary resolution to eradicate child poverty by the year 2000. It was a bold initiative aimed at lifting 14.4 percent of Canadian children out of poverty. However, despite the good intentions of parliament and the efforts of Campaign 2000, child poverty had grown to 16.5 percent by the year 2000.

The intent of this paper is to cast some light on the issue of child poverty in Canada, and in particular one of the policy responses to this persistent problem. Lesley Pal (2001) notes that the manner in which a problem is described or defined is central to the policy response. If no problem is perceived, no intervention is necessary. On the other hand, widespread belief that something is problematic increases the likelihood of a policy response, and the type of response is related to how the problem is defined. Pal notes, "the process of problem definition can either be exhaustive or casual" (p.6). It can, for example, be the result of conclusions drawn from a longstanding royal commission or the portrayal of events found on the editorial pages of a newspaper. Given that a consensus has developed around the issue of poverty in Canada and that it is children who are living in poverty, what is a likely policy response? The definition does not include families, even if they are single-moms with children. The definition is narrow and the response options, as a result, are limited. One of the responses that has been considered is quality childcare "which could counteract the long-term negative effects of growing up in poverty"

(Michel, S. & Mahon, R., 2002, p. 203). Research presented by McCain and Mustard (1999) demonstrated the importance of the early years in a child's development saying that "there is powerful new evidence from neuroscience that the early years of development from conception to age six, particularly for the first three years, set the base for competence and coping skills that will affect learning, behaviour and health throughout life" (McCain and Mustard, 1999, p.5). The report stresses the importance of a variety of universally accessible programs for childhood development and parenting that goes beyond custodial care to include programs that are stimulating, educational, and therapeutic in nature. The message is consistent with what Carol Bellamy, Executive Director United Nations Children's Fund was saying when addressing The State of the World's Children in 1999. It is also inline with the proceedings of the World Bank Conference on Early Child Development, Investing in the Future held in 1996 which stated.

The better the care and stimulation a child receives, the greater the benefit – for the national economy as well as the child. The world is finally recognizing that children's rights to education, growth and development – physical, cognitive, social, emotional and moral – cannot be met without a comprehensive approach to serving their needs from birth." (cited in McCain and Mustard, 1999, p.4)

In the late 1990s, early childhood development programs, once again, had been identified as a response to child poverty and the discourse, in certain circles, had pushed the matter beyond a mother's issue to a rights issue for children. Properly stimulated and educated from an early age, children could overcome the negative effects of poverty. Benefits to the child, the family, and the nation's economy had been identified. However, it took another five years for the federal government in Canada to introduce child care as a policy response. In June 2004, the Liberal Party had formed a minority government; eighteen months later another election was held and

the Liberal made universal child care the central issue in their campaign. Leading up to the election, the Liberals had committed \$5 billion over five years for an Early Learning and Child Care Initiative that was to be worked out with the provinces and the territories. If elected, the Liberals promised to make the initiative a permanent social program and add an additional \$6 billion to finance the program through to 2015. The Liberals appeared to be serious; they had signed agreements with all of the provinces and territories, and after decades of political posturing it looked like Canada was about to have a system of universal child care. The primary focus of this paper is on the social discourse over the last three federal elections related to child care. Canada came closer than ever to implementing a universal program of Early Learning and Child Care. So, what was being said? How was the problem being defined? What was the final policy response?

Review of the Literature

A wide-angle lens was used in reviewing the literature for this study to provide sufficient context to understand the issue of poverty, how it got defined as child poverty, and how an enhanced national child care policy response was proposed and rejected. The study itself is on how the Liberal party's campaign promise leading up to the January 2006 election was portrayed in the media. Acknowledged in this review of the literature is the fine work of people like Evans & Swift (2000) who have examined the role of media and how it shapes the public discourse towards women. For the purposes of this study, however, a review of the literature includes relevant historical developments from the 1960s to the present; it includes events within Canada, the United States, and to a lesser degree the United Kingdom. It is a literature review that attempts to capture some of the salient aspects that have shaped social policy responses in Canada over time; it is a literature review that will hopefully lend insight and understanding to

current developments and the type of questions to pursue when analyzing the data collected for this study.

As long as Canada has been a country, poverty has been a pressing problem, stirring great debate. There are those who blame the poor claiming they are lazy and entirely responsible for their plight. Others point to structural problems related to faltering economies and a lack of political will to ensure decent jobs, and social programs that distribute wealth in a fair and equitable manner. In the one hundred and forty two years since confederation, this country is substantially wealthier and has a plethora of social programs, but poverty persists. In the 1960s, Canada followed the United States declaring a “War on Poverty”. It was a time of compassion, a time of concern for the collective. However, according to Adams et al. (1971), the Canadian Senate Committee on Poverty did not attempt to address the actual causes of poverty by neglecting to discuss such things as the role played by the tax system, corporate autonomy, and collective bargaining (p.v). In *The Real Poverty Report* (1971), Adams and others noted

From the very beginning, when you are told you are poor because your father is too stupid or too shiftless to find a decent job; or that he is a good-for-nothing who has abandoned you to a mother who cannot cope... In the newspapers you read that the government is spending millions of dollars on people like you but it is apparently all money down the drain.” (pp. xi- xii)

The Real Poverty Report (1971) was critical of Prime Minister Lester Pearson’s efforts to address poverty; however, looking back from this point in history, it must be said that the 1960s and early 1970s was perhaps the greatest period of growth and development for the Canadian social welfare system. Under Pearson’s watch, during the years 1964-65, the Youth Allowance Act, the Canada Student Loans Act, the Canada Pension Plan, and the Established Programmes (Interim

Arrangement s) Act were passed. The latter piece of legislation ensured well-established cost-shared programs such as hospital insurance, social assistance costs, and health grants to be transferred to the provinces (Guest, 1997). In 1966 -67, Pearson and his government also passed the Medical Care Act, the Health Resources Fund Act, the Training Allowance Act, the Guaranteed Income Supplement, and the Canada Assistance Plan. Also established were the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, and the Company of Young Canadians.

The war on poverty was not won in Canada and nor was it won in the United States, but in retrospect, the discourse and policy responses in both countries, during this period, would have to be considered preferable to the present. Stricker (2007), points to factors such as a Michael Harrington's book *The Other America* (1962), Harry Caudill's book *Night Comes to the Cumberland*s (1963) as seminal. These books on the plight of poverty, together with a New York Times report on poverty, as well as civil rights movement pushed John F. Kennedy into action. Approximately one month before his assassination he announce a full-out attack on poverty. His successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, made the "War on Poverty" the centerpiece of his January 1964 budget, announcing that any community wanting to participate could do so. Sticker (2007) notes, "The hope of scholars and the funders that antipoverty efforts would be part of controlled social science experiment was doomed" (p. 49). Many praiseworthy programs including Head Start, food stamps, work-study, Medicare and Medicaid, were implemented, but not with the controls and standards necessary, across all program areas, to evaluate their true impact. Also, despite encouragement from certain advisors, the Johnson administration would not get involved in direct government job creation. "Johnson had just won a tax cut from Congress that his economists claimed would create jobs" (p.49). Within the Johnson administration there were concerns that increased taxation was counter-productive. The critics of Johnson's "War on Poverty" could echo those who authored *The Real Poverty Report* (1971).

As the initiatives unfolded, the discourse increasingly suggested jobs were available and unemployment was a personal rather than a structural problem. However, in both Canada and the United States the 1960s' discourse was such that poverty percolated to the top of the policy agenda. The detractors were not mute, but voices sympathetic to the poor could not be ignored. Poverty was broadly defined and serious enough to justify a "war", fought through a series of targeted programs. In the United States, it was recognized that half of the nation's poor were children and pre-school enrichment programs were necessary to break the cycle of poverty for this vulnerable segment of the population. Hence, "Head Start" programs were launched in 1965. However, like so many of the targeted programs of Johnston's "War on Poverty", "Head Start" was based on local control and allowed for a range of approaches. A lack of national standards with clearly articulated goals and objectives meant that measures of success would vary across programs, making it difficult for "Head Start" advocates to make the empirical case for expanded programming (Stricker, 2007, p. 69).

As Richard Nixon and the Republicans replaced Johnston and the Democrats, some programs were eliminated, but the political will towards the poor had not faded entirely. In the early 1970s, while Nixon was President, a plan for a guaranteed annual income was advanced, but did not receive approval of Congress. However, the Congress did approve enhancements to "Social Security benefits, an Earned Income Tax Credit for working poor families, and a program of government jobs for the poor and the unemployed" (Stricker, 2007, p.2). In Canada, there were similar discussions about a guaranteed annual income. Robert Stanfield, the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party in Canada embraced the idea in the late 1960s, but Pierre E. Trudeau while Prime Minister in the late 1960s and early 1970s initially resisted the policy approach. As the Prime Minister who spoke of the "Just Society" it was, in the eyes of many anti-poverty groups, an odd position to take. However, some proponents of the guaranteed annual

income saw it as an opportunity to dismantle universal programs, directing assistance only towards the poor, and in particular, the “working poor”. Studies conducted by “the Economic Council of Canada and other bodies revealed that at least two-thirds of the heads of poor families were in the labour force and over three-quarters of poor families had at least one wage earner” (Banting, 1987, p. 15). In the early 1970s, the focus shifted to the “working poor” and targeting programs towards “low-wage families, gained currency in the social policy debate” (Banting, 1987, p. 15). Trudeau and the Liberals did eventually propose a guaranteed annual income to assist the working poor, but domestic politics and the state of the economy got in the way.

After 1973, the Canadian economy faltered in an unusual fashion, with high unemployment and high inflation. Norrie and Owsam (1996) describe the decade after 1973 as “one of the most challenging in Canada’s political and economic history. Macroeconomic performance deteriorated markedly and in two ways that seemed to contradict current theory about the operation of the modern industrial economy” (p. 437). They also acknowledged “many of Canada’s difficulties in this period stemmed from the international economy...[and] Canada could not avoid dealing with the growth slowdown and stagflation that were gripping the industrial world” (p.437). Trudeau attempted to hold the course but the prevailing winds were shifting away from a Keynesian model of economics and towards a neo-liberal ideology. Government spending, particularly on social welfare programs, was seen as responsible for the rising debts and deficits. Nevertheless, poverty rates for seniors were recognized as a problem and Trudeau raised their monthly income by enhancing the Guaranteed Income Supplement in the early 1980s.

In terms of the discourse, Finkel (2006) notes that, in 1965, the Chamber of Commerce concluded their voice had little influence with the federal government on matters of social

spending. The corporate community gradually “sought other ways to turn public thinking against social equality, particularly through funding superficially independent research institutes that could become the main spokespersons for the corporate viewpoint” (p.284). Finkel notes

The Fraser Institute in British Columbia, the CD Howe Institute in Ontario, and the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies presented themselves as disinterested organizations of academics. The findings of their well-financed studies were regularly distributed to the corporate-controlled media and reported on as if they were news rather than editorials. Judging by public opinion polls that showed Canadians in the early 1990s to be more right wing than their counterparts in the late 1960s, the steady stream of alleged research results from the institutes influenced Canadian attitudes towards the proper balance between social spending and taxation. (p. 284)

In 1984, Trudeau stepped down and in the fall of that year Canadians elected the Progressive Conservatives lead by Brian Mulroney. In so doing, Canadians chose a Prime Minister who described Canadian social programs as a “sacred trust”; a Prime Minister whose campaign slogan was “jobs, jobs, jobs”; and a Prime Minister who, during the election campaign, pledged to create a national daycare program. The latter campaign promise was brought the top of the policy agenda as a result of a number of factors including a book detailing the day care crisis in Canada (Johnson & Dineen 1981), subsequent news coverage of abuse and neglect within some custodial care arrangements, and the impact of the women’s movement which had reach its point of greatest influence (Rebick, 2000). In additions, the Liberals had established the Abella Commission on Employment Equality and the Cooke Task Force on Child Care that would be favourable to a universal system of childcare. Young (2000) notes that the women’s movement in Canada between 1970 and 1984 was essentially multi-partisan in orientation, with informal

connections to all three established national parties at the time (p.64). According to Paltiel (1997) childcare had emerged from the 1984 federal election campaign as a key issue that was embraced by all three leaders during the nationally televised debate on women's issues.

Although promises were made, it became readily apparent that Mulroney was to follow the policy agenda set out by Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom and the Ronald Reagan in the United States. It was a neo-conservative agenda, pro-business or neo-liberal agenda. In the United States, the Reagan administration used a number of legislative tools to cripple social programs, reduce government intervention, and empower the private sector. George Bush Sr. continued the agenda with his concept, "1,000 Points of Light." It was a concept that "rests on the belief that the private sector will pick up the social responsibility of a declining public sector" (Fisher & Karger, 1997, p. 19). Private charities, such as the United Way and voluntary food banks, were to become the primary providers of care and assistance to the poor and disadvantaged members of society. It was a political agenda that could be consistent with the Republican values, but would it be in line with Democratic values? Perhaps not at an earlier point in history, but as Fisher and Karger (1997) point out a number of prominent Democrats established the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) in the late 1980s in an attempt to rewrite the party's agenda in a manner that was less antagonistic to the corporate interests. "Two of the founders of the DLC were Bill Clinton and Al Gore. In fact, Bill Clinton chaired the DLC just before announcing his candidacy for president" (pp. 97-98). Fisher and Karger also state that it was the Clinton administration that eventually bowed to the pressure of the neo-conservative agenda and allowed the shift of responsibility to state officials for the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program.

In Canada, there were some parallels to what was going on in the United States. Mulroney, like Reagan, adopted a policy agenda that ultimately favoured the interests of business. Within a year of taking office, for example, the government announced that old aged security and family allowance would no longer be fully indexed to the cost of living. Family allowance was folded into the income tax system, and tax reform was used as a less obvious means of clawing back social security. Government spending on unemployment insurance was reduced, as were the grants to the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC). In 1989, Canada signed a Free Trade Agreement with the United States, and many Canadians perceived this agreement a threat to social security. Despite assurances to the contrary, unemployment insurance received further cuts, and transfer payments to the provinces for health, postsecondary education, welfare and social services were reduced. In the 1993, a second trade agreement that includes Mexico was signed and this, according to McBride and Shields (1997), was “the most fundamental assault on the traditional Canadian polity” (p. 161). Aside from the negative economic impacts, they argued, “the agreements work to limit the ability of government, present and future, to moderate or escape from the free-market principles upon which they are based” (p.161).

Mulroney’s response to the women’s movement and his campaign promise on a national childcare are noteworthy. Paltiel (1997) notes

Following hearings across the country, a parliamentary Committee on Child Care reported in March 1987 on the future of childcare in Canada in the context of the changing family. The committee’s conclusion stood in sharp contrast to those of the Cooke Task Force, especially in its recommendation that the wide-range of child care activities found in communities throughout the country and involving a mixed approach of voluntary, commercial, and public resources, be supported and strengthened as ‘the best way of

enhancing parental choice and encouraging their involvement in a process that is of vital concern to them. This would not be the case in a childcare system run completely by governments. (p.34)

In December of 1987, a National Strategy on Child Care announced that Mulroney's government would commit approximately a billion dollars a year over six years to improve the quality, affordability, and accessibility of childcare. Improvements would come in the form of new cost-sharing legislation, and child care initiative fund, enhanced tax assistance to families with pre-school children, and day care initiatives for First Nations people. The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women (CACSW) supported a universal system of child care but rejected this initiative saying that it fell short of addressing the true need and described it as "tax breaks for higher-income parents" (Paltiel, 1997, p.34).

According to Young (2000) the women's movement was starting to fracture. NAC's ties to political parties, particularly to the Conservatives had eroded after the 1984 election and an antifeminist group called REAL Women of Canada (Realistic, Equal, Active, for Life) captured Conservative support. Mulroney saw NAC and other groups that questioned his party's intentions as a special interest groups not representative of "real" or "ordinary" Canadians. McKeen (2004) states that "In this neo-liberal landscape, gender issues and women's concerns have slipped from view, while in their stead stand 'Canadian children', somehow stripped of their family connections and gender relations they embody" (p. vii). She further notes "with the adoption of child poverty as an official focus, women and gender concerns were effectively excised from the poverty story and the national debate on poverty and child benefits, and with this the opportunities for feminists to make claims on behalf of these debates was reduced" (p102).

Evans and Swift (2000) examined Canadian newspapers from 1982 to 1984 and from 1994 to 1996 and found that the discourse about women, particularly single women, had changed remarkably. "In the early period, they were generally viewed as helpless or hapless – they faced difficult circumstances not entirely of their own making and required, in addition to considerably personal resources, some structural supports in order to overcome them. By the mid-1990s, however, the dominant discourse surrounding single mothers had constituted them as problematic to their children and a threat to social well being" (p.88). What Evans and Swift concluded from their study was that there were a number of processes contributing to the shift in discourse: there was an increasing reliance on so-called "experts" to substantiate the "problem"; more of an emphasis on statistical data; and less of an emphasis on primary reporting (p.88). What they also noticed was the traditional notion of a women's social role did not change from one period to the next, but single mothers as a group was a growing social problem that required state sanctions rather than support.

Under Mulroney there were cuts to social spending, a reframing of women's issues, and a policy agenda that harmonized with Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. However, true welfare reform happened under President Clinton and the democrats in the United States, and Jean Chrétien and the Liberals in Canada. The political will had shifted in both countries to the point whereby even liberal leaning political parties were tough on the poor. In 1996, Clinton had installed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act that emphasized work and limited one's time on social assistance. One year before, that the Liberals, in Canada, reformed the unemployment insurance system, changed the funding arrangements to the provinces for social spending, and permitted work for welfare schemes. By definition, only children were considered deserving.

Methodology

To address the questions above, a study was undertaken using content analysis. According to Neuman & Robson (2009), “content analysis is a technique for gathering and analyzing the content of text... It includes books, newspaper and magazine articles, advertisements, speeches, official documents, films and videotapes, musical lyrics, photographs, articles of clothing, and works of art” (p.221). Neuman and Robson acknowledge that with content analysis, researchers use “objective and systematic counting and recording procedures to produce a quantitative description of the symbolic content in the text. There are also qualitative or interpretive versions of content analysis...” (p.221). Whether content analysis should be considered quantitative or qualitative has been the subject of great debate. Burns and Grove (2005), for example, “suggest that because content analysis frequently involves counting, it is not considered a qualitative analysis technique by many qualitative researchers” (cited in Berg, 2009, p.342). On the other hand, people such as Selltiz et al. (1995) claim “that heavy quantitative content analysis results in a somewhat arbitrary limitation in the field by excluding all accounts of communications that are not in the form of numbers as well as those that may lose meaning if reduced to a numeric form (definitions, symbols, detailed explanations, photographs, and so forth) (cited in Berg, 2009, p. 342). Others, such as Abrahamson, 1983 and Smith, 1975 suggest that a combination of the qualitative and quantitative analysis should be used to capture both the form and the frequency of the form of communication.

For the purposes of this study three national daily newspapers were examined: The Toronto Star, The Globe and Mail, and The National Post. The readership of the three newspapers, including print only, would be the Star (slightly over a million), the Globe (slightly

under a million), followed by the Toronto Sun, and then the Post. Characterizations of the three newspapers selected are: Star as liberal; Globe as “Red Tory”; and the Post as conservative.

Using Lexis-Nexis and Factiva online databases, all three newspapers were searched for any reference to “child care” or “day care”. For the Toronto Star, the online database Lexis-Nexis was used and for the National Post, and the Globe and Mail, the online database Factiva was used. Articles were taken from all sections of the newspapers including news, opinion, and letters to the editor. Excluded from the search in the case of the National Post and the Globe and Mail were republished news, recurring pricing and market data, obituaries, sports, and calendars. In total, 565 articles were captured for analysis.

Data analysis was undertaken using QSR software, NVivo 7. Attributes highlighted from each of the articles included: the date the article appeared in the paper; what paper it appeared in; the type of article (i.e., news, opinion or letter to the editor); the author; the headline; the section of the paper the article appeared in; and the length of the article (word count). The data was then coded to determine the “sentiment” of each article (i.e., was the article positive, negative or neutral towards a universal system of child care). Articles that were for the enhanced childcare program as outlined by the Liberals before the June 06 elections were coded as positive. Those news articles that presented findings that were in support of the universal childcare plan were also coded as positive. Articles that were critical of the universal childcare program were coded as negative. Also the news articles that presented findings that supported the Tories approach were coded as negative. Articles in which neither side was taken were coded as neutral.

The “sentiment” was then considered as another attribute which would allow for a variety of analyses of the data, including: what the overall sentiment of each paper was; when that reporting occurred relative to the three federal elections; what the predominate messages were;

and what voices were given prominence. Based on a review of the literature, the following questions were of interest when analyzing the data: Was child care being discussed as a mother's issue, a family issue, or an issue of concern to society? Was the focus primarily on custodial care or on earlier learning? Was childcare being presented as a response to child poverty? Was there evidence of the "mommy wars"? Were there arguments for harmonizing the Canadian approach to that of other countries? A review of the literature suggests a variety of theoretical approaches could be considered including feminist theory, economic theory, political theory, as well as theories of diffusion and convergence. There would be merit in selecting any one of these theoretical frameworks to inform the analysis. However, because of historical patterns and current tendencies of Canadian policy responses to move in a similar direction to those south of the border, the theory of convergence as articulated by Alber (1981) and Wilensky (1987) was selected.

As with most studies, there are limitations to this study. One such limitation is that the content analysis was conducted on print media alone with the realization that the radio, television and the Internet also play an important role in shaping public opinion; including these forms of communication would have made for a richer study. The newspapers selected for the study ranked one, two, and four in terms of readership. The newspaper with the third highest readership, the Toronto Sun, was not part of the study. In searching the online databases terms such as "head start" and "early learning" were not used and they may or may not have been captured with the "child care" and "day care" searches.

Results

As seen in the tables below, the Star devoted far more coverage to the issue of childcare than the other two newspapers, not a surprising finding given the newspaper's traditional editorial liberal leanings. The Globe provided the next amount of coverage followed by the Post, which might also be expected. In terms of "sentiment", the following tables are also not surprising: the Star provided the greatest amount of positive relative to the negative coverage, followed by the Globe and then the Post. The articles in the Globe and Mail tended to be longer than those in the other two newspapers.

The National Post pursued the financial perspective about childcare issues more often. On the other hand, the Globe and Mail and the Star often present life pieces about mothers. The "mommy wars" often came up in articles about people's lives. The Globe and Mail tended to present both the financial and the "people" perspective. The most frequently quoted "experts" were OECD (positive on balance), The Caledon Institute (positive on balance), The Vanier Institute (negative on balance), The C.D. Howe Institute (negative on balance), and Martha Friendly (positive on balance). Experts, to make their case, frequently used research and statistics. In this regard there were two studies that were showcased for each side of the debate. The Early Years Study coauthored by Margaret McCain and J. Fraser Mustard highlighted the importance of early learning and child development. They presented research showing the connection between early stimulation and enhanced brain development. The other research highlighted was completed by the C.D. Howe Institute titled "Lets Walk

Before We Run: Cautionary Advice on Childcare” This study was quoted in the both the Globe and the Post. The Globe and Mail, April 6, 2006 quoted

“We studied a wide range of measures of child well-being, from anxiety and hyperactivity to social and motor skills,” it says. “For almost every measure, we find that the increased use of child care was associated with a decrease in their well-being relative to other children . . . reported fighting and other measures of aggressive behaviour increased substantially.”

Parents were in some ways worse off, too. Mothers with kids in daycare reported more depression and a decline in their parenting skills.

The study says it's not all bad. Subsidized childcare does allow more mothers to go back to work, and most of the jobs they get are full time, and that's good for the economy and their future earnings potential. (No wonder daycare moms are depressed and stressed-out with their kids. They're going nuts.)

What the above research attempts to discredit the Quebec system of universal care and by implication the McCain and Mustard report. What does not get properly distinguished in the media coverage is the different between “custodial care” and “early learning” programs. The latter is primarily focused on child development whereas the former is focused on assistance for the mother. Childcare never gets discussed as a child’s right; the debate in the media still centers on childcare as a mother’s responsibility and not a child development issue.

With respect to addressing child poverty, both sides claim their policy approach to childcare addresses child poverty; the Liberal Party approach through a universal child

care program and the Conservatives through a \$100 per month allowance to families with children of child care age.

Table 1

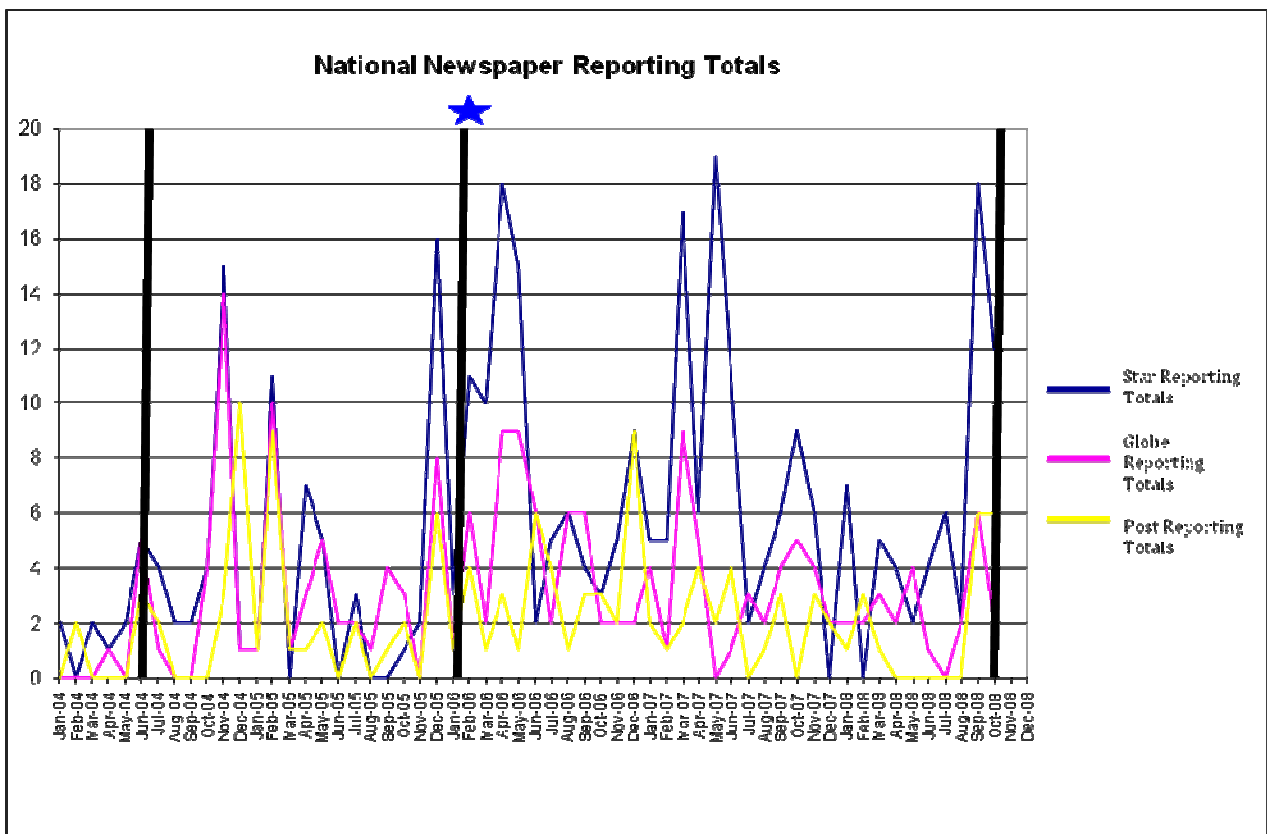


Table 2

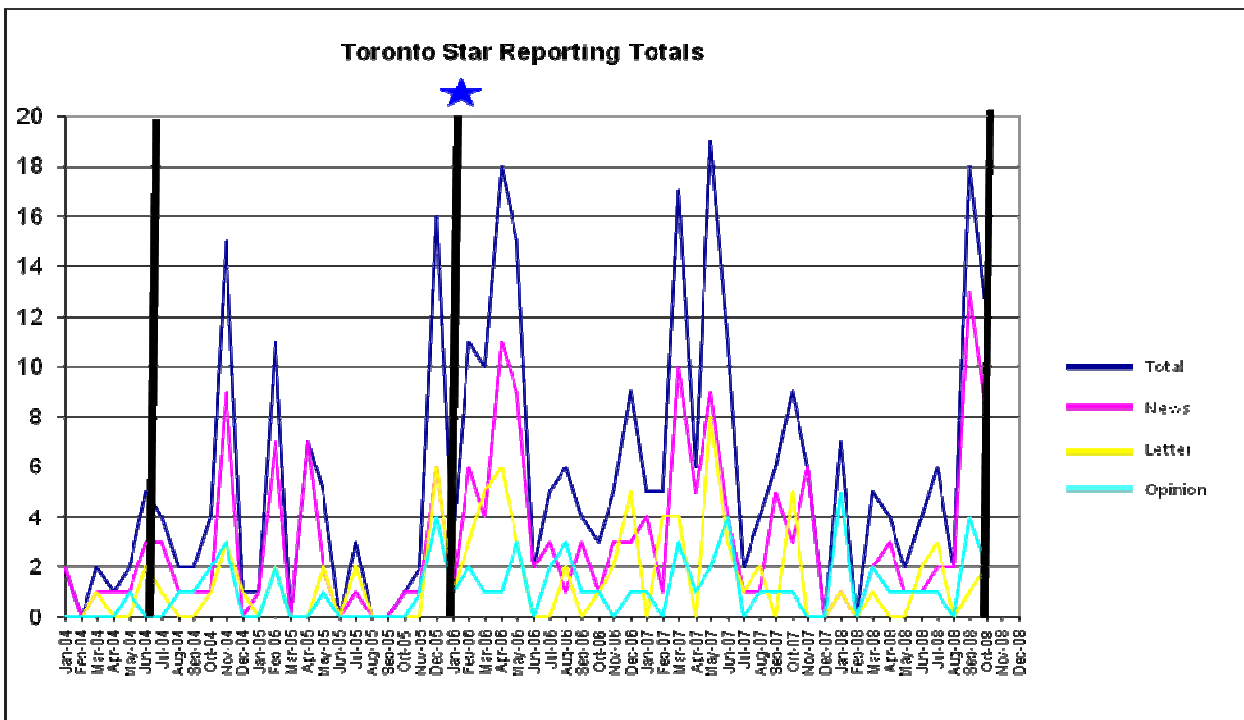


Table 3

Toronto Star Sentiments

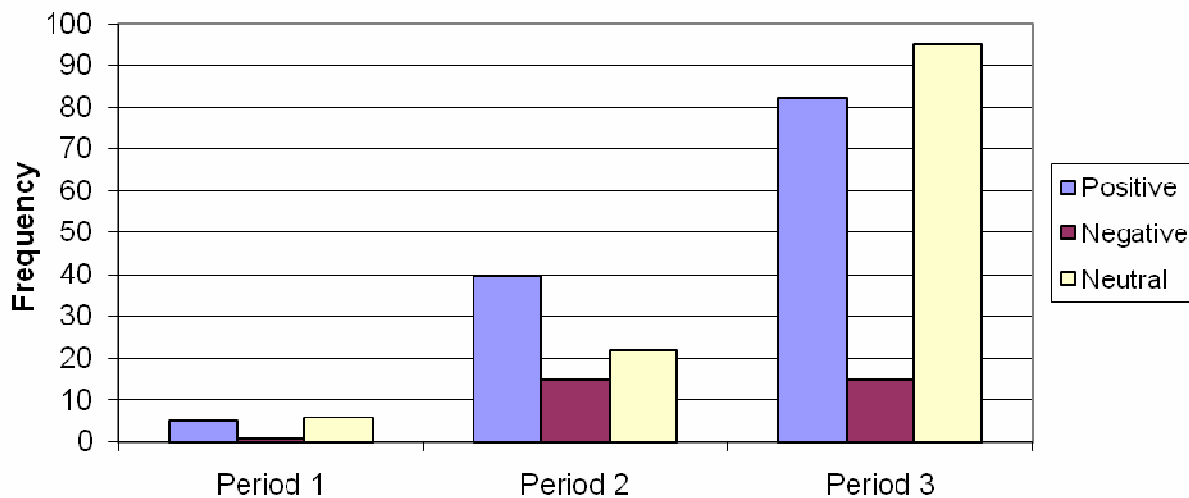


Table 4

Globe and Mail Reporting Totals

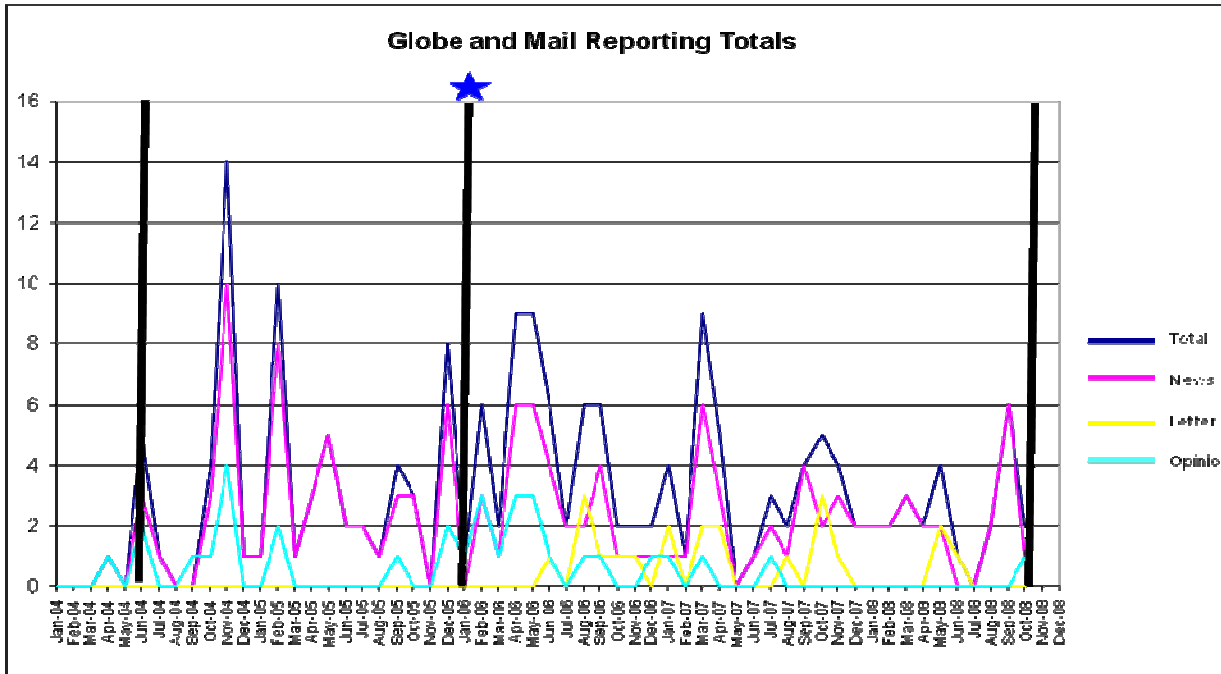


Table 5

Globe and Mail Sentiments

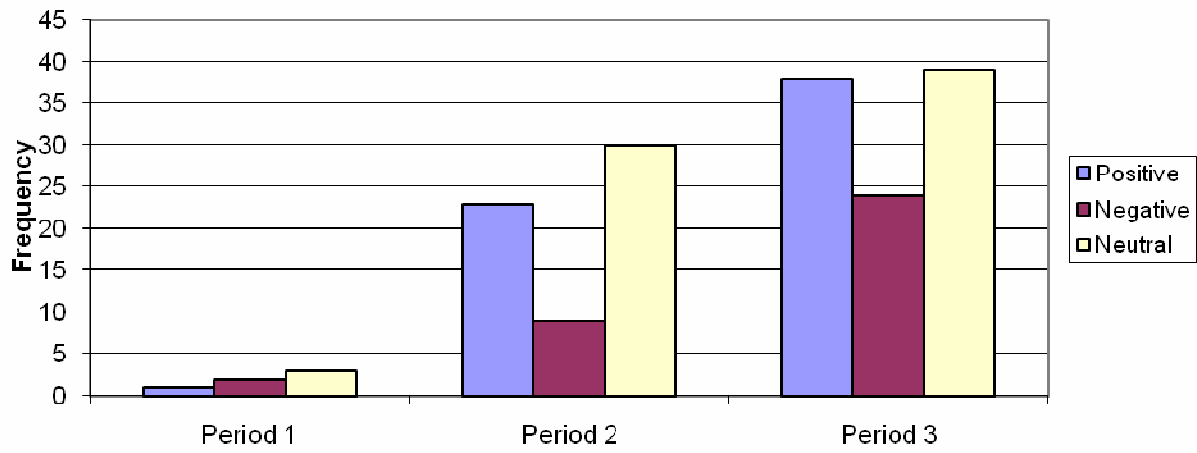


Table 6

National Post Reporting Totals

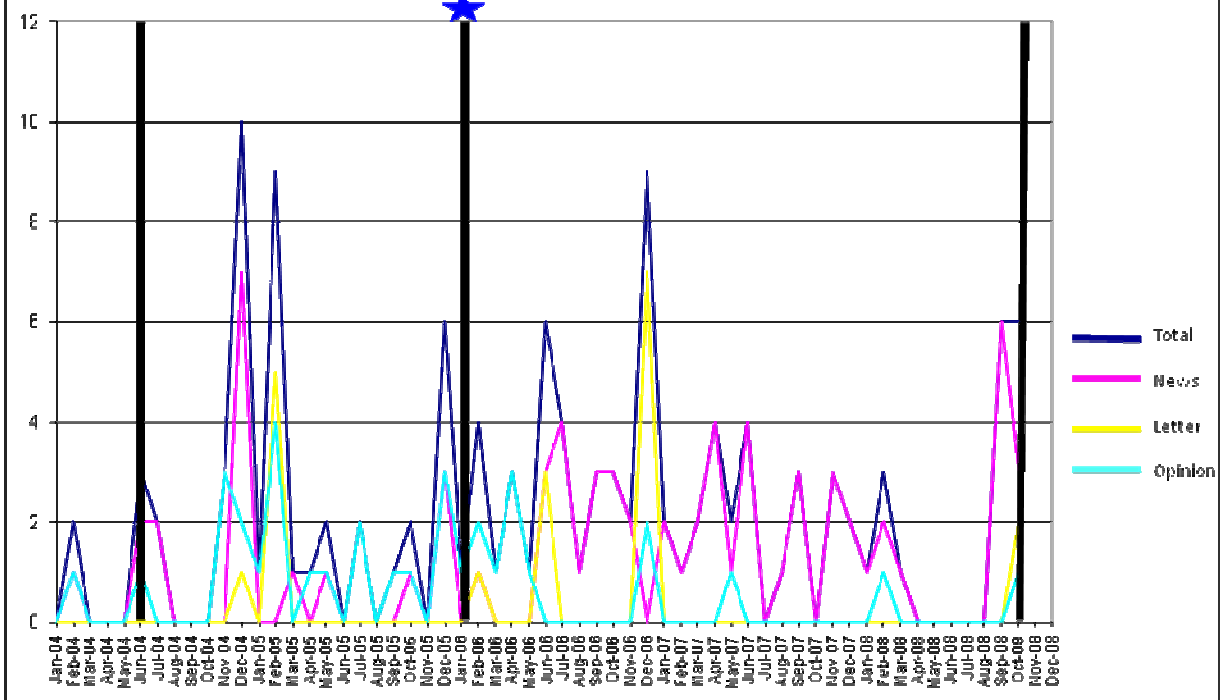


Table 7

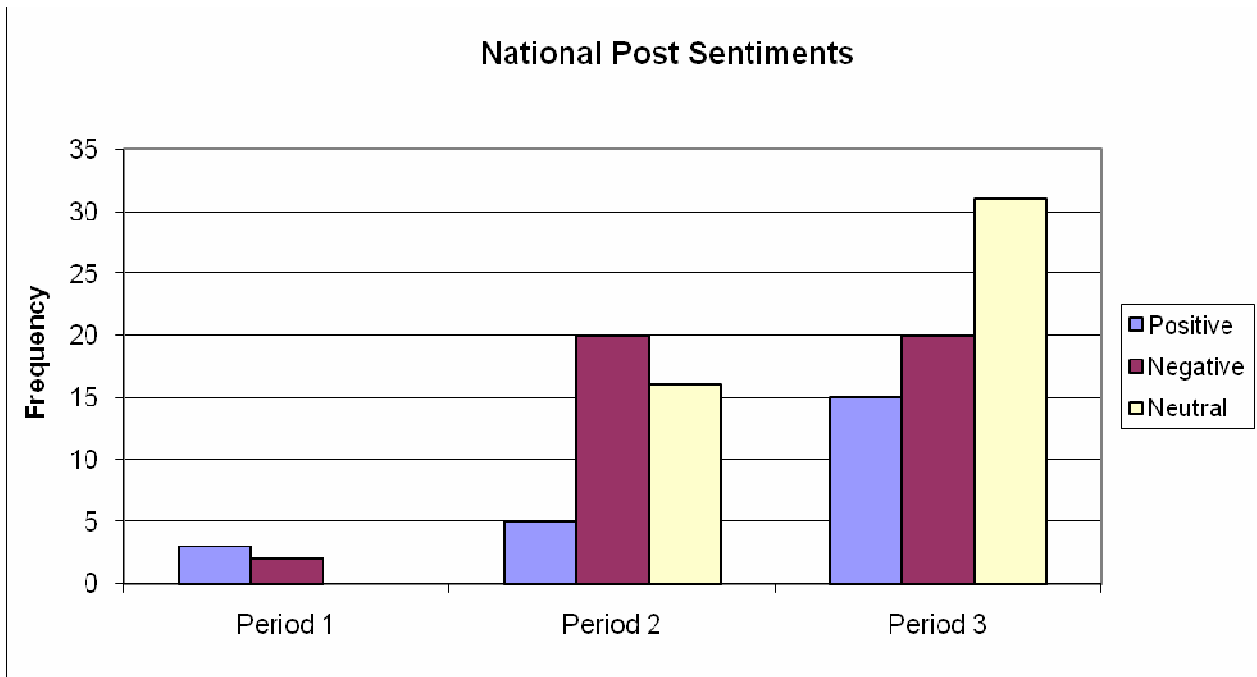
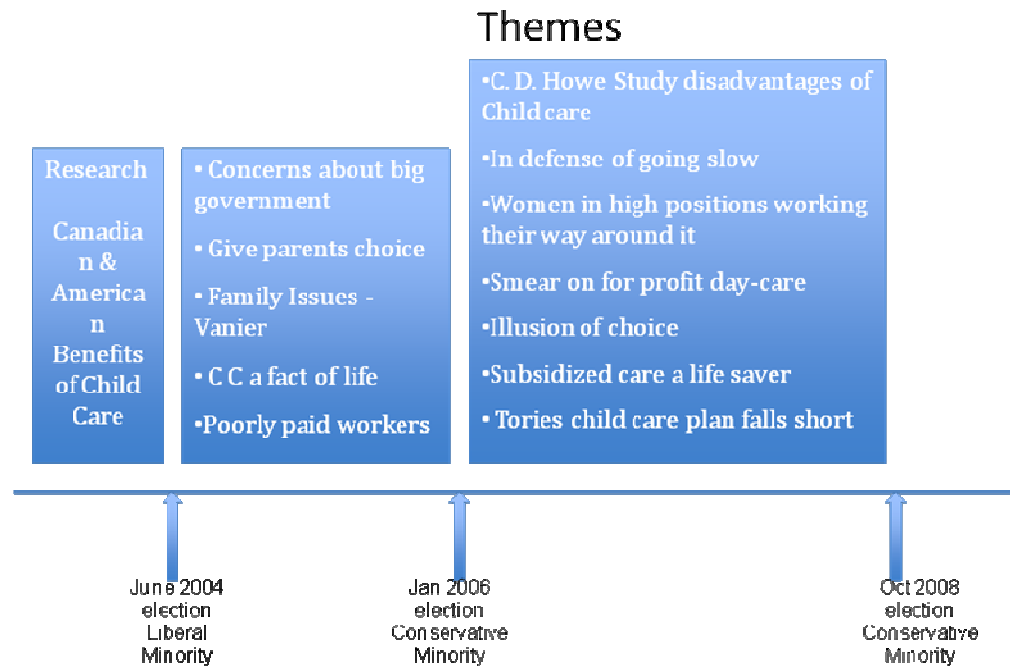


Figure 1



Conclusions

In both Canada and United States one can observe a common response to the problem of poverty. Going back the 1960s, the United States declared a “War on Poverty”; the social discourse of this time was such that poverty could not be ignored. The efforts to address poverty, although of good intention and some would say even laudable, did not eliminate the problem. Canada had a delayed response, but eventually followed the United States, commissioning the Senate to investigate the problem. A host of programs were implemented in Canada throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, but poverty did not disappear. Both countries considered a form of guaranteed income, United States first then Canada. However, neither county actually got the point of implementation. Then came the neo-conservatives

with their pro-business/neo-liberal agenda; first in the United States and then in Canada. Cuts to social welfare were made; single women were viewed as a serious and ever growing problem. There was no longer a concern about the poor, only about them getting off welfare and poor child were considered the ones who deserved government assistance. Again, Canada appeared to follow the United States.

Childcare is one possible response to the problem of child poverty and in Canada, after years of unsuccessful attempts to eliminate (even lower) child poverty, the Liberals proposed a universal childcare program. They had done the necessary negotiations with the provinces and it looked like they were serious. However, they did not win the election and the Conservatives backed away from universal childcare, implementing instead an allowance of \$100 per month to mothers of pre-school aged children.

This study examined three national newspapers over four years and three federal elections in an attempt to understand the social discourse with respect to universal childcare in Canada. The analysis shows a fairly predictable result in terms of the coverage of the three papers; it tended to be in-line with their editorial traditions. The Star being more supportive, the Globe and Mail being more balanced, and the Post giving more coverage against the Liberal childcare initiative. In the coverage, there was a reliance of “experts” quoting statistics and research to support their positions either for or against. There were two studies highlighted: one extolling the importance of early learning and childhood development, the other

highlighting problems of children with aggressive behaviour and mothers with depression connected to the used of day care. What is not considered is the differentiation of “custodial care” from “early learning”. Childcare continues to be presented as a mother’s responsibility rather than a child right, which is problematic considering the women are not longer “deserving”. The are “mommy wars” in the coverage with life stories of women whom stay home with their children claim a moral high ground. There are also stories of moms who do it all consistent with the ideas of the “new momism”. Both sides of the debate claim their approach (i.e., the universal child care and the Conservative response) addresses poverty.

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