

“More Normal than Welfare”: The Mincome Experiment, Stigma, and Community Experience

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Cet article traite de l'impact d'une expérience sociale menée dans les années 1970, l'Expérience du revenu annuel de base du Manitoba (MINCOME). J'examine le lieu de “saturation” de la MINCOME, la ville de Dauphin au Manitoba, où tous les habitants étaient admissibles à des versements de revenus annuels garantis pendant trois ans. À partir d'archives de récits qualitatifs des participants je montre que la conception et le discours autour de la MINCOME ont amené les participants à voir les versements d'un oeil pragmatique, contrairement à la perspective moralisatrice qu'inspire le bien-être sociale. Conformément à la théorie existante cet article constate que la participation à la MINCOME n'a pas produit de stigmatisme social. Plus largement, cette étude discute de la faisabilité d'autres formes d'organisation socio-économique à travers une prise en compte des aspects moraux de la politique économique. La signification sociale de la MINCOME était suffisamment puissante pour que même les participants ayant des attitudes négatives à l'égard d'aides gouvernementales se sentent capables de recevoir des versements de la MINCOME sans un sentiment de contradiction. En occultant les distinctions entre les “pauvres méritants” et les “pauvres non-méritants”,

This work was supported by the National Science Foundation (1333623) and Institute for Research on Poverty. I would like to thank Ryan Courchene, David Horky, and, especially, David Cuthbert for assistance navigating the Mincome accession at the Library and Archives Canada. The survey referenced herein and other archival documents cited are held at Library and Archives Canada (Winnipeg, MB); Department of Health fonds including the former Department of National Health and Welfare fonds, RG 29; and Policy, Planning and Information Branch sous-fonds, branch accession number 2004-01167-X, “Operational Files of Manitoba Basic Annual Income Project (Mincome).” Thanks are also due to Stewart Deyell, Sabrina Kinsella, and the production team at Statistics Canada for assistance in data construction and to Evelyn Forget, Erik Olin Wright, Robert Freeland, Sarah Halpern-Meekin, Tatiana Alfonso, Pilar Goñalons-Pons, Jonathan Latner, Aliza Luft, and Madeleine Ritts for helpful comments on earlier drafts.

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les programmes universalistes de support économique peuvent affaiblir la stigmatisation sociale et augmenter la durabilité du programme.

This paper examines the impact of a social experiment from the 1970s called the Manitoba Basic Annual Income Experiment (Mincome). I examine Mincome's "saturation" site located in Dauphin, Manitoba, where all town residents were eligible for guaranteed annual income payments for three years. Drawing on archived qualitative participant accounts I show that the design and framing of Mincome led participants to view payments through a pragmatic lens, rather than the moralistic lens through which welfare is viewed. Consistent with prior theory, this paper finds that Mincome participation did not produce social stigma. More broadly, this paper bears on the feasibility of alternative forms of socioeconomic organization through a consideration of the moral aspects of economic policy. The social meaning of Mincome was sufficiently powerful that even participants with particularly negative attitudes toward government assistance felt able to collect Mincome payments without a sense of contradiction. By obscuring the distinctions between the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor, universalistic income maintenance programs may weaken social stigmatization and strengthen program sustainability.

IN THE 1960S AND 1970S, both the American and Canadian governments launched among the most innovative and large-scale social experiments ever attempted. Five separate guaranteed annual income (GAI) experiments were implemented to test the mechanics of a revolutionized social policy that ensured a basic standard of living to all. The field studies involved huge expenditures of money, time, and human energy. This expense—particularly in the Canadian experiment—must be considered that much greater next to the somewhat limited contribution to knowledge they produced. Much was learned about the labor supply response (for summaries of the experiments, and the typically modest reductions in work effort, see Burtless 1986; Hum and Simpson 1993; Keeley 1981; Levine et al. 2005; Widerquist 2005) and to a lesser extent about marital dissolution (Cain 1986; Cain and Wissoker 1990; Hannan and Tuma 1990). More recently, Evelyn Forget (2010, 2011) has examined the health effects of the GAI in the Canadian context (Forget, Peden, and Strobel 2013). However, the original research agenda was cast in fairly narrow terms (Haveman 1997; Rossi and Lyall 1976).¹ Questions concerning social inclusion, social solidarity, and the well-being of communities were sidelined by researchers, as were considerations of the extent to which "welfare's" social stigma was reproduced under a universalistic social policy.² In other

1. Social consequences were often condensed into chapters covering "Noneconomic Outcomes" (Hannan 1978), "Non-labor-supply-responses" (Hanushek 1987), or "Non-labor Supply Experimental Responses" (Rossi and Lyall 1976). However, final reports for the U.S. experiments did include chapters reporting some small social psychological effects (Ladinsky and Wells 1977; Middleton and Allen 1977).

2. I use the terms "welfare" and social assistance interchangeably.

words, there was little interest in what John Rawls (2009) called “the social bases of self-respect” (p. 54). It is natural that a program distributing large amounts of money to diverse groups of people without work requirements would forefront the effects on work. However, achieving a decent standard of living might affect people in significant and subtle ways that are poorly summarized by their propensity to reduce work hours by a few percentage points.

The labor supply results are important but tell us little about the actual people populating these studies, how they understood the program, how it impacted their experience of community life, and whether participation came with social-psychological costs. Most of the GAI studies did not collect much information on the motivations and experiences of the human subjects involved. As Lee Rainwater (1986) pointed out in the wake of the American experiments, there is a major “black box” element to these studies. We often know what goes in and what comes out, but it is never clear what was actually going on in between. We do not know how the guaranteed income was perceived in the context of community life, what motivated participants to join, and how community members and participants interpreted it relative to traditional means-tested social assistance. We do not know whether it provided benefits without stigma, as was often hoped and hypothesized (Adams et al. 1971; Canada 1971a; Moynihan 1973; Offe 1992; Tobin 1966). Perhaps a reflection of the methodological preferences and prejudices of the time, the most rudimentary forms of qualitative description were largely absent from the GAI data. A descriptive account of experiences of individuals can put flesh on the bones of statistical findings.

Moreover, the consideration of community experiences and the moral interpretation of social policy bear on the question of political feasibility, which is sometimes absent from the overall feasibility analyses of social policy alternatives (i.e., Munnell 1986). In the name of economic feasibility, social policies may impose stigma costs on recipients. However, these policies may also be self-defeating if their unpopularity undermines their political feasibility. “Welfare” in North America is the paradigmatic case of a stigmatizing program whose overall social and moral reception may have undermined its long-run sustainability. Both in Canada and the United States, welfare programs had shrunk and acquired more-stringent conditions by the late 1990s (Danziger 2010; Peck 2001). Social policies that spotlight the moral quality of the poor, ones that hinge on the worthiness or unworthiness of recipients, may be less likely to be endorsed by the public. There is evidence that people’s perception of the moral virtue of the poor (rather than class position alone) is a good predictor of their support for generous forms of redistribution (Fong 2001; Moffitt, Ribar, and Wilhelm 1998; Williamson 1974). Policies that take the question of the motivations and morality of the poor off the table may be more robust. Human

beings, after all, are moral creatures.³ As such, understanding the political feasibility of policies such as the GAI involves a consideration of the moral aspects of economic policy.

It is often argued that universalistic social policy produces solidarity and resilience, where income-tested or targeted social programs produce stigma and fragility (i.e., Brady and Bostic 2015; Korpi and Palme 1998). However, concrete social policies, including the GAI, do not always fit well into this dichotomy. I reframe the hypothesis using qualitative survey data from the Manitoba Basic Annual Income Experiment (Mincome), a three-year (1975 to 1977)⁴ experimental GAI, which included a “saturation” site, the town of Dauphin, Manitoba, where all town residents had the option to collect payments.⁵ Mincome was technically an income-tested program—to collect payments one’s income must fall below a certain threshold—though it is best described by Theda Skocpol’s (1991) expression, “targeting within universalism,” because it had strongly universalistic features: if *anyone’s* income fell below the threshold for whatever reason, they were eligible for payments.

Instead of emphasizing universalism per se, this paper argues that the moral reception of social programs pivots on (1) *the degree to which groups are treated differently or similarly*, (2) *the degree to which payments are automatic or open to discretion*, and (3) *the program’s semi-independent moral framing*. First, Mincome’s design meant that typically separated groups were treated under a unified scheme, thereby facilitating a universalistic ethos and a broad appeal. Particularly salient was the absence of special rules for special categories of people—especially regarding work—that ultimately exclude some from the mainstream activities of life. By blurring lines of demarcation among low-wage workers, unemployed workers, and social assistance recipients, the guaranteed income was less likely to be interpreted as a program for “other” people. The program’s broad applicability provided a kind of ideological cover to participants, allowing them to sidestep typical constructions of social assistance receipt. This breadth facilitated a range of explanations to choose from when people explained their participation. Second, Mincome improved people’s incomes somewhat automatically, without subjecting them to invasive and degrading caseworker discretion. Finally, Mincome’s ideological framing by official sources impacted its social reception: the program tended to be framed as

3. For summaries of the observational and experimental evidence on the complex relationship between material interests and moral sentiments, see papers in Gintis et al. (2006).

4. There is some ambiguity around these dates; while payments were made between December 1974 and December 1977, Mincome staff began interviewing families before this period and remained in place for some time after.

5. Though no analysis of the Dauphin portion of Mincome was completed in the wake of the experiment, recently Evelyn Forget (2011) has renewed public interest in the Dauphin sample. Using Manitoba Health data, Forget showed that relative to controls Dauphinites saw a reduction in hospitalization rates during the Mincome years.

a contribution to science and as a program beneficial to “all Canadians.” This weakened the archetypal portrayal of social assistance as a form of “dependence” that encourages moral deficiency, low motivation, or cheating (Canada 1971b; Fraser and Gordon 1994; Rainwater 1982; Yoo 2008).

Together, these features reduced the social-psychological costs of social assistance. The program was, according to one participant, “more normal than welfare.” In stark contrast to comments from welfare participants, Mincome’s framing and design made it easy for participants to cite a variety of casual, pragmatic, or seemingly incidental reasons for participation—often failing to mention any actual or potential material benefits at all. Explanations frequently refer to “curiosity” or a desire “to help with research.”

I argue that the basic material benefits and design of the scheme facilitate and interact with ideological (or nonmaterial) factors to explain why Mincome participants enrolled, and likewise, why they felt it was superior to welfare, which the majority resolutely refused to consider joining. Finally, I show that the social meaning of Mincome was powerful enough that even participants who themselves had particularly negative attitudes toward social assistance—people who opposed welfare on moral grounds, who saw welfare recipients in a negative light, and who believed strongly in the principle of earning one’s own living—felt able to collect Mincome payments without a sense of contradiction. A man who wrote, “Welfare to me was accepting something for nothing,” joined Mincome because it “would be a benefit to me at some time.” Although it was a government assistance program, which targeted income disproportionately to the poor, survey respondents typically viewed payments in a pragmatic rather than a moralistic light. This paper examines the material and ideological factors behind people’s participation in Mincome in order to locate the sources of this distinctive social meaning.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF AN UNUSUAL EXPERIMENT

The early GAI debates in Canada were shaped by influential reports from the Economic Council of Canada (Canada 1968) and Department of National Health and Welfare (Canada 1970), which addressed, perhaps for the first time, the multidimensional problem of poverty. They made appeals to evaluate the merits of a national GAI program. The Economic Council report (Canada 1968) cautioned that an exclusive focus on groups in the deepest poverty would fail to deal adequately with the problem; this would “neglect unduly the very considerable group whose poverty problems are associated not with an absence of earnings, but with an insufficiency of earnings” (p. 113). The discussion came to center on the income security of the working poor and the objective of extending welfare to new groups (Leman 1980; Smith 1965).

Between 1968 and 1973 the guaranteed income was ubiquitous in Canadian policy debates (Haddow 1993). Senator David Croll conducted an influential inquiry into poverty in Canada in 1971, concluding with a call for a comprehensive guaranteed income to supplant means-tested social assistance. Several staff members defected in protest from the committee, believing the chair to be insufficiently radical (see McCormack 1972). They produced their own *Real Poverty Report* (Adams et al. 1971) later that year. The *Croll Report* defined poverty as income deficiency, while the “renegade report” defined poverty as deprivations in power and status, but both ultimately recommended a sweeping transformation of income maintenance policy pivoting on a guaranteed income for all. A sufficiently generous GAI could solve deficits in income as well as deficits in status.

It was in this context that Manitoba’s New Democratic Party Premier Edward Schreyer announced that “the Government of Manitoba is explicitly dedicated to try to provide greater equality in conditions of life to the individual citizens of our province” (Schreyer 1971:1–2). Schreyer (1971) linked the goal of extending welfare to the old problem of dividing up the poor into separate social categories: “If we can get around the legal—and psychological—barriers which so rigidly separates the employed from those on welfare . . . then surely we have made a solid step forward” (p. 4). The historic gulf between the deserving and undeserving poor is what motivated Schreyer’s (1971) comment that “the time has come to give out welfare at the unemployment office” (p. 1).

In an interview that summer, Schreyer declared, “we feel that a GAI is necessary and inevitable” (Green, Mardon, and Werier 1971:16). The Mincome experiment, publicly announced in February 1974 (Manitoba 1974), was a means to locate any “difficulties in small scale” (Green et al. 1971:16). Due to considerable interest in understanding the administrative aspects of a GAI (Atkinson, Cutt, and Stevenson 1973; Hikel, Powell, and Laub 1974) as well as some interest early on in the “impact on the community,” an important aspect of the project would be conducted in a “contiguous area” (rather than an exclusively randomized control trial format), eventually Dauphin (Schreyer 1971:8).

Dauphinites were offered guaranteed incomes equivalent to \$19,500 for a four-person household (the guarantee varied by household size).⁶ People earning no labor market income, for whatever reason, could access the full guarantee, which was about 38 percent of median family income (a measure that excludes relatively low-income “nonfamily persons”) or 49 percent of median household income in 1976. At a negative income tax rate of 50 percent, people could always increase their incomes by working. Every dollar of labor market earnings reduced the guarantee by 50 cents; this meant that payments phased out once earnings reached \$39,000.

⁶ All figures are reported in 2014 constant dollars.

Positive tax liabilities were rebated too; the rebate faded to zero once market earnings reached around \$43,400.

According to the 1971 Census, real median household income for Dauphin and its rural municipality was only \$24,758 and median family income was \$39,166. By the middle of the experiment in 1976, I estimate that real median household and family incomes were \$39,382 and \$51,055, respectively. Though the program itself affects 1976 data, these figures illustrate the accessibility of benefits to diverse social segments.

In a town with a population of 8,885, along with a 3,165-person rural municipality, at least 18 percent—2,128 individuals or 706 households—received benefits at some point throughout the program (this is a lower bound because available data exclude late-joining farm families; an estimate of this group increases the participant count to 2,457, or 20 percent of the population). Mincome staff knocked on the door of every home in Dauphin to introduce the experiment with an initial interview. After the interview, prospective participants would mail an application form and income statement to the Mincome office. The entire procedure could be completed through the mail. Income was reported by mail each month, and on that basis, checks were sent to homes (see Hum, Laub, and Powell 1979; Sabourin et al. 1979). Welfare, by contrast, was characterized by highly visible and special treatment. It involved frequent contact with staff who held considerable discretionary power, conducted searching investigations of recipients' resources, and sometimes made unexpected home visits. Welfare recipients normally collected payments in person. They were often referred through doctors and counselors, used vouchers, and had services paid for by the welfare office (Barber 1972; Canada 1971b; Ryant 1983). In all, Mincome was less visible, was more automatic, involved less individual discretion, and could benefit diverse social groups. As I discuss in the next section, these features helped shape Mincome's social meaning.

RETHINKING UNIVERSALISM AND SELECTIVITY

There is a large literature which argues that universal programs will be internalized as natural rights of citizenship, while programs targeted to small groups of people will be fragile (Esping-Andersen 1990; Korpi and Palme 1998; Larsen 2008; Moene and Wallerstein 2001). Where broad-based programs weaken divisions between the deserving and undeserving poor, highly targeted programs are said to be actively stigmatizing. In the former case, an expanded sense of community and social inclusion are at the explanatory core of the apparent association between the universality of a program and its resilience. In the latter case, targeting and income-testing requires the poor to stand up and self-identify as poor. This spotlights a stigmatized population and leaves programs vulnerable to funding cuts (Titmuss 1968).

However, the path from targeting to stigma to program unsustainability is not straightforward. Kenworthy (2011) studied total government transfer incomes in 10 countries and found universal programs to be no more robust than targeted ones. Brady and Bostic (2015) found that while transfer share is positively associated with universalism, it is not negatively associated with targeting. Marx, Salanauskaite, and Verbist (2013) found that targeting *is* associated with higher levels of spending. Stigmatizing programs may be vulnerable; however, targeted programs need not always attach stigma to participants. The thesis needs to be refined: it is not targeting as such that generates stigma and potentially weakens programs. Various examples clarify the point: The income-tested Earned Income Tax Credit in the United States does not appear to be stigmatizing (Sykes et al. 2015) and has steadily grown in recent years, even inspiring similar programs in Canada (the Working Income Tax Credit) and elsewhere.

The purported theoretical link between the targeting of a program and its fragility operates through the negative subjective experience of participants and moralistic evaluation of nonparticipant neighbors. Though the GAI is technically income tested, the typical evaluation of income-tested programs does not map onto it easily. I identify three ways an income-tested or targeted program can evade these dynamics. What is at issue in a stigmatizing program is not so much whether it is income tested *per se* but,

1. the degree to which typically divided groups are treated in a uniform manner;
2. the degree to which payments are automatic rather than determined case by case; and
3. the degree to which a program is framed as morally acceptable.

The first item suggests that uniform treatment reduces the chance and severity of exclusionary practices. Programs directed to specific groups of people may emphasize group differences. The process of categorization may highlight some moral deviation, in turn giving rise to special conditions. For example, from the standpoint of social policy, do you *happen* not to work or are you tagged with a special category identifying you as a “nonworker”? GAI proposals constituted sweeping transformations of social policy primarily because they dissolved the boundaries between the deserving and undeserving poor; they weakened insider-outsider distinctions (see Katz 2013). To this it could be added that a program will be less stigmatizing if there is more participation from privileged groups. Patrick Moynihan, one of the main planners of Nixon’s Family Assistance Plan (see Moynihan 1973; Wiederspan, Rhodes, and Shaefer 2015)—a GAI proposal nearly approved in the U.S. Congress in 1970—believed that the

deserving status of the working poor would purify the program of its negative association with welfare policy (Steensland 2007).

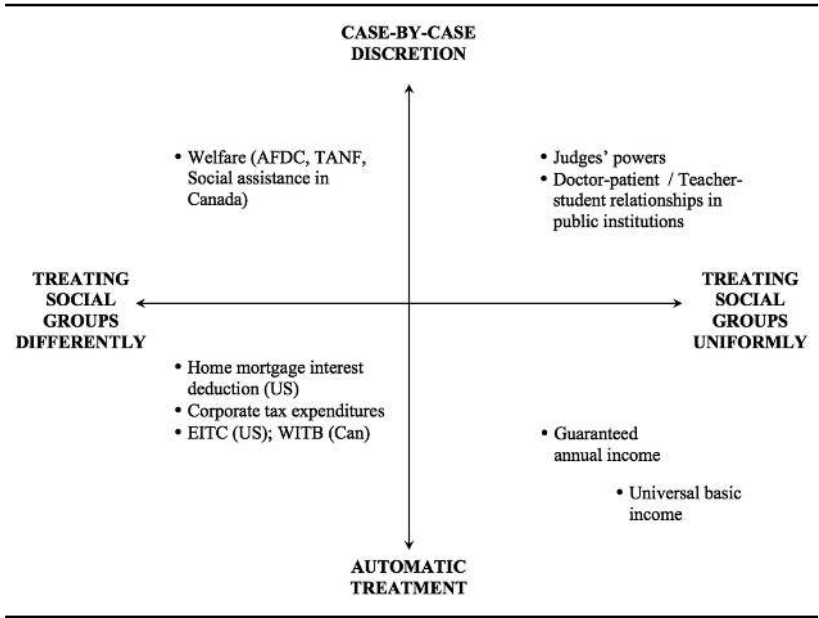
The second consideration emphasizes the automaticity of program delivery rather than the binary consideration of whether or not a program is income tested. Income testing is often falsely conflated with demeaning experiences with bureaucrats and caseworkers. Much of the literature on social assistance interprets the income test as characterized by demeaning application processes, punitive sanctions, and intrusive caseworker discretion that reinforces damaging stereotypes of welfare recipients (Handler and Hasenfeld 2007; Sandfort, Kalil, and Gottschalk 1999; Stuber and Schlesinger 2006; Watkins-Hayes 2009). However, income testing is not linked inherently to these experiences. People undergo a uniform process of income testing when filing their taxes annually. Likewise, the manifold targeted benefits delivered automatically to different groups through the tax system are self-evidently nonstigmatizing. The less of an ordeal is the procedure, the more automatic and less discretionary, the less likely it is to be accompanied by stigma.

The first two items are displayed as two dimensions in Figure 1. In the upper left, typical North American welfare systems are distinguished by high levels of caseworker discretion and by the special treatment received by recipients. Various tax expenditures in the bottom left, including the Earned Income Tax Credit, are marked by a degree of automaticity alongside differential treatment. Judges' powers, in the top right, exemplify the permutation of case-by-case discretion with an abstract uniform set of rules applicable to all. Although I characterize the GAI as a social policy that treats social groups in a uniform fashion, there remain nonrecipient groups outside the umbrella of the GAI. Unlike, say, a universal basic income—to the right of the GAI in Figure 1—the fullest sense of uniformity in treatment is not a feature of the typical GAI design. A universal basic income, which operates without prior assessment of incomes, is also more automatic. It lacks even an initial sign-up procedure and therefore also falls below the GAI on Figure 1. Though the two programs can lead to identical posttransfer income distributions (Groot 2004) and individual incentives (Harvey 2006), they retain symbolic differences. Finally, this measure of ambiguity in the GAI on the dimensions above makes the question of framing more important and less deterministic than might obtain in, say, a universal basic income. This leads us to the third point about the way targeted programs might evade stigma.

Social programs can be framed in more or less morally acceptable terms (Kahneman and Tversky 2000; Tversky and Kahneman 1981). Similar benefits may, for example, be portrayed as earned or as charity (Skocpol 1991). These frames will shape interpretation in the community (Chong and Druckman 2007; Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Nelson, Oxley, and Clawson 1997; Slothuus 2007; Steensland 2008; Wiederspan et al. 2015). There is no doubt that the ideological reception of a policy will be, in part, a reflection of its underlying design and material impact. However another

Figure 1

The GAI on a Map of Social Policy Attributes



part is somewhat unmoored and open to more-positive or more-negative portrayals. The guaranteed income has certain aspects that are open to both portrayals—unlike programs with the strongest forms of discretion and group differentiation on the one hand or the strongest forms of automaticity and uniform treatment on the other—so its framing may be particularly consequential.

The Dauphin experiment, to some extent, satisfied the conditions above where welfare did not. Mincome guaranteed incomes to a mixed group of recipients in a fairly automatic fashion. It fostered an idiosyncratic, largely positive framing. A relevant hypothesis expects the program to generate subjective interpretations and community experiences quite different from the stigma of welfare participation. Before approaching these issues, the next section introduces the data and methods.

SURVEY DATA AND METHODS

A nine-page “community experience” survey was issued to every participating adult head in their homes once at the midpoint of the experiment in August 1976. It included open-ended questions, as well as yes/no and

Likert-style questions concerning people's day-to-day experience with the community and with Mincome itself. The survey was self-administered by participants, although interviewers were directed to explain instructions or define words when necessary. Interviewers explained that the survey was strictly confidential, that it would be unconnected to participants' names, and had no bearing on Mincome payments. The survey was also optional; although interviewers encouraged completion, they introduced the survey with the following statement:

This questionnaire will help us to gather information about the way in which income assistance programs affect other areas of a person's life, such as his daily activities and experiences with others in the community. We are depending on your assistance in filling out this questionnaire. This additional information will make an important contribution to our study of how well different types of assistance programs work.

The survey was completed by 407 Dauphinite household heads, roughly 65 percent of the adults enrolled at the time. Some files are incomplete due to illiteracy or refusal. Of the completed surveys, 79 percent provide at least some qualitative commentary on open-ended questions, while Likert scale and yes/no questions were on average 97 percent complete.

For purposes of comparison, I examine another 40 surveys completed by Manitoba welfare recipients and 98 surveys completed by nonrecipient "controls" from various small Manitoba towns. Nonparticipants are a stratified random sample, rather than a fully random sample. This means that they consist of families whose income falls into a range where, in Dauphin, they could have been eligible for Mincome. This allows for a partial control of class differences. The two comparison surveys are virtually identical to the Mincome survey, substituting the word "welfare" for "Mincome" or skipping questions altogether where inappropriate.

The survey queries participants on time-use, difficulties with various community members, experiences with Mincome's bureaucracy, embarrassment related to being on Mincome, and comparisons of Mincome and welfare. Data are held by the Library and Archives Canada.⁷ The surveys were photographed and transcribed into digital format. Rating scale, multiple-choice, and yes/no questions (shown in Figures a pre-existing coding scheme, and percentage frequencies are presented on the basis of original answer categories (i.e., yes, no, don't know, only if

⁷ At the conclusion of the Mincome program, some of the longitudinal survey data were collected into several data sets, used for the handful of academic papers published on Mincome in the 1980s and 1990s (i.e., Hum and Choudhry 1992; Hum and Simpson 1993; Prescott, Swidinsky, and Wilton 1986; Simpson and Hum 1991). However, due to limited resources it was decided that most survey data would be digitized for the Winnipeg site rather than the Dauphin and Manitoba sites. In the wake of the experiment, the remaining raw data were left somewhat unorganized and without a finding guide, until being organized recently by Archives Canada.

necessary). In some cases, I report only one central answer category in order to coherently present multiple question items in a single figure (i.e., respondents saying “yes” or “none”). In other figures, I combine answer categories (i.e., “occasionally,” “often,” and “always”) when the grouping scheme captures most of the category-by-category variation. In cases of lists of similar items, I group persons who report that they have experienced at least one item in the list (i.e., a list of community positions) or answer yes to at least one in a set of similar questions (i.e., credit-related questions). The survey’s open-ended questions (shown in Tables 1, 2, and 4) were inductively coded into answer categories in two steps, following Corbin and Strauss (2007) and Charmaz (2014). Line-by-line coding linked provisional categories to fit the data. Next, “axial” or “focused” coding involved a category-by-category examination. Here categories were identified relative to each other, and certain codes were identified as either core or provisional, where the latter were subsumed into the former.⁸

WHY DID PEOPLE PARTICIPATE IN MINCOME?

Understanding people’s motives to join Mincome sheds light on its social meaning. As shown in Table 1, almost half of the respondents said they joined for the “money.” Quite simply, they needed help. These answers varied from “I was financially desperate” to “. . . it gives us the chance to pay a few bills . . .”

Under the broad rationale of “money,” Table 1 demonstrates a good amount of heterogeneity in people’s circumstances. Some families saw Mincome money as risk reduction, some viewed it as supplementing insufficient incomes, and others saw it as their only access to a standard of living. However, as an answer to why a family would join Mincome, “money” obscures as much as it reveals. Welfare also provided money, but was universally disliked. Thus, money is a proximate cause and self-evident answer, but alone it does not expose why money is needed or the conditions under which it can be accepted. Beyond this undeniable material rationale for joining a GAI program, there were a wide variety of other material factors offered, including “insurance,” disability (*[John] had broken leg and we needed help*), unemployment (*shortage of jobs*), help in accessing education (*we have a chance to improve our educational level in order to improve our income*), and providing care for families (*to look after children while in school*).

Putting “money” to the side, the modal “material” response refers to insurance or security, and typically refers to possible health problems—“to back up my financial state in case of sickness”—or possible income loss—“when I’m not working or let off it’s nice to know you can get help from

⁸ Since people sometimes make multiple comments, some answers are given more than one code.

Table 1

“Material” Reasons to Join Mincome

Sample responses to question 1 (“Indicate the main reason why you decided to go on the Mincome program”) by “materialist” theme

Coding category	N	Percentage	Samples
Money/assistance	143	44	<p>“For the money.”</p> <p>“Need more income with the cost of living now.”</p> <p>“I was not making enough wages.”</p> <p>“Business wasn’t going good.”</p> <p>“Need more income with the cost of living now.”</p> <p>“I needed more help to support the boys.”</p> <p>“I was financially desperate.”</p> <p>“Didn’t want to live off my parents.”</p> <p>“No other income and found it very successful and a very great deal of help to my family.”</p> <p>“Thought that the little bit would help a lot.”</p> <p>“Because it makes up for what you don’t earn.”</p> <p>“To make it easier for me to support my family.”</p> <p>“To give my family a regular living standard, more in line with the people around us.”</p>
Security/if unable to work/in case of illness	20	6	<p>“We don’t receive any payments. I am self-employed and if I ever did become ill, Mincome would probably be paid to my family and I.”</p> <p>“For security in the event I lost my job for any reason . . . I have no wish to live without working for my pay, and as long as I can work for a decent wage I will do so. However it is nice to know that Mincome is available to me if I ever need it . . . I consider Mincome as an experiment which I am taking part in, even though I don’t know if I will ever need it. I may want it someday.”</p>

(Continued)

Table 1

Continued

Sample responses to question 1 (“Indicate the main reason why you decided to go on the Mincome program”) by “materialist” theme

Coding category	N	Percentage	Samples
			<p>“Uncertain of husband’s earning abilities for [the] winter months as seasons sometimes affects his earnings. . . . If one loses a job (or illness) I feel Mincome gives families a little more security and helps remove some extra fears.”</p>
			<p>“Because if I ever got laid off I could live.”</p>
			<p>“If for some reason I was unable to work for a short while, I would have a small income, until I was able to work again.”</p>
			<p>“When I’m not working or let off its nice to know you can get help from Mincome for when you need it.”</p>
			<p>“To back up my financial state in case of sickness.”</p>
			<p>“Security reasons . . . people feel more secure knowing that if they need help it is there.”</p>
			<p>“It gives me a good security feeling in case I can’t work. . . . All I can say [is] it is a very good program. It certainly helped me a great deal in fact an awful lot when I lost my husband for which I am very grateful and I thank you.”</p>
			<p>“It helped me very much during winter months when work was not too plentiful. . . . I don’t have anything against Mincome. I think it’s a very good program. . . . It has helped me very much.”</p>
			<p>“It would be a guaranteed income if anything happened to my husband and he was unable to work.”</p>

(Continued)

Table 1

Continued

Sample responses to question 1 (“Indicate the main reason why you decided to go on the Mincome program”) by “materialist” theme

Coding category	N	Percentage	Samples
Could not find work	12	4	<p>“I was on Mincome for three months when it started . . . I think Mincome is good to people who are in need of it, as long as people do not take advantage of it. When I was on Mincome two years ago I was on a low wage bracket and I needed it . . . When I got a better income I did not file anymore even though sometimes we could of used it.”</p> <p>“Shortage of jobs and my husband was on the program.”</p> <p>“No permanent job when Mincome was introduced.”</p> <p>“Lack of jobs.”</p> <p>“No work at the time, no income.”</p> <p>“I was pregnant and couldn’t get a job.”</p>
Could not work/disabled/ill/elderly	12	4	<p>“We had no other choice as my husband is disabled and with my health and age, I am not able to work full time . . . If it wasn’t for Mincome, I don’t know how we would survive as there would be no income whatsoever.”</p> <p>“[John] had broken leg and we needed help.”</p> <p>“From this stage on I believe I can’t work much longer if any. Also I’m being laid off as my employer too is going out of business.”</p> <p>“We had no other choice as my husband is disabled and with my health and age, I am not able to work full time.”</p> <p>“I felt it would help our situation, and invalid husband with no income.”</p>
To help care for family	8	2	<p>“My children were young and I felt I was needed at home.”</p> <p>“I wasn’t eligible for welfare and had to support my son somehow.”</p>

(Continued)

Table 1

Continued

Sample responses to question 1 (“Indicate the main reason why you decided to go on the Mincome program”) by “materialist” theme

Coding category	N	Percentage	Samples
Help to go to school	7	2	<p>“I have a child to take care of and didn’t want to go on welfare . . . I don’t really believe in welfare.”</p> <p>“Spend a year at home with my children.”</p> <p>“To look after children while in school.”</p> <p>Mincome did not provide “enough money to look after myself and 2 children. I still have 2 years left at University and it’s rather a hard row to be when you’re as poor as I am at this point.”</p> <p>“We have a chance to improve our educational level in order to improve our income.”</p> <p>“Mincome has helped a lot to provide for my family and since my husband is a student it was a comfort to have the monthly cheque to look forward to.”</p>
Better than welfare	3	1	<p>“Husband was going to school.”</p> <p>“Because [it offered] more independence with money than welfare.”</p> <p>“Welfare was unreasonable with me.”</p>
Total	322 (Tables 1 and 2)		

Mincome for when you need it.” One participant joined Mincome because she was “uncertain of [her] husband’s earning abilities for [the] winter months as seasons sometimes affects his earnings.” A 50-year-old single woman joined Mincome “for security in the event I lost my job for any reason.” She wrote, “. . . as long as I can work for a decent wage I will do so. However it is nice to know that Mincome is available to me if I ever need it . . . I consider Mincome as an experiment which I am taking part in, even though I don’t know if I will ever need it. I may want it someday.”

The above quote emphasizes material circumstances, but provides an additional key to the “ideological” aspects of Mincome’s reception. As

Table 2 shows, the modal ideological response related to “helping” the experiment. In fact, this response was more common than the “security” rationale. One participant joined “to contribute to the success of the program.” Another joined “in order to aid in an adequate cross-reference of the community.” The third cited “statistics regarding guaranteed income, might help in studies.”

It is necessary here to describe the portrayal of the guaranteed income by Mincome and provincial officials. In the months before the start of the program, potential participants received a short letter from Canada’s minister of Health and Welfare inviting families to join the experiment. The letter refers to Mincome as “an experiment” designed “to assist in our efforts to improve Canada’s social security system.” It closes by stating, “I consider that your participation will contribute substantially to its success.” The language used in press releases between 1971 and 1974 and additional letters from the Manitoba government were virtually identical. One letter explained that the purpose of the project is to “collect information” on a “representative cross-section” of Manitobans. Finally, before joining, participants read the same seven-page booklet introducing the Mincome experiment. On the first page, it asks, “Why is a test necessary?” The pamphlet explains:

... a Basic Annual Income would be an efficient way of making sure that all Canadians have a reasonable and secure income, including those who are working. But both governments felt that more advance information was needed about what would happen if such a program came into being. To test this, a small-scale study has been set up.

This framing by Mincome staff and both levels of government is clearly reflected in the majority of contemporaneous articles and editorials in the town’s main newspaper, the *Dauphin Herald*. The earliest reporting on the experiment began with four major articles in 1973. The themes considered were often technical, mirroring the language of Mincome staff and government press releases. The articles discuss the scientific nature of the experiment, the economic survey of the area, the “computer” analysis to be used, the payments procedure, and other details of the project’s operation. In 1974, the year running up to the experiment, there were 16 articles and editorials about Mincome, typically emphasizing the scientific and experimental nature of the project. Some highlight specific scientific developments that Mincome will employ (“New computer techniques aid Mincome,” *Dauphin Herald* 1974c). Other articles discuss aspects of the research design (“Mincome moves to its second phase,” *Dauphin Herald* 1974b) or how Dauphin was selected (“Dauphin considered best for Mincome experiment,” *Dauphin Herald* 1974a). By the end of the program, the paper’s reporting had shifted emphasis to the minutiae of daily operations, though it maintained its initial framing (“Mincome, firstly, just

Table 2

“Ideological” Reasons to Join Mincome

Sample responses to question 1 (“Indicate the main reason why you decided to go on the Mincome program”) by “ideological” theme

Coding category	N	Percentage	Samples
To help with research/project	39	12	“To contribute to the success of the program.” “To help the program along.” “Help in research.” “To help the government get information.” “For the benefit of the government study program.” “In order to aid in an adequate cross-reference of the community.” “Statistics regarding guaranteed income, might help in studies.” “I feel they need all the help they can get if the programme is to succeed.” “Have always been a firm believer that surveys and statistical data are a necessary program of our daily lives.” “If and when the total statistics are formulated I would appreciate a copy so that I may continue a study on the relationship of families on Mincome and school performance.”
We were asked	25	8	“Asked to.” “I was asked to and volunteered to go on.” “Was asked to participate.” “Was approached by an interviewer.” “I was asked to and volunteered to go on.” “We were asked and we accepted.” “Mincome picked our name and asked us to be on the program.” “No particular reason. Was just asked and continued.”
Curious/wanted to see what it was about	15	5	“No special reason. Wanted to see what it was about.” “Thought it would be an interesting experience.” “See what it was all about.” “It sounded like an interesting experiment . . . The sociological booklets were fascinating—we thoroughly enjoyed them.” “Tried to find out how it works out.” “Curiosity.”

(Continued)

Table 2

Continued

Sample responses to question 1 (“Indicate the main reason why you decided to go on the Mincome program”) by “ideological” theme

Coding category	N	Percentage	Samples
Thought it was a good program/helpful for people	14	4	“Because I think it’s good for the country - help the economy.” “Because I think it is good for Canada.” “Decided to as I felt it was for the cause.” “To contribute to the success of the program.” “Because of the Dauphin involvement and need of an balanced program.” “[It is] an approach for some form of betterment.”
Because family/friends/others were on it	11	3	“Everybody else was.” “Just to be in it like others.” Husband: “My wife and mother-in-law both talked me into it.” Wife: “My mother is on it and has helped her considerably and we also needed help.” “Friends told us about it.”
Other	17	5	“Don’t know why.” “No reason.” “I don’t remember.” “Never really thought about it before.”
Total	322 (Tables 1 and 2)		

an experiment,” Dauphin Herald 1978a). The only piece of explicitly negative reporting published came out in 1978, after operations concluded (“Mincome no cure all—Ritchie,” Dauphin Herald 1978b).

Mincome planners framed the project as a “test” of a program intended to help “all Canadians.” Local coverage reinforced this portrayal. Participants commonly accepted this frame, interpreting participation as aid in research rather than accepting public assistance. One participant had the following to say: “Have always been a firm believer that surveys and statistical data are a necessary program of our daily lives.”

Although some of the “ideological” responses directly reflect the framing of the project, others appear at first glance to be so diverse as to be indecipherable. Some participants were simply “curious” about the program, others joined because they were “asked.” One man joined for “no special reason. Wanted to see what it was about.” Another wrote, “It sounded like

an interesting experiment . . . The sociological booklets were fascinating.” What the majority has in common—and what is absent from responses of welfare recipients—is their banality. The portrayal of Mincome—its framing as a “test . . . to improve the income security of Canadians”—provided a kind of ideological cover for would-be participants. Mincome’s relatively unstigmatizing social meaning allowed recipients to evade the typical representations of public assistance receipt. In fact, many happily neglected any mention of actual or potential material benefits.

Mincome’s portrayal facilitated a variety of casual and even evasive seeming answers, never found among welfare recipients. When asked why he joined Mincome, one participant claimed he “never really thought about it before.” This I argue is a consequence of the program’s social meaning. Only if a program is generally perceived as nonstigmatizing will people join out of such prosaic motives. Meanwhile, it is desperation, not curiosity, that typically motivates participation in welfare.

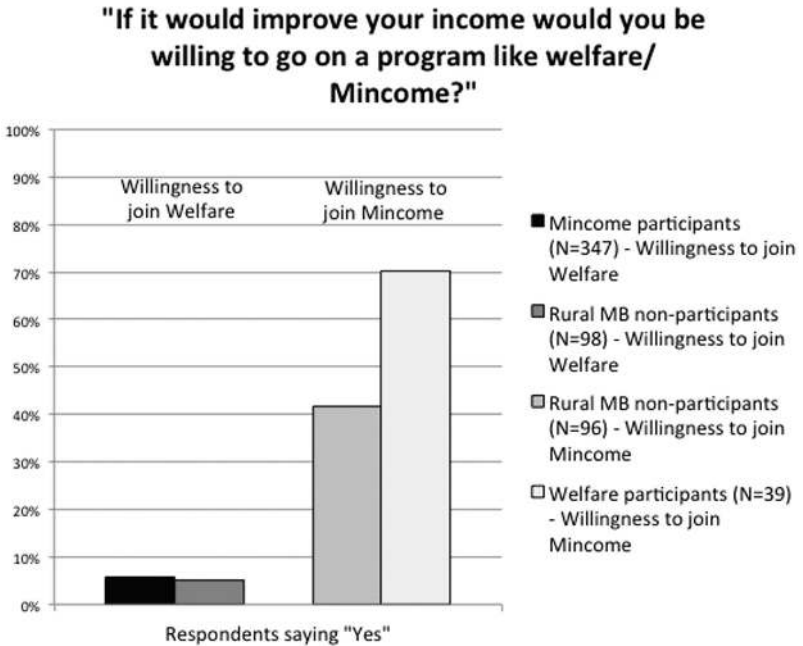
Mincome allowed for a variety of personal justifications for joining. Indeed, the lack of participation rules made it easier to find socially legitimate reasons to join. Its flexibility in responding to diverse social needs, working-class needs, the needs of the poor, people at different life stages, and people facing various kinds of uncertainty, bears on its appeal. That appeal, however, is also a product of its portrayal. Its framing as an experimental, universalistic program may have made participation easier. It provided leeway to contrive morally acceptable reasons for participation. A program’s framing is critical even if a universalistic and nonstigmatizing portrayal will consolidate more easily on a program whose technical apparatus is somewhat flexible and inclusive. The interactions between a program’s framing and its basic design features are subtle; although the Manitoba government attempted to frame the welfare system in a positive light in the 1970s (Barber 1972; Manitoba 1972), the underlying design may have made it less amenable to positive frames. I pick up the issue of design in the next section, and compare the program features of Mincome to those of welfare, in order to understand how they affect the moral reception of the two programs.

THE STIGMA OF WELFARE, THE NORMALCY OF MINCOME

A combination of elements allowed residents, even ones with largely negative attitudes toward social assistance, to comfortably participate in Mincome. As shown in Figure 2, only a small minority (6 percent) of Mincome participants reported willingness to join welfare (if it would improve their incomes). The vast majority either refused or would only join if necessary. By contrast, welfare participants were overwhelmingly willing (70 percent) to join Mincome. Nonparticipating rural Manitobans were also far more likely to consider joining Mincome (42 percent) than welfare (5 percent).

Figure 2

Willingness of Mincome Participants, Welfare Participants, and Nonparticipants to Join Welfare or Mincome



Participant accounts reinforce the notion that these programs were perceived quite differently. One 34-year-old married man joined Mincome because he “needed extra money.” Yet, he eschewed welfare, saying, “I’ll suffer instead.” What explains this widely divergent reception? What made Mincome more socially acceptable than welfare? This section describes survey data in percentage frequency graphs and then participant accounts to establish and explain perceived differences between Mincome and welfare, and locate the sources of social stigma.

However, before examining these survey data, it is important to look at differences among our three comparison groups—Mincome participants, welfare participants, and nonparticipant controls—in order to appropriately interpret the data. Table 3 provides descriptive statistics on familial status, presence of young children, age, and education across groups at a “baseline” interview before the experiment. Comparing the welfare and

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics at Baseline Interview

Baseline characteristics	Manitoba community nonparticipants (N = 56 households)		Dauphin (N = 265 households)		MB Welfare (N = 36 households)	
	N	Percentage	N	Percentage	N	Percentage
Familial status						
Married	43	76.8	156	58.9	8	22.2
Single	7	12.5	89	33.6	27	75.0
Single parents	3	5.4	42	15.9	19	52.8
Missing	6	10.7	20	7.6	1	2.8
Young children						
No children under six	28	50.0	133	50.2	20	55.6
Any children under six	22	39.3	56	21.1	11	30.6
Missing	6	10.7	76	28.7	5	13.9
Age of individual heads						
Mean age of male head	39.05	(N = 44)	41.23	(N = 181)	47.10	(N = 10)
Mean age of female head	35.65	(N = 49)	38.00	(N = 223)	43.00	(N = 33)
Education						
No high school grad. in household	31	55.4	130	49.1	21	58.3
High school grad. (at least one head)	18	32.1	48	18.1	1	2.8
Missing or NA (i.e., under 21)	7	12.5	87	32.8	14	38.9

Notes: To generate this table, the community survey discussed in this paper was merged with family ID numbers in “baseline” data on participant families, available from Library and Archives Canada. Missing data exist due to incomplete baseline information and “walk-ins” (in Dauphin) during the first experimental months. In order to fill in some missing data, I supplement the “baseline” data with another data set containing information on actual payments made. This fills in data on age and familial status when missing in the baseline data but available in the payments data. Supplementary payments data are unavailable for education and children under six, and as such those items contain more missing data. The observational unit in this table is the household rather than the individual.

Mincome groups, the former has a much higher portion of singles, and of those singles, the welfare groups has a higher portion of single parents. The welfare group is also older on average, somewhat more likely to have children under six, and much less likely to have a high school graduate in the household. Table 3 shows differences between Mincome and Manitoba community nonparticipant groups as well: nonparticipants include more married couples, fewer single parents, more families with young children, and more families with a high school graduate head. My discussion of the figures in the next section attempts to take account of these demographic differences, and provide interpretation in light of them. For example, to improve comparability to the welfare group, where possible and most relevant I include additional comparisons to Mincome participants with experience in the welfare system in the two years prior to the experiment. Moreover, in comparing the Mincome participants and community nonparticipants I note that similarities in the figures below are particularly suggestive in light of the baseline demographic differences; similarities in outcomes between a more privileged and a less privileged group only strengthen the suggestion of a community effect.

Community Experiences and Social Stigma

Part of the argument in favor of broadly inclusive programs suggests that they reduce the barriers to community building and, at minimum, avoid exacerbating the potential social isolation of participants. Below I describe evidence on social stigma and community experience bearing on these hypotheses.

The community survey inquires into time-use, in order to discern the extent to which people's spare time is spent alone or in social contexts. Mincome participants and nonparticipating community members were less likely than welfare participants to report spending no spare time with friends, neighbors, relatives, or workmates (Figure 3). Both groups were also less likely to spend time at home (Figure 4A) and more likely to spend time at other people's homes (Figure 4B) than welfare participants. More interesting than the divergence with welfare recipients is that Mincome participants tend to have time-use patterns not unlike Manitoban nonparticipating community members, a group with higher average socioeconomic status. This suggests that one could participate in Mincome without forfeiting certain community experiences.

Mincome may have escaped the strain and tension in the community commonly accompanying welfare receipt. Mincome participants (98 percent) were more likely than welfare participants (72 percent) to "never" attribute any community difficulties to program participation (Figure 5A). Mincome participants (92 percent) were also more likely than welfare participants (65 percent) to report "never" feeling embarrassed or uncomfortable when they were with people not on the same program (Figure 5B).

Figure 3

Spare Time Spent with Various People

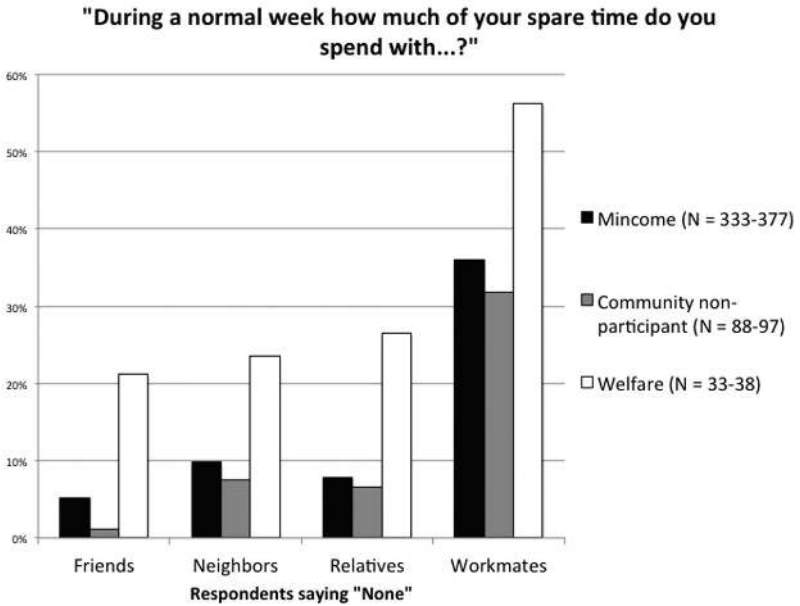


Figure 4

Spare Time Spent at Home and at Other People's Homes

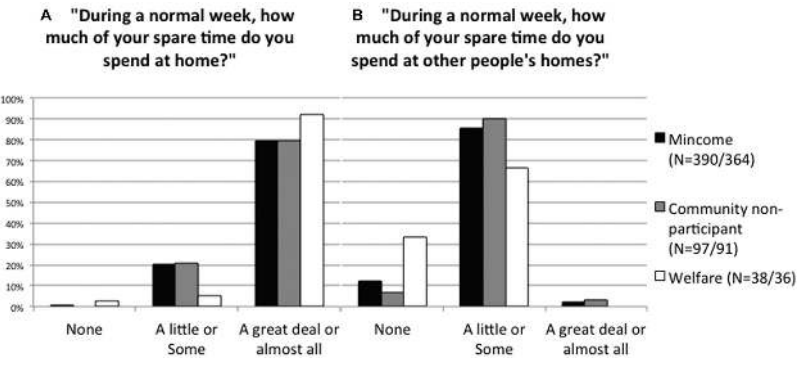
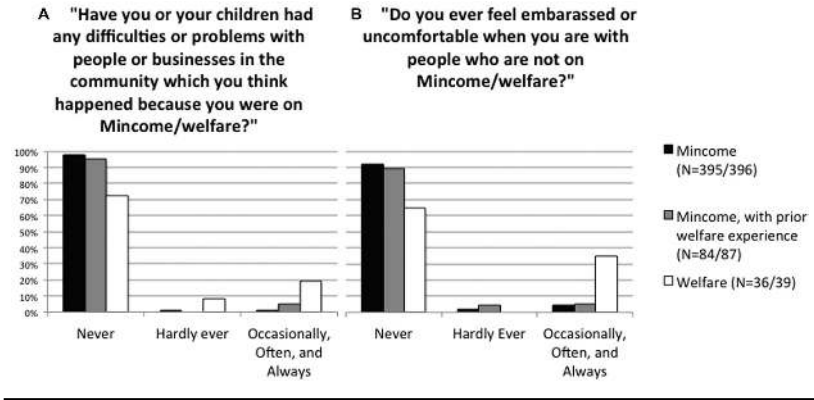


Figure 5

Difficulties and Embarrassment in the Community due to Mincome/Welfare



Note that Figure 5A and 5B (and onward through Figure 9) includes additional comparisons with Mincome participants who have prior welfare experience. This group provides a useful contrast, as they are more likely to have social and class positions in common with welfare participants.

Another indicator of community participation concerns people’s interactions with banks and various community members. As shown in Figure 6A, welfare participants (18 percent) were most likely to experience one or more credit-related difficulty, community nonparticipants (12 percent) less so, and interestingly, Mincome participants (8 percent) were the least likely to experience these problems. Mincome may have led to interactions with creditors that were more positive than the norm. Dauphin banks may have seen Mincome as a source of economic stability for participants; an increased confidence of repayment on the part of banks might have increased the availability of credit. Roughly similar patterns are found regarding community difficulties participants attributed to their income (Figure 6B).

With respect to landlord-related difficulties (Figure 7A) and difficulties with other community authorities (Figure 7B), Mincome participants tend to report community experiences that are much the same as those of nonparticipant controls. Similarly, Mincome participants and community nonparticipants were equally likely, and more likely than welfare participants to have held positions in at least one community group (Figure 8). Finally, welfare participants are twice as likely as Mincome participants

Figure 6

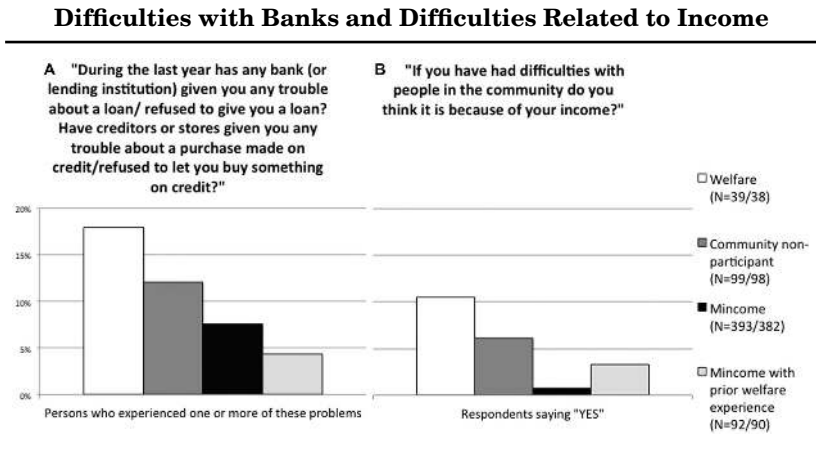
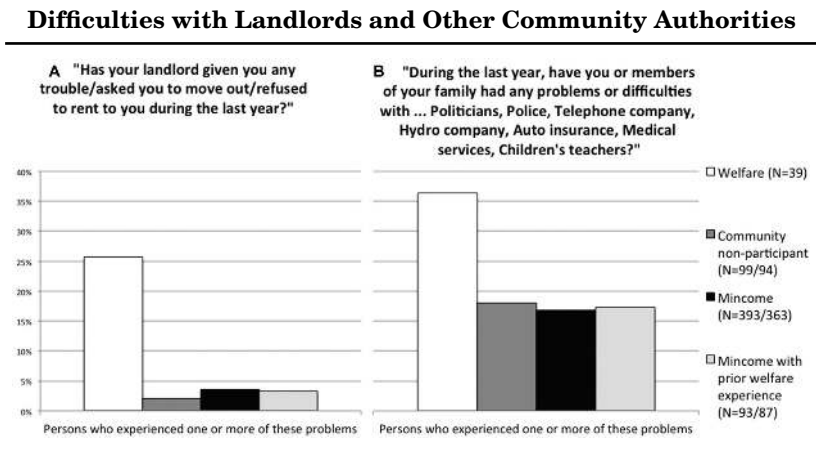


Figure 7



to admit that they have attempted to hide participation from workmates, friends, or stores (Figure 9).

Figure 6 onward includes additional comparisons with Mincome participants who have prior welfare experience. In some cases, in particular some data points in Figure 9, this comparison weakens the overall argument. However, more often than not the comparison with this subgroup

Figure 8

Positions in Community Groups

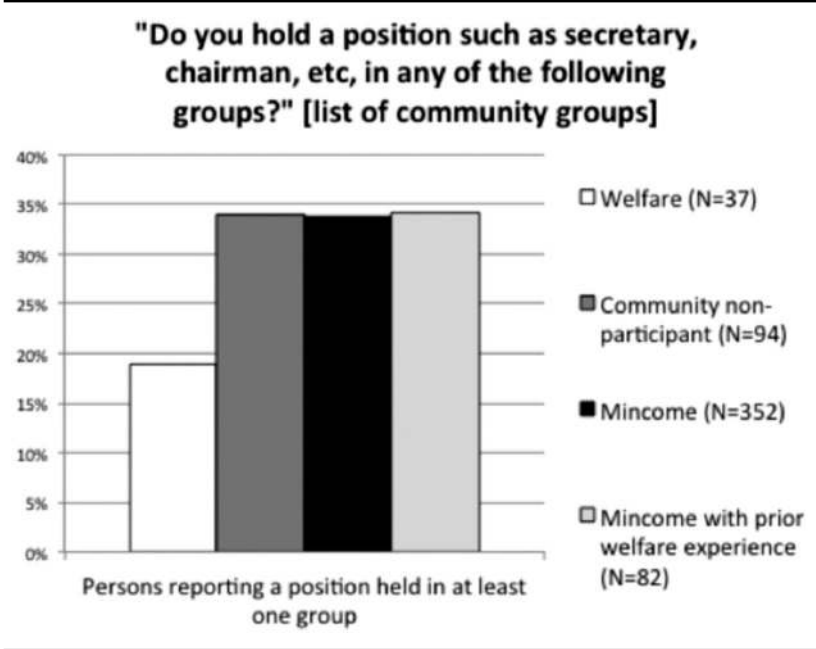
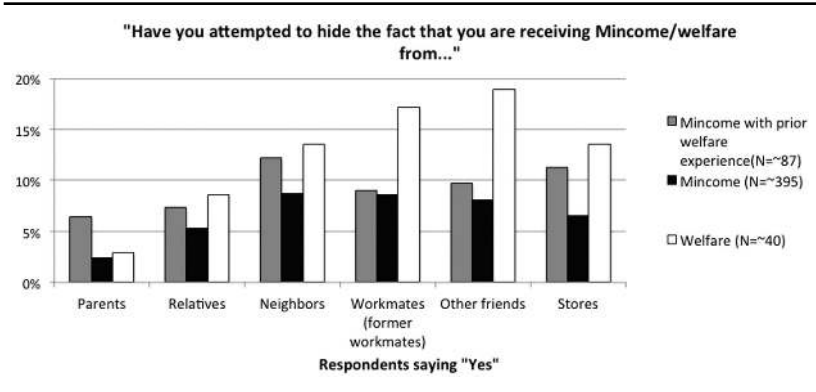


Figure 9

Hiding Program Participation



strengthens the argument due to subgroup results that are similar to results in the full Mincome sample. In all cases, it is hard to argue that Mincome led to difficulties in the community in the way that welfare did. In large part it appears that Mincome participation was compatible with community experiences not unlike those experienced by nonparticipating Manitobans. This is particularly striking given the more “mainstream” demographic characteristics of the community group. Absent the experimental treatment, theory would predict this group to be less socially isolated and less stigmatized. Below, I develop these findings with qualitative accounts.

Moralist on Welfare, Pragmatist on Mincome

Mincome participants who would not accept traditional social assistance sometimes explicitly and more often implicitly argued that the latter was stigmatizing. This did not mean that people did not need assistance. However, accepting aid only became possible when stigma was reduced: one man declined welfare, simply citing “status,” but joined Mincome for “extra income.” A woman refused to join welfare because “It would make me feel bad and think people may be laughing at me.” She joined Mincome “to help along with the expenses.” This subsection describes the consistently divergent personal assessments shown in Table 4.

In the qualitative accounts of welfare participants, consciousness of social stigma and its psychological cost was overwhelming. Various studies have shown that welfare participants often share society’s negative attitudes toward them (Bullock 1999; Canada 1971b; Rainwater 1982). This is consistent with the 43 welfare participants in my sample. One welfare participant wrote, “I dislike welfare, it is degrading . . . Surely we are entitled to live in dignity.” Another wrote, “You never know what your proper place in [the] community is, as some people think you seem to be inferior to them.”

Among Mincome participants’ accounts, it was common for individuals who took strong moralistic positions against welfare to view Mincome in pragmatic terms. One man opposed welfare stating, “Welfare should be used only for those who require it not abused by those who really don’t need it.” Regarding Mincome however, he wrote that, “Extra income really helps when one gets it today.”

It was not uncommon to view traditional social assistance as a program exclusively for people who were ill, disabled, “lazy,” or in some sense marginal: “Welfare is only for needy or bums.” The welfare system aggravated distinctions between people falling into different social categories. One man wrote, “I feel that [welfare] is more for disabled or people which are too lazy to work. It doesn’t include us, we’re both able and willing to work but can’t get a job due to the low employment rate.” They joined Mincome simply because they were “short of money.” Where it was easy to

Table 4

Why Mincome Participants Would Not Join Welfare; Why They Joined Mincome

Mincome participants who would NOT go on welfare (if it would improve their income), asked: "Why wouldn't you?"		Corresponding subsample answers (if available); "Why join Mincome?"	
Coding category	N	Percentage	Sample answers
Would rather work/support myself	43	37	<p>"Because I'd go crazy doing nothing at home - I feel more useful working."</p> <p>"I can make my own living."</p> <p>"I would rather work if I could."</p> <p>"I'd rather work first."</p> <p>"I wouldn't go on welfare unless I was extremely desperate. I would like to think of myself as being capable of supporting myself . . . I feel I could find work enough to keep me off welfare." She joined Mincome because "I felt it would help our situation, and invalid husband with no income."</p> <p>"Welfare to me was accepting something for nothing."</p> <p>"I am able to support myself."</p> <p>"I'm healthy and can be self-sufficient I feel."</p> <p>"Feel better earning own income."</p>
	...	...	<p>"To back up my financial state in case of sickness etc."</p> <p>—</p> <p>"We were asked and we accepted."</p> <p>"I felt it would help our situation, and invalid husband with no income."</p>
	...	...	<p>"Would be a benefit to me at some time."</p> <p>"I might get some assistance."</p> <p>"It provided one with enough income to live sufficiently."</p> <p>"Statistics re: guaranteed income might help in studies . . . added income perhaps best feature!"</p>

(Continued)

Table 4

Continued

Mincome participants who would NOT go on welfare (if it would improve their income), asked: "Why wouldn't you?"		Corresponding subsample answers (if available): "Why join Mincome?"	
Coding category	N	Percentage	Sample answers
Don't want to/need to	19	16	<p>"I believe if a person is capable of working he should work instead of accepting charity."</p> <p>"I am capable of earning a living and feel no reason to be on welfare."</p> <p>"Prefer to work for every dollar of income on my own."</p> <p>"I'm capable of working and I believe every able-bodied man should work."</p> <p>"Don't need any."</p> <p>"There is no need to."</p> <p>"Never would."</p> <p>"No need of it."</p> <p>"Don't need welfare."</p> <p>"I wouldn't."</p> <p>"Because there is other ways to make a living. I went along with Mincome, since I feel it's my duty to Canada to go along with new social programs."</p> <p>"For myself, I don't think I would go on welfare."</p>
...	...	...	<p>"To receive enough money to meet our needs."</p> <p>"Low income I receive."</p> <p>"To help in the survey."</p> <p>"To help pay expenses that my salary did not quite cover . . . Being on Mincome helps to stretch the pay cheque a little farther each month. Which I for one appreciate."</p> <p>"No reason."</p> <p>"Test program."</p> <p>"Short of money."</p> <p>"Thought it was a good program."</p> <p>"As help when a student and for survey."</p> <p>"Need more money to make ends meet."</p> <p>"Because I think it is good for Canada."</p>
...	...	...	<p>"It helped me very much during winter months when work was not too plentiful."</p>

(Continued)

Table 4

Continued

Mincome participants who would NOT go on welfare (if it would improve their income), asked: "Why wouldn't you?"		Corresponding subsample answers (if available): "Why join Mincome?"	
Coding category	N	Percentage	Sample answers
The terms/conditions of welfare not acceptable	14	12	"Welfare would take everything." "Because we would have to forfeit all we own."
		...	"Because we mink ranch and the money made from mink ranch would feed the mink but not the family."
		...	"security reasons" ... "It helps the below the average earning without having to go through doctors etc. You can live where you want to. You can spend your money when you need to and save for the next month when more will be needed. There are many more things I think Mincome is just the thing for the below the average earnings. People feel more secure knowing that if they need help it is there. I would need pages to be able to put down why I think Mincome was a wonderful way of helping people out."

(Continued)

Table 4

Continued

Mincome participants who would NOT go on welfare (if it would improve their income), asked: "Why wouldn't you?"		Corresponding subsample answers (if available): "Why join Mincome?"	
Coding category	N	Percentage	Sample answers
		...	"For the money" ... "Mincome people seem very considerate ... I like Mincome in that one is left alone, never harassed or made to feel like you had to crawl to receive an almighty dollar. I don't like the idea that it is intended to end shortly, with nothing to replace it but that same lousy welfare."
		...	"For help."
		...	"No other income and found it very successful and a very great deal of help to my family."
		...	"I don't know."
		...	"Extra income."
		...	"Asked to,"
		...	"Mincome picked our name and asked us to be on the program."
		...	"To help along with the expenses."
		...	"For government experiment."
		...	"I wanted to take part in the Mincome experiment."
The stigma of welfare not acceptable	9	8	"Welfare is more uncertain. Workers are rude, incompetent, etc." "Can't sit still." "Because they are too noisy and you always feel like they're watching you around the corner." "Because we were on welfare when I was at home and I don't like the way people treat you." "Status." "Pride." "I wouldn't want to destroy my dignity and pride." "It would make me feel bad and think people may be laughing at me." "Other people abuse families on welfare and talk about them." "It makes a bad image on the family."

(Continued)

Table 4

Continued

Income participants who would NOT go on welfare (if it would improve their income), asked: "Why wouldn't you?"		Corresponding subsample answers (if available): "Why join Mincome?"	
Coding category	N	Percentage	Sample answers
		...	
		...	"Because I was approached and thought it would help the average person with my information." "I don't know."
		...	"We had no other choice as my husband is disabled and with my health and age, I am not able to work full time." "Because of cost of living and to give my family a regular living standard, more in line with the people around us." "Extra income." "Why not?" "Short of money to be able to survive."
		...	"Research assistance."
Welfare is for other people	9	8	"Because I have my pride. As long as I am able to work I will own my own way." "Because we were on welfare when I was at home and I don't like the way people treat you." "Because Mincome seems more normal than welfare." "I would like to keep my self-respect which is lost when on welfare." "Welfare is only for needy or bums." "Welfare is for people not able to work." "I feel that [welfare] is more for disabled or people which are too lazy to work. It doesn't include us, we're both able and willing to work but can't get a job due to the low employment rate." "Welfare is for people who can't work. I'm able to work—even if it's not exactly the type of work I may prefer."

(Continued)

Table 4

Continued

Mincome participants who would NOT go on welfare (if it would improve their income), asked: "Why wouldn't you?"		Corresponding subsample answers (if available): "Why join Mincome?"	
Coding category	N	Percentage	Sample answers
Don't believe in it	9	8	<p>"I feel that is more for disabled or people which are too lazy to work. It doesn't include us, we're both able and willing to work but can't get a job due to the low employment rate."</p> <p>"Welfare is for people who can't work."</p> <p>"I believe in self-help and don't see why people should receive money by not trying to earn it on their own."</p> <p>"Because I will just cheat the government and the people who are paying their taxes to support the welfare."</p> <p>"Welfare should be used only for those who require it not abused by those who really don't need it."</p> <p>"I don't believe in it. Unless a person really has to."</p> <p>"Don't believe in it. Would get a better job if I had to."</p> <p>"I feel there are far too many able bodied people on welfare now who should or could be working."</p>
...	...	...	<p>"Short of money to be able to survive."</p> <p>"It sounded like it was a little fairer than unemployment insurance."</p> <p>"To help assess a proper rate of income to help people who require same."</p> <p>"I was asked to."</p> <p>"It helps us a little bit in our family expenses."</p> <p>"Extra income really helps when one gets it today."</p> <p>"We were interviewed when they started with it."</p> <p>"Help the program. Needed money."</p> <p>"It sounded like good insurance."</p>

(Continued)

Table 4

Continued

Mincome participants who would NOT go on welfare (if it would improve their income), asked: "Why wouldn't you?"			Corresponding subsample answers (if available): "Why join Mincome?"
Coding category	N	Percentage	Sample answers
Mincome is better	4	3	"I don't really believe in welfare." "Mincome is better." "Like the income system better." "Somebody has to pay for the welfare in taxes. If only the needy received welfare it would be alright, but there are a lot of freeloader ..." "I'll suffer instead." "Why should I." "I just wouldn't."
Other	9	8	"I have a child to take care of and didn't want to go on welfare." "Because I need the money." "Didn't want to live off my parents." "Test."
Total	116		"Needed extra money." "No reason." "I thought it was a good program."

distance oneself from welfare recipients, Mincome was not tarnished as a program for specific kinds of people. No equivalent linkages are made between the program and particular, undeserving groups. Rather, Mincome was practical support. As a practical program, participation was less likely to signal a person's moral worth.

Consistent with the discussion above, one could simultaneously view welfare as stigmatizing and Mincome as an experiment, as an aid to working people, and innocuous, more generally. "Other people abuse families on welfare and talk about them," noted a woman who joined Mincome "for the government experiment." A man who would not join welfare because "it makes a bad image on the family," joined Mincome "... to take part in the Mincome experiment."

Participants want to retain their dignity and are open to a form of social assistance program that has been reframed. When families are asked to help, when their information is seen as valuable, it becomes easier to join. A man who avoided welfare citing "pride," joined Mincome because he was "asked to." Another refused welfare stating, "I wouldn't want to destroy my dignity and pride." He joined Mincome because "Mincome picked our name and asked us to be on the program."

Not all participants viewed Mincome as destigmatizing. At least four participants expressed explicit concern that Dauphinites might take "advantage" of Mincome. However, even these comments are contradictory, typically blending criticism with positive assessments. On the other side, some participants explicitly state that social stigma was reduced under Mincome: "It trusts the Canadian people and leaves a man or woman, their pride." One woman concluded, "Mincome seems more normal than welfare."

Though welfare was a normal part of everyday life, Mincome might have treated participants as "normal" people. Just after the midpoint of the program the director of Mincome told the *Dauphin Herald* that Mincome "appears to have become a natural part of the community" ("Mincome payments made as usual," *Dauphin Herald* 1976). One woman reported that she had "always been put at ease" with interactions with Mincome staff. Some comments indicate that Mincome had a mainstream character. One man suggested that Mincome enabled his family to live at standards acceptable in the community. He joined "to give my family a regular living standard, more in line with the people around us." Another man may have observed the "normal" qualities of the program. He asked, "Will everyone in Manitoba soon be on Mincome?"

The Terms of Welfare, the Flexibility of Mincome

This final subsection argues that the sources of Mincome's normalcy described above are linked to design features that allowed recipients to participate in the normal activities of daily life, especially work life. Recipients

were not separated out to be assigned special sets of rules. In particular, Mincome maintained incomes without revoking the autonomy and independence enjoyed by better-off residents.

Survey participants give a variety of reasons for refusing welfare, but the biggest portion (see Table 4) emphasize their desire to work and support themselves. The desire to avoid welfare is not surprising, but people who refused welfare because they prefer to work—or more poignantly, because they prefer to earn their own incomes—often joined Mincome precisely to obtain additional income. “Welfare to me was accepting something for nothing,” said a man who joined Mincome because it “would be a benefit to me at some time.” One participant who avoided welfare, stating “I am able to support myself,” joined Mincome because “I might get some assistance.” A 22-year-old single man who refused welfare because “I’m healthy and can be self-sufficient I feel” joined Mincome because “it provided one with enough income to live sufficiently.” Working allowed him to feel “self-sufficient,” but Mincome allowed him to “live sufficiently.” Another welfare refuser said he “felt better earning his own income,” yet he noted that Mincome’s “added income” was “perhaps [the] best feature!” One man refused welfare on moral grounds, saying “I believe if a person is capable of working he should work instead of accepting charity”; he joined Mincome with his family for pragmatic reasons: “to receive enough money to meet our needs.”

It was not uncommon for people who wish to earn a living on their own to simultaneously collect Mincome payments comfortably. Participants appreciate the feeling of independence that comes from “earning” a living, but often cannot earn sufficient employment income. Work provided a sense of autonomy, Mincome helped people actually achieve a decent standard of living. It could be integrated into an already existing moral code of self-sufficiency and meritocracy. When income maintenance policies required recipients to violate mainstream values around work and autonomy, they were morally unacceptable; when they sidestep confrontation with a mainstream work ethic they were paid little heed.

The absence of regulation around the work lives of individuals stands out as a key part of “feeling independent.” Mincome’s smooth integration into work life and the sense of autonomy it facilitated was a key feature separating it from the social meaning of welfare. In one case, inclusion into the normal habits of daily work life was possible, in the other, exclusion from mainstream activities and special treatment was the rule. Mincome allowed participants to retain a mainstream ideology of meritocracy. They were not forced to question their place within broad community norms.

Beyond the regulation of work, there are myriad complaints about the stipulations and conditions of welfare, which single out recipients. Many of these conditions involve invasive and degrading procedures that combine to nurture a pervasive sense of indignity. As Reich (1963) once noted, welfare administrators exercise their discretionary power “to impose

standards of morality [on welfare recipients that are] not imposed on the rest of the community” (p. 1359). More recent analyses of welfare administration reveal the endurance of these dynamics over time (Chunn and Gavigan 2004; Herd, Mitchell and Lightman 2005; Little and Morrison 1999).

Likewise, Mincome participants often object to the basic fact of case-worker discretion. One former welfare recipient compared Mincome’s automatic delivery and flexibility to welfare’s conditionality:

It helps the below the average earning without having to go through doctors etc. You can live where you want to. You can spend your money when you need to and save for the next month when more will be needed . . . People feel more secure knowing that if they need help it is there.

Another participant refused welfare reporting, “Welfare is more uncertain. Workers are rude, incompetent.” She joined Mincome simply “for the money.” She continued: “Mincome people seem very considerate . . . I like Mincome in that one is left alone, never harassed or made to feel like you had to crawl to receive an almighty dollar. I don’t like the idea that it is intended to end shortly, with nothing to replace it but that same lousy welfare.”

The contrasting terms of welfare are stark. One welfare participant wrote, “The thing I don’t like is practically having to beg for . . . extra money for expenses and the idea that if they don’t like your attitude you can be cut off. This can be a very strong weapon in some of the workers hands and creates bad feelings between people as it seems to make some of them adopt a very snotty attitude towards people unfortunate enough to be on welfare.”

The assessment of welfare caseworkers as “rude” and Mincome staff as “friendly,” “nice,” and “super people” is a product of design details as much as anything else. Welfare workers were tasked with home visits where various criteria, much open to personal discretion, are used to determine continued eligibility. By contrast, Mincome was relatively hands-off; the most sustained interaction with Mincome staff came during interviews, which were unrelated to actual payments. As emphasized in Figure 1 above the absence of design features that treat one group of people in a separate fashion and the substitution of automatic procedures for case-by-case determination produces social policy less conducive to the emergence of stigma.

CONCLUSION: BENEFITS WITHOUT BARRIERS

Though Mincome produced fewer solid conclusions than it should have, the old questions of stigma and social inclusion are germane to a full consideration of the lessons to be learned from the experiment. Mincome bore

a familial resemblance to welfare. It disproportionately directed benefits to the poor, and retained distinctions between Mincome recipients and nonrecipients. However, participants and other Manitobans saw it as distinctly different from welfare, as a program providing assistance without also imposing the costs of stigma.

The importance of the moral aspects of social policy should not be underestimated. The most successful antipoverty effort over the past century in North America, the growth in social insurance for the elderly (Campbell 2003; Myles 2000), was effective in part because the elderly are seen as morally deserving (Pettersen 1995; van Oorschot 2000, 2006). Eliminating social stigma is important for its own sake; Rawls (2009) argued that “self-respect and a sure confidence in the sense of one’s own worth is perhaps the most important primary good” (p. 348). But it is also important for instrumental reasons: if antipoverty tools are to be socially reproducible, if they are to provide a base from which to mobilize for broader reforms, they must consider the moral reasoning they foster.

Mincome did not single out groups to be treated in a manner that accentuated their separation from others. Participants avoided the special treatment of having their work and personal lives monitored and regulated. It did not force participants to transgress mainstream norms around work and meritocracy. Participants were treated, in sum, like “all Canadians,” and the program’s portrayal reinforced this image. As a consequence, the community’s reception was pragmatic, not moralistic. For these interacting reasons, Mincome appeared “normal” in the eyes of participants. The bright line dividing the deserving and undeserving poor turned fuzzy. The seeds of Rawls’ (2009:54) “social bases of self-respect” were planted.⁹

If part of Mincome’s positive reception can be attributed to its framing, a contemporary variant might be equally compatible with a variety of positive portrayals. In an age of precarity (Kalleberg 2009; Standing 2011), a modern guaranteed income may make common cause with a range of groups if portrayed as “insecurity insurance” or “low-income insurance” (Hacker, Rehm, and Schlesinger 2013; Paskov and Koster 2014). Pitched in these terms the guaranteed income may be understood as a collective resource, one that benefits even those people not drawing net benefits at any given moment (Sjöberg 2010). These considerations take it for granted

⁹ Although these seeds may have been planted, it is possible that the complete eradication of social stigma—in particular, the stigma linked to “able-bodied” people outside the labor market—is incompatible with robust, sustainable capitalist labor markets. The conjecture here is that without stigmatizing those outside the labor market, without making the alternative to work painful, capitalists lose their negotiating power over those currently at work, and this in turn makes the game of capitalism far less sustainable or impossible over time. If this asymmetry in negotiating power is indeed truly necessary to the social reproduction of capitalism, then one could speculate that in a capitalist world with a generous guaranteed income, the power of “the sack” (Kalecki 1943) comes not from the deprivations of unemployment, but from the lingering pain of social stigma. Differently put: if one accepts a functionalist explanation of unemployment under capitalism (see debates in Berger and Offe 1982; Cohen 1982; Elster 1982; van Parijs 1982), then “unemployment as social stigma” may achieve the same functionality once achieved by “unemployment as poverty,” now off the table.

that political feasibility is as significant as economic feasibility in the evaluation of income maintenance policy. If desirable social arrangements are to be robust, the political impact of their design details and framing ought to be at the fore of discussions of the social reproduction of social policy.

Welfare systems in the United States and Canada have changed in important ways since the 1970s. Apart from the shift to “workfare” (Bashevkin 2002; Danziger 2010; Peck 2001), and increasing barriers to eligibility (Kneebone and White 2009), some of the most extreme intrusions into people’s lives have been relaxed (Boychuk 1998; Caputo 2011; Gustafson 2012). Yet the distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor persists. The moral regulation of the poor is an enduring feature of social assistance (Chunn and Gavigan 2004; Gazso 2012; Little and Marks 2006). One qualitative study of female social assistance recipients’ experiences with the welfare system in Canada found that recipients “said they were belittled, abused and treated as file numbers, and ‘non-persons’” (Reid 2009:135). Recent evaluations (Neysmith, Bezanson and O’Connell 2005; Wallace, Klein, and Reitsma-Street 2006) conclude that the social assistance system continues to be marked by deep social stigmatization. In some cases there is evidence that the “micro-regulation” of job search intentions and personal behavior has expanded in the wake of welfare reform in the 1990s (Herd et al. 2005). Social policies that destigmatize, ones that blur the boundaries between the deserving and undeserving poor, remain as relevant as ever.

Amartya Sen (2000) often refers to Adam Smith’s conception of deprivation as the inability to appear in public without shame. By reducing social stigma, the guaranteed income helps achieve this object. The question of whether a guaranteed income can actually enhance social solidarity among poor and working people is harder to argue persuasively. It achieves this end, in part, insofar as it provides benefits without erecting barriers to social inclusion. By obscuring the distinctions among low-wage workers, unemployed workers, and social assistance recipients, universalistic income maintenance programs may reduce the barriers to communication between otherwise separated people. This does not quite equal the active nurturing of social solidarity, but avoiding its obstruction is a meritorious goal nonetheless.

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