

**Nonprofits and Poverty:  
The Relationship Between Frames, Conceptions, and Programs**

by  
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## **ABSTRACT**

### **NONPROFITS AND POVERTY: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FRAMES, CONCEPTIONS AND PROGRAMS**

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This thesis is an investigation of how nonprofits focused on poverty reduction conceptualize and frame poverty, and to what degree these align with their programs. Canadian nonprofits provide essential services to those facing issues of poverty, and yet we know very little about how nonprofits and the people within them understand poverty. Three nonprofits in London, Ontario were selected. Methods included content analyses of formal organizational documents and semi-structured interviews. Conceptualizations of poverty varied across the three nonprofits. Only one nonprofit had alignment between their conceptualizations, framing and programs, while two of the three had considerable misalignment. Possible explanations for the misalignment include: nonprofit size; organizational structure; funding source and type; ambiguous framing; and the impact of the values, principles and practices of new public management (NPM). Ideas associated with NPM were present within all nonprofits to varying degrees, and were identifiable within their funders' priorities as well.

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I think we should view these small, ephemeral, volunteer-run places serving up inadequate, unhealthy food as symbols of the breakdown of our social fabric, the end of whatever collective understanding we have about our responsibility to each other.

(Saul & Curtis, 2013)

## **Introduction**

While social policy development and implementation have historically been left to the state (Howlett, Ramesh, & Perl, 2009), state restructuring has resulted in a larger role for nonprofits in the delivery of public goods and services (Evans & Shields, 2000). As a result, the power to create, maintain, alter and evaluate policies does not rest solely in the hands of those with elected political power, or within the traditional bureaucracy of the state. In fact, nonprofit organizations are considered important players in public policy (Bryce, 2005; Casey, 2016a, 2016b; Evans & Shields, 2000; Heitzmann, 2010), and there has been tremendous growth in the last few decades within the sector in Canada (Imagine Canada, n.d.). In particular, areas of growth include service delivery, education, and emergency response, with much of this work targeting the most vulnerable in society, including those living in poverty (Hall, Barr, Easwaramoorthy, Wojciech Sokolowski, & Salamon, 2005). Across Canada we see nonprofits providing essential services to some of our most vulnerable citizens, and yet we know very little about how these organizations, and their staff, volunteers, and recipients of services, understand the problem of poverty.

While Canada does not have an official definition of poverty, the literature is clear about the importance of problem definition in policy development, implementation and evaluation processes (Pal, 2014; Paquet, 2017). Canada's lack of clarity and agreement on the issue of poverty thus has several implications. There are challenges related to answering fundamental questions such as, who is poor (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2001)? Additionally, some argue that a lack of definition is at odds with democratic values because citizens cannot

easily hold the government to account when the state makes policy decisions related to the issue (Pasma, 2008). Finally, there is reason to believe we cannot successfully move toward solutions to poverty without understanding and documenting the “fundamental causes at work” at a policy level (Pal, 2014, p. 113).

While this study is a small-N research project, in that it relies on a limited number of cases, it aims to contribute significantly to filling an important gap in the research around issues of poverty and public policy processes. This project is guided by the following research questions: First, how do nonprofits focused on poverty alleviation or reduction in southern Ontario conceptualize and frame poverty? Second, how, if at all, does an organization’s program choices align with its conceptualizations and framing of poverty? These questions, and the research that informs the responses, are important for at least three reasons. First, the mechanisms, including new public management (NPM), that have facilitated and supported the changes in social policy provision in Canada and in other developed states require careful examination at the nonprofit level. There is evidence to suggest nonprofits have been significantly impacted by NPM (Evans, Richmond, & Shields, 2005; Woolford & Curran, 2012), and yet we know relatively little about the specifics of these impacts, and how these impacts influence the alignment of conceptualizations of poverty and programs, if at all. Second, this study focuses attention on both the organization, and the individuals who work and volunteer within it. This project examined how organizations frame poverty, but also engaged with staff and volunteers, recognizing the important role they play in a nonprofit. Values, practices, and culture may or may not be cohesive in an organization, and this may impact the likelihood of their being similar (or different) conceptions of poverty between staff, volunteers, and departments (Chen, Lune, & Queen, 2013). It is important to speak with individuals within the

nonprofit. Third, nonprofits interested in aligning their conceptualizations of poverty, their framing of the issue, and their programs, ought to have resources to help navigate the challenges in so doing as identified by this research. These challenges include intersecting issues such as the ways that program-based funding impacts nonprofits; the challenges faced by nonprofits when administering programs and services, the goals of which may or may not align with their conceptualizations of poverty, and that are part of an inadequate and complex social safety net; the political activity limitations placed on nonprofits, particularly for those nonprofits with structural conceptualizations of poverty; and the complex challenge that nonprofits face in building and maintaining an inclusive organizational culture that values input and collaboration from its staff, volunteers, and people in the community. The findings in this study provide a foundation from which these resources can be built.

To address the research questions in this project, the study draws on three bodies of literature. First, public policy literature helps us understand how an issue like poverty is identified as a policy problem. Second, literature on conceptualizations of poverty provides a theoretical framework for the research. There are many ways we can understand poverty, and literature from different disciplines helps to guide the project's analyses. Third, through purposive sampling based on criteria developed from the nonprofit literature, three cases were selected for this research. While this small-N study does not allow me to make any robust generalizations, the findings do allow for some broad observations, drawn out in the conclusion, beyond the location of the research (London, Ontario).

Through semi-structured interviews and document analyses, it is clear that conceptualizations of poverty, and the ways organizations frame poverty, are as diverse as the nonprofit sector itself. These results point toward a reactive, patchy, asymmetrical system of

social services, with several associated consequences. First, this misalignment likely impacts how someone in the community experiences and has access to programs. Second, NPM, and the underlying values of neoliberalism, may negatively impact the degree to which organizations can align their conceptualizations of poverty, their framing of poverty and their programs. While NPM ideas and practices are present in all nonprofits in this study, albeit to varying degrees, the nonprofits that had the most exposure to what Evans and colleagues (Evans et al., 2005) call the “new [neoliberal] modes of control” (p. 73) also had the greatest misalignment between their conceptualizations of poverty, their framing of poverty, and their programs (Organization 2 and 3). There were several modes of control identified for these nonprofits. The nonprofits adopted language associated with NPM and were limited in their capacity to engage in program design, administration or evaluation processes. Additionally, these nonprofits received program-based funding, which primarily focused on self-improvement of people in the community and reactive/emergency services. Third, it suggests that the status quo is a system largely designed to keep nonprofits out of the business of creating structural change.

This thesis is organized as follows. Chapter 1 offers a review of public policy and poverty literature in the context of the project’s research question. I first look at poverty as a policy problem and examine how policy problem definition may impact the size and scope of the issue and second, I examine conceptions of poverty available in the literature. Chapter 2 provides context for the study. In this chapter, I define the nonprofit sector and examine it as an institution in Canada. Next, I explore the emergence and maintenance of NPM in the context of the public and nonprofit sectors. Finally, I examine the nonprofit literature as it relates to the topic of poverty. Chapter 3 outlines the research methods of this study. It provides a rationale for all choices made within the project, including case selection, location, and methods of analysis. Two

types of analyses are necessary to answer the research questions. Semi-structured interviews are used to inform conceptualizations of poverty, and a content analysis informs how each nonprofit included in the study frames the issue of poverty.

While Chapters 1 through 3 provide the context and theoretical foundation for this project, Chapter 4 details the results and findings of the study. Here I review individual versus structural approaches to poverty, and present findings. The findings of each case are presented separately and include: a description of the nonprofit's characteristics, details of how poverty is conceptualized by staff and volunteers and how poverty is framed, and whether and to what degree programs and services align with these conceptions and frames.

Chapter 5 compares and contrasts the findings in four sections: misalignment between nonprofit poverty conceptualizations and framing; challenges faced by nonprofits and the role these challenges might play in misalignment; new public management and nonprofits; and the inadequacies of the public social safety net. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes the work by making recommendations and discussing the contributions of this study, and by highlighting areas of further inquiry. This research sheds light on the degree to which there is alignment between nonprofits' conceptualization of poverty, how they frame poverty, and the programs they offer. My findings demonstrate that the way we think about poverty matters. However, external forces such as funding models and competitive funding environments, and internal forces such as poverty framing and an organization's characteristics and culture, have impacts; they might influence the likelihood of alignment between a nonprofits' conceptualization of poverty, its framing of poverty, and the programs it offers. It matters to people in the community and to those who do this work every day. It should also matter to the policy makers who depend on nonprofits around the country to provide often life-saving social services.

## **Chapter 1: Literature Review**

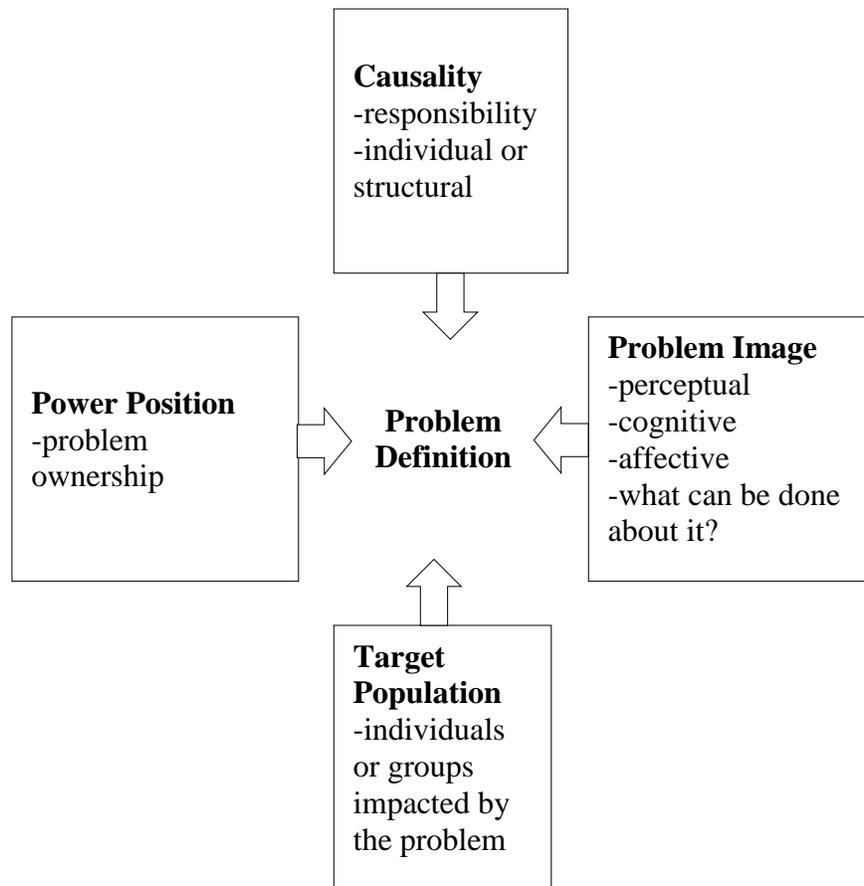
### Introduction

This research is grounded in two sets of literature. First, the public policy literature on decision-making helps us understand how, why, and whether an issue like poverty is identified as a policy problem. It also supports the notion that a problem like poverty fundamentally requires a definition, which it currently lacks in Canada. Second, the literature on the ways we conceptualize poverty offers a theoretical framework for this project. Halperin and Health (2012) define conception as a “mental image...that summarizes a collection of seemingly related observations and experiences” (p. 149). Drawing on this definition, my research asks, when people and organizations use the term poverty, what exactly are they talking about?

### Problem Definition

#### *Poverty as a Policy Problem*

Policy problems are socially constructed (Rochefort & Cobb, 1993; Schneider, Ingram, & Deleon, 2014). Some believe they are constructed through a “process of image making, where the images have to do fundamentally with attributing cause, blame, and responsibility” (Stone, 1989, p. 282), where others believe causality is but one facet of problem definition. We can identify three other components of problem definition (Figure 1) including problem image, populations impacted, and identifying who has influence and power to define the problem (Pal, 2014; Rochefort & Cobb, 1993; Stone, 1989). Causal arguments are focused on answering the question, where did this problem come from? This can include arguments that assign blame and identify victims of the problem (Stone, 1989). It also includes consideration of whether causation is individual or structural (Pal, 2014). Additionally, causation can be either purposeful (intentional or inadvertent) or accidental (Stone, 1989).



*Figure 1.* Problem Definition Formation. Source: adapted from Rochefort & Cobb, 1993, p. 58-59; Stone, 1989, p. 285; Pal, 2014, p. 97-114.

Problem images are a subjective response to something previously perceived (Rochefort & Cobb, 1993). They include four components: perceptual (what we believe we observe); cognitive (how we interpret what we believe we observe); affective (how we feel about what we observe); and what can be done about it (what action potential exists)? Problem images are subjective because they are based on our own experience in the world. These experiences can be influenced by how a problem is framed by political elites, the media or others with influence. The idea of problem framing is discussed in more detail below.

When problems are defined, they may also define individuals or groups who are impacted by the problem (and by potential responses to the problem) (Pal, 2014). When populations become targeted, there is a risk that individuals within target groups may be categorized as either deserving or undeserving of assistance. In his work on congressional discourse on poverty in the United States, Guetzkow (2010) unpacks this idea of deserving versus undeserving, which is worth quoting at length:

...[I]f you believe a cause of poverty is that people do not work, do you get them to work by allowing them to keep a portion of their welfare benefits if their initial wages are too low (using what is known as the “earned-income disregard”), or do you get them to work by placing a time limit on their benefits? If you think that welfare recipients can (have capacity) and want (have motivation) to work, then the first solution makes more sense; if you believe instead that people on welfare can work but are lazy (motivation), then the latter solution is more sensible. Thus, holding causal attributions constant, policymakers’ ideas about the capacities and motivations of the poor channel policy development and choice. In this example, when the poor are viewed as motivated to work, they are deemed “deserving,” when unmotivated they are “undeserving,” and the policy choices that make sense given a particular view of their motivation may subsequently be described by researchers in broader terms as being more or less generous. But note that the logic of the policy tool is not derived from the poor’s lack of deservingness (“let’s cut them off because they don’t deserve it”) but, rather, from an understanding of how to get the poor to behave in a desired fashion ostensibly aimed at reducing poverty (“let’s cut them off so they’ll start working”) (Guetzkow, 2010, pp. 177-178).

There are two immediate points of interest we can derive from Guetzkow’s work, which relate to how discourse and one’s worldview can inform problem definition. First, in a full text inquiry of congressional documents from 1960 to 1997, he found very little use of the terms deserving or undeserving. This is important because it highlights the need to look beyond basic text and seek to understand the ways that discourse, through what Stone (1989) identifies as “symbolic devices”, contribute to problem definition and framing (p. 282). Second, in Guetzkow’s (2010) example, “the particular view of [the poor’s] motivation” (p. 177) is in part derived from what some scholars refer to as a paradigm or worldview (Campbell, 2002). One’s worldview can both

inform problem definition and constrain the types of responses that seem possible to address the problem (Campbell, 2002). Additionally, worldview impacts the stories we tell about the problem, and whose story is deemed legitimate (Rocheffort & Cobb, 1993).

Finally, a fourth way to define a problem is to examine who has the power and authority to define the issue (Rocheffort & Cobb, 1993). Who has the power to weave the causal story (Stone, 1989) and keep other problem definitions at bay (Rocheffort & Cobb, 1993)? This raises questions of legitimacy and power because it is most concerned with which individuals or groups have the capacity to not only define a problem, but to ensure the way they conceptualize the problem is considered the *right* way.

#### *Problem Definitions and the Impact on Size and Scope of the Issue*

There are multiple and intersecting ways a problem can be defined, and there is evidence to suggest that the various ways policy actors define a problem can illuminate the pathways connecting policy processes and outcomes (Pal, 2014; Paquet, 2017). Problem definition can result in “various outcomes depending on the context and [*sic*] of the actors involved...[I]t is safe to assert that it generally has a structuring effect on policy and politics over time” (Paquet, 2017, p. 452). What is less clear, and is largely absent from public policy literature, is the impact of a lack of problem definition on policy formulation. Canada does not have a definition of poverty, which presents several problems. First, it is difficult for individuals, policy actors, nonprofits, anti-poverty groups, and the like to agree on answers to fundamental questions such as who is poor? how long have they been poor? and how poor are the poorest people? (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2001). We cannot begin to answer these questions if we do not know how we are measuring poverty. As will be discussed below, there are two broad ways to understand poverty, from an absolute or relative perspective. Within each of these there are again

various ways to measure the incidence of poverty. Without a national definition, policy actors across the country are left to determine their own answers to these important questions, and their answers may differ not just across organizations, but also within organizations, which is one reason why this research is important. Second, some argue that a lack of definition is at odds with democratic values because citizens cannot easily hold the government to account when the state makes policy decisions related to the issue (Pasma, 2008). Finally, the Canadian state ought to be more precise and transparent with its problem definition because we cannot move toward solutions to poverty without understanding the “fundamental causes at work” (Pal, 2014, p. 113).

As many have argued, problem definition is neither a politically neutral process (Schneider et al., 2014; Stone, 1989, 2012) nor a science (Pal, 2014). It is very often about making claims and arguments to persuade others that one definition is superior to another. At a foundational level, this suggests that the way we conceptualize the policy problem of poverty influences our understanding of the size and scope of the issue. For example, when viewed from a relative perspective, people living in poverty risk social exclusion and barriers to wellbeing (Maxwell, 2009) and lack resources that are “necessary to meet a *community standard of decency or credibility*” (Guppy & Hawkshaw, 2009, p. 108, emphasis added). From this perspective, 14 percent of Canadians (roughly 4.8 million people) live below the low-income measure according to the 2016 Canadian Census (Statistics Canada, 2017).<sup>1</sup> This view is contrasted by those who understand poverty in absolute terms. An absolute perspective of poverty prioritizes income over all other resources and defines poverty as living below a specific

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<sup>1</sup> This is based on the low-income measure (LIM). LIM is a relative measure of poverty (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2001) and is fixed at 50 percent of median income (where 50 percent of families have a lower income and 50 percent have a higher income). This is then adjusted for family size based on the premise that, assuming the same standard of living, a family of four requires a higher income than a family of three. A criticism of LIM is that the amount of extra money needed with the addition of one person to a family is arbitrary (Sharma, 2012).

income required to avoid physical harm from deprivation (Sarlo, 2013). From this view, poverty in Canada in 2009 was under six percent (Lammam & MacIntyre, 2016; Sarlo, 2013), representing less than half of the figure cited above. The scale of the issue is thus dramatically different depending on one's perspective. This difference can have an impact on the urgency with which public policy is devised (or not) to address the problem of poverty. Different conceptions of poverty also impact understanding the scope of the problem. The next section reviews the various ways poverty is conceptualized within the literature (summarized in Table 1). Nonprofits may conceptualize poverty in one or more ways, which may impact their approach(es) to addressing poverty.

### Conceptions of Poverty

In her influential work on anti-poverty policy, Rebecca Blank (2010) reviews common approaches within economics that explain causes of poverty. One such theoretical framework is what can be described as economic inequality. In this framework, poverty can be explained by acknowledging one of the greatest flaws within the market itself: when economic growth occurs, it does not translate into an increase in individual wealth for all. Over five decades ago, Anderson (1964) hypothesized that economic growth did not distribute equally throughout society. The result is that even in times of prosperity, not everyone is lifted out of poverty or even shares in the spoils of economic growth equally. Within the economic inequality framework, the state is the main actor of interest; it can address the issues of poverty through policy choices such as regulation and tax redistribution systems (Banting & Myles, 2013; Hacker & Pierson, 2010).

The theory of labour participation captures a range of perspectives. For some, labour participation (demand side) can only be guaranteed through incentives (Sarlo, 2013). If the safety

net provided to individuals in society is too high, people will choose to opt-out of the labour market and live off the benefits of the state instead. People choose to work because the alternative (social assistance) means assured poverty. This is a rational choice grounded theory that places the self-interested worker at the heart of the problem of poverty. In this case, an individual will choose to rely on state benefits, instead of entering or maintaining labour market participation. This theory is somewhat complicated by the fact that work today does not necessarily mean a life free of poverty. While the rational worker may choose work over state benefit, that work may still not provide enough income to keep them from being poor. The types of jobs that ensure someone a life free from poverty may not be available, or the individual may not be qualified for the jobs that are available (Lewchuk et al., 2015; McBride, 1999). Within this version of labour participation (supply side) theory, the state is the main actor of interest. Policies such as job (re)training, education and income guarantees, which enhance access to benefits for insecure workers (workers who are without a permanent, stable, full-time job) provide policy responses to address issues of poverty. Additionally, regulations are an important policy consideration and can ensure employment is a “pathway to income and employment security” (Lewchuk et al., 2015, p. 13).

Social stratification theory is most concerned with the myriad ways that structures within society interact with individuals and groups to distribute poverty (this includes place-based issues such as racial segregation within neighbourhoods, discriminatory housing and education policies, or labour market stagnation within particular communities) (Price Wolf, 2008). Structural discrimination based on race, gender, class, sex or other sociopolitical identity categories may keep certain people and groups out of areas of the economy that offer more generous compensation packages. Similarly, the same type of discrimination can often encourage

certain groups into sectors of the economy with less generous compensation packages and more precarious work conditions. When viewing poverty through a social stratification lens, the state is the main actor of interest; it can address issues of poverty through policy mechanisms such as regulation around hiring practices, quotas, and incentivizing organizations to support diverse hiring practices such that our private and public sectors reflect the diversity of our society.

The influence of culture, values and norms on poverty is often articulated through culture of poverty literature, where low educational and financial ambitions and a high acceptance for behaviour deemed socially unacceptable interact to reinforce (often generational) cycles of poverty (Price Wolf, 2008, p. 51). While these values are individually held, they are informed through social culture and shared beliefs, which are structural. The paradox of culture of poverty literature is that, while the theories themselves hold structural ideas of poverty (values and norms are learned through sub-culture behaviour and acceptance), the actor of most interest within this theory is the individual or family (Bradshaw, 2007).

Some conceptions of poverty are rooted in the politics of recognition (Fraser, 2001) and social exclusion (Caragata, 2009). Fraser sees recognition of oneself by others as a “question of social status” (p. 24).

From this perspective – I shall call it the status model – what requires recognition is not group-specific identity but rather the status of group members as full partners in social interaction. Misrecognition, accordingly, does not mean the depreciation and deformation of group identity. Rather, it means social subordination in the sense of being prevented from participating as a peer in social life. To redress the injustice requires a politics of recognition, to be sure, but this no longer means identity politics. In the status model, rather, it means a politics aimed at overcoming subordination by establishing the misrecognized party as a full member of society, capable of participating on a par with other members (p. 24).

From this perspective, what is required is socialism, a radical transformation of economic and social institutions, placing the state at the heart of this conception of poverty (Fraser, 2001). Similarly, in her work on social exclusion for lone mothers, Caragata (2009) argues that conceptualizations of social exclusion are complex, involve one's capability (discussed in detail below), relational deprivation, which impact one's status in society, and material deprivation, or lack of goods and resources. For Fraser (2001) and Caragata (2009), social exclusion, including a rejection or lack of recognition by one's peers and society at large, is a systemic issue, which can be addressed through public policy.

While a systematic theory of poverty has not emerged from existing political science research, much has been done to investigate the ways that poverty may be influenced by political processes and institutions (including issues of distributive justice and the role of government) and political participation (Lehning, 2007). In his classic work on distributive justice, John Rawls (1971) argued that equality of opportunity was essential in order to ensure one's "life-prospects" (p. 7) are not diminished by circumstances outside one's control, such as being born into poverty. For Rawls, limitations on social, political and economic mobility are concerning because they can impede one's ability to improve upon one's own "starting point" in life (p. 7). He develops an ideal system where rational individuals decide on the general structure of society (including institutional arrangements and distributions of rights and obligations) prior to knowing their economic or social place in the world. Just as Rawls (1971) believes one's starting point in life should not determine their life's course, Amartya Sen (1999) argues "substantive freedoms – the capabilities – to choose a life one has reason to value" (p. 74) is required for a just society. This requires looking beyond things like income to what Rawls (1971) describes as "primary goods" (p. 12-13).

*Table 1.* Conceptions of Poverty. Eight theories that explain why poverty exists and the actor at the heart of each theory (the individual or the state), along with the authors who explore these theories

<b>Theory</b>	<b>Poverty Outcome</b>	<b>Policy Level Response</b>	<b>Author(s)</b>
<b>Economic Inequality</b>	While a country may experience economic growth, this prosperity is disproportionately distributed to those at the top of the income ladder.	State or sub-state	Blank, 2010 Anderson, 1964 Myles & Banting, 2013
<b>Labour Participation (Demand)</b>	Workers do not participate in the economy because incentive to do so is too low.	Individual	Sarlo, 2013
<b>Labour Participation (Supply)</b>	Workers do not participate in the economy because they cannot find suitable work; workers who do participate in the economy do not always make enough to escape poverty.	State or sub-state	Lewchuk, 2015 McBride, 1999
<b>Social Stratification, Exclusion, and Misrecognition</b>	Economic (labour market) and social segregation encourages certain groups into low-paying jobs and neighbourhoods that are often underserved; misrecognition and exclusion are complex issues of social status and limit individuals' capability to participate fully in society.	State or sub-state	Price Wolf, 2008 Fraser, 2001
<b>Culture of Poverty</b>	Future generations are impacted by current issues of poverty.	Individual	Price Wolf, 2008
<b>Equality of Opportunity and Capability</b>	Structural limits exist which impact the extent to which a person can achieve their life's goal.	State or sub-state	Rawls, 1971 Sen, 1999
<b>Settler Systems of Oppression</b>	Conditions of poverty exist because of federal and provincial Canadian government policies of oppression; understandings of Indigenous poverty are built on myths of mental illness, addiction, recidivism, and delinquency.	State or sub-state	Kuokkanen, 2011 Palmater, 2011 Thistle, 2017
<b>Political Organization</b>	As poverty rates increase, political participation goes down, leaving issues of poverty off the policy agenda.	State or sub-state	Jacobs & Skocpol, 2005 Oche, 2012

Indigenous understandings of poverty are rooted in the political, social and economic systems of the settler Canadian government. These systems have supported myth narratives of mental illness, addiction, recidivism, and delinquency (Thistle, 2017) and policies have supported these myths throughout history and continue today. Kuokkanen (2011) argues that today Indigenous peoples live with the legacy of a capitalist system, introduced to replace “subsistence with trade and relations of sharing with market exchanges” (p. 279), which led to “the collapse of traditional economies, loss of collective and individual autonomy, starvation, poverty and ecological imbalances” (p. 279). Poverty is also exacerbated by what Palmater (2011) describes as funding inequalities. These inequalities are evident in the uneven distribution of social services, which result in “desperate living conditions, poor health, barriers to education and employment, social dysfunction, over-representation in jails and children in care, and premature deaths in First Nations” (Palmater, 2011, p. 116). These structural issues are compounded by a system that operates in bureaucratic silos (between levels of government), limiting responsibility among policy makers and bureaucrats (Thistle, 2017).

Lastly, while poverty and political participation does not represent a clear conceptualization, it does point out an important consequence of poverty (Jacobs & Skocpol, 2005; Oche, 2012). The literature suggests a negative relationship between certain political activities (protesting or voting, for example) and poverty rates (Jacobs & Skocpol, 2005). In other words, as poverty rates go up, political participation goes down. A critique of this theory comes from those who argue that what some researchers determine as political participation often overlooks the dynamic ways that people engage with each other, with political elites and institutions (Oche, 2012; Wedeen, 2007). The state is the key actor within this theory. The individual may appear unmotivated or apathetic to policies and political decisions that impact

them directly, but structural issues likely impede their capacity to become involved, even if an individual wanted to participate. Barriers such as time, lost wages, family care and transportation are noted as barriers to political and community engagement facing people living in poverty (Hubbell, 2013; Ravensbergen & VanderPlaat, 2010).

Within theories of poverty where the individual is the key actor, we can expect policies and programs to prioritize changing the individual as the solution to the problem (Bradshaw, 2007). Poverty may be caused by an individual's behaviour or poor choices (i.e., bad budgeting decisions). In this case, the solution lies in socialization (such as after-school programming, mentorship and programs to promote productive or paid work); penalties (such as reduced social benefits for non-productive or unpaid work) or incentives (such as benefits based on education or training, volunteer or paid labour participation) may also be implemented. When poverty is individualized, programs fulfill needs through service delivery (such as providing food hampers, second-hand clothing donations or emergency shelter) instead of direct funds because there is often a "lack of trust in the discretion of poor people" (Bradshaw, 2007, p. 14). Direct fund payments or benefits are generally seen as structural responses when they are broad in scope, ideally universal, and are not tied to claw-back schemes as are often seen in welfare-to-work programs.

Within theories of poverty that place the state (or sub-state) as a key actor, policies and programs focus on economic, social, and political issues that are structural. From this perspective, people advocate for: universal benefits; family-friendly social policy such as universal daycare and strong family leave support for both early and late-life care obligations and wants; more policies that recognize the unique challenges faced by marginalized groups; increases in minimum wages; more secure, permanent paid work, basic or universal incomes;

mobilizing marginalized groups with the aim of increasing political influence; higher union density, particularly within low-paying sectors; providing or funding education and training programs that are not tied to benefit claw-backs and will lead to good paying jobs; and incentives or quotas that ensure paid workplaces reflect the diversity of our society.

Within the nonprofit sector, we can anticipate that an organization may conceptualize poverty one way, but frame the concept differently, whether outwardly (to people in the community, donors, service recipients, granting agencies or others) or inwardly (to board members, employees, volunteers and others) for strategic reasons. Like conceptualizations, we can anticipate that there are multiple ways poverty can be framed. Frames consist of “normative and sometimes cognitive ideas that are located in the foreground of policy debates...[E]lites strategically craft frames and use them to legitimize their policies to the public and to each other” (Campbell, 2002, pp. 26-27). Framing is a tool aimed at influencing how others (whether internal or external to the organization) conceptualize and understand an issue. While some research suggests that poverty is often framed by media elites without any specific cause or effect (Kensicki, 2004), others find that poverty is largely framed as an individual issue (Redden, 2011). Political frames of poverty have been shown to impact policy decisions. For example, in Canada, some argue that political elites often frame poverty as child poverty, which “narrows the definition of poverty as a social problem and thereby reduces expectations of the state” (Wieggers, 2002, p. vi). While public social policy can be understood as an attempt to solve problems, examining how problems are framed by policy actors illuminates their diverse and often competing interpretations of an issue such as poverty (Bacchi, 1999).

## Conclusion

Policy problems, while socially constructed through a variety of processes, are an essential component of policy development. Without an identified problem, solutions are limited, and risk missing the often complex and interconnected causes at work. While Canada does not have an official definition of poverty, poverty and its conceptualization are at the heart of this enquiry. Conceptualizations focus either on the state or the individual when considering ways to address issues of poverty. The literature suggests there are multiple ways one can conceptualize and frame poverty, and we can assume that multiple conceptualizations may be present within the same organization.

## Chapter 2: Context of the Nonprofit

### Defining the Term Nonprofit

There are many names and characteristics to describe an organization that does not seek to make a profit. An early definition of nonprofit organizations, focused on structure and organization (Salamon & Anheier, 1992a), remains the most widely accepted in North American literature (Casey, 2016b). Using this definition, nonprofit organizations must meet five criteria: First, they must be organized, with consistent structure and operations; second, they must be private, outside the formal structure of government (although they may receive funding through the government); third, they must be autonomous; fourth, they cannot exist to generate commercial gain; and fifth, their membership and contributions of time, energy and money are voluntary (Salamon & Anheier, 1992a). Some have argued this definition is in need of refinement because the characteristics oversimplify what is, in actuality, a complex and diverse group of organizations (Kenny, Taylor, Onyx, & Mayo, 2015). For example, many nonprofit organizations have paid employees and some have social enterprises that, while not necessarily generating profit, do take on much of the language and competitiveness of the for-profit market (Kenny et al., 2015). This criticism has led to divergence in the terminology and research methodology used within the sector.

With differing approaches to this type of organization comes differing ways of studying them. Outside of North America, researchers are more likely to use the term, *the third sector*, and often select a unit of analysis based on organizational models such as cooperatives, community organizations or the social economy (Heitzmann, 2010). Within North America, however, researchers are more likely to use the term nonprofit (or not-for-profit) and select a unit of analysis that reflects categories within the sector, which can include health, education or social services (Hall et al., 2005; Heitzmann, 2010; Salamon & Anheier, 1992b). This categorization

was among the initial research steps taken in creating the landmark John Hopkins University Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project, considered the first international attempt to examine the size, scope and roles of the nonprofit sector on a global scale (initially, 45 countries were included) (Salamon, Wojciech Sokolowski, & List, 2003). In 2005, additional countries were added, including Canada (Hall et al., 2005).

Within Canada, twelve nonprofit categories have been identified, based on the goals and activities of organizations within the sector (Hall et al., 2005). Those nonprofits committed to the reduction or elimination of poverty fall within what Hall and colleagues identify as *Social Services* and *Development and Housing* (SSDH). Combined, these two categories make up almost 40 percent of the sector's total gross domestic product contribution (Hall et al., 2005). This suggests that the categories of nonprofits that most adequately address this project's research questions are not only important social and political actors but are also important economic actors. While the term "nonprofit" will be used throughout this research, it is with the understanding that organizations do not have to be wholly made up of volunteers. Indeed, while some nonprofit organizations are comprised of volunteers, many have paid employees or a mixture of the two groups (Hall et al., 2005). In addition, this research is focused on those nonprofits with a concern for poverty alleviation or reduction, so nonprofits that fall within categories of SSDH are of most interest. Hall and colleagues' categorization helped to provide guidance and criteria for case selection, discussed in more detail below.

#### Neoliberalism, New Public Management and the Nonprofit Sector in Canada

The nonprofit sector in Canada has witnessed continued growth over the last few decades, with government supplying much of the sector's revenue. In Canada, the state supplies 66 percent of all revenue to nonprofits that address issues related to poverty (Hall et al., 2005).

These nonprofits fall within the categories of SSDH and employ 49 percent of all nonprofit workers (Hall et al., 2005). Outside of universities, colleges and hospitals, SSDH is the largest category within the nonprofit sector when measured by GDP contribution and the vast majority of these organizations are located within the province of Ontario (Hall et al., 2005). In Canada, social policy development and implementation have largely been the purview of the state (Howlett et al., 2009) and yet, in the last few decades, state restructuring has resulted in a larger role for nonprofits in the delivery of public goods (Evans & Shields, 2000). This has occurred to such a degree that the sector has been called a secondary welfare system (Curtis, 2005). While the state has and does play a role in providing services aimed at reducing poverty and its impacts, public sector restructuring has moved many of these responsibilities to the nonprofit sector (Ilcan, 2009). Some have argued that this downloading has resulted in a de-politicization of complex social issues, such as poverty (Curtis, 2005; Newman & Clarke, 2009), while others argue this trend will continue as governments (particularly provincial and municipal governments that are largely tasked with administering and delivering social services) struggle with structural deficits (Emmett, 2016).

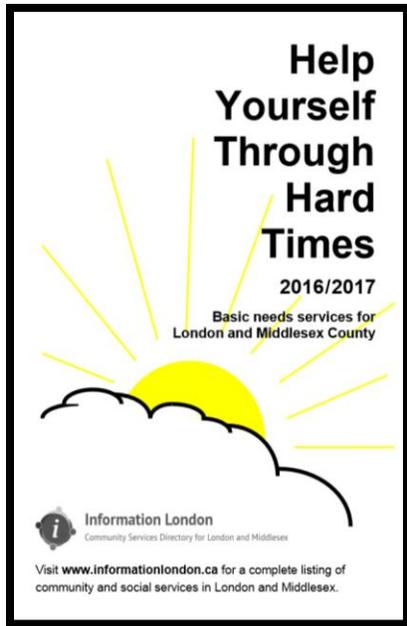
While the Canadian state's restructuring has essentially positioned nonprofits as extensions of the public sector, this extension or partnership masks hierarchical relationships of power rooted in neoliberalism and new public management (Evans et al., 2005). New public management (NPM) is a broad term that describes the processes, patterns and managerial strategies that have taken place in the last few decades, where the use of private sector language, tools and practices aimed at increasing efficiencies (lean and flexible workforces, performance measures, monitoring and audit systems, for example) are adopted by the public sector (Baines,

2004; Fattore, Dubois, & Lapenta, 2012). These changes have also been documented in the nonprofit social services sector (Baines, 2004).

Private sector influence on the public and nonprofit sectors is broadly associated with globalization and neoliberalism (Baines, 2004). During the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century, governments came under attack for being inefficient and NPM represented a response to that criticism. The public sector, critics argued, could be more economic, efficient and effective with the help of the tools and language of the private sector (Fattore et al., 2012). The state did not simply shrink or retreat because of the criticism. Instead, the charge of inefficiency raised questions about how a state should be organized and to what extent a state should intervene in society (Ilcan, 2009). The shift in federal social policy funding is a good example of this re-organization. Historically, the state had centralized social policy (including setting national standards) to uniformly address systemic issues such as poverty, which seemed larger than any regional or local institution or organization could attempt to solve. Dennis Howlett (2006) documents the structural changes that took place in the 1990s when the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) was cancelled. The CAP provided funding to the provinces for social policies and programs and set minimum standards, which included an individual's right to income that met basic needs and the right to welfare income without the obligation to work. Under pressure to curb spending, the federal government took measures to adjust the structure and formula for the CAP (Howlett, 2006; Madore & Blanchette, 1997). As a result, it was replaced by the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) early in 1997, which was then split in 2004 to become the Canada Health Transfer and Canada Social Transfer (CST). This was done to "ensure greater transparency and accountability for the health transfer" (Howlett, 2006, p. 118). Block funding through the CST replaced the CAP resulting in decreased funds from the

federal to provincial governments (Howlett, 2006). While provinces became more responsible for their own social policies and standards, they fundamentally lacked the resources to meet the same robust standards that were previously upheld by the federal government. Rice and Prince (2013) argue that the impact of social policy devolution “raises questions about how social welfare systems can be financed and sustained” (p. 128). Further, some authors argue that this devolution of state welfare provision, from federal to provincial to sub-state and nonprofits, makes “it easier for government to shed its responsibility for the poor...It is not an accident that poverty grows deeper as our charitable responses to it multiply” (Poppendieck, 1998). Today’s social system is provided by a combination of nonprofit, for-profit, and state organizations. The result of this devolution, dismantling, and re-organization of the state’s role in welfare distribution and redistribution is that “[v]oluntary organizations and volunteers in many parts of the world are becoming increasingly responsible for managing the more vulnerable members of society” (Ilcan, 2009, p. 228).

NPM shares many values with neoliberalism including prioritization of the market, personal autonomy, entrepreneurship, efficiency, resiliency, and individualism, with personal responsibility, self-discipline and self-care at the forefront of problem definition and policy decisions (Ilcan, 2009). Some argue neoliberalism operates in public administration through NPM (Evans et al., 2005), a claim we see evidence of in the community service directory for London and Middlesex County, the cover of which is depicted in Figure 2. Both the name of the directory, and the language inside, offer evidence of NPM in practice.



*Figure 2.* Community services and programs online directory (Community Services Directory for London and Middlesex, 2016/2017)

Figure 2, the *Help Yourself Through Hard Times* directory, is an overview of nongovernmental and governmental programs and services that “provides assistance in basic material aid and emotional or social support to people during times of financial hardship” (Community Services Directory for London and Middlesex, 2016/2017, p. 3). We can interpret the name of the booklet in two ways: either users are meant to help themselves, as in they are welcome and encouraged to use the services; or, users are expected to help themselves, as in independently find solutions to their social or economic woes. Since this booklet is only available online (printed copies can be requested by telephone), one would not immediately assume people are welcome and encouraged to use the services. We cannot assume people in economic hardship have access to a computer and internet (or a telephone to call for a printed copy). Some nonprofits print copies for members of the community, but that expense is left for

the nonprofits to bear. And if welcome and encouragement is what the City of London was implying, they could have used very different language to get that message across.

Language inside the booklet reinforces the values of NPM. People who use the services are described as clients or child clients, and the booklet itself offers “value-added referrals” for social service sector workers (Community Services Directory for London and Middlesex, 2016/2017, p. 2). If citizens become clients under NPM, we are also at risk of interactions between people turning into transactions, which is only a small step from evaluating this interaction in terms of transaction-costs (Fattore et al., 2012). This line of thinking “discourages activities that target unjust social conditions” and represents a challenge to the welfare model of social service provision (Woolford & Curran, 2012, p. 46).

Pressures on public services were not only seen at the federal level, but also at provincial levels. In the province of Ontario, structural social policy changes were witnessed during the 1970s when the Ontario government “concluded that public spending...was out of control and threatened [its] economic future” (Novick, 1985, p. 341). As a result, social spending was reduced (Maxwell, 2009) and alongside these cuts was an increase in the promotion of “volunteerism, charity, or fundraising as a substitute for public investment” (Coulter, 2009, p. 28). Yet, while nonprofit activity was encouraged and promoted, cuts in social spending meant a decline in core-funding for nonprofits, which limited the capacity of these organizations. Core funding was typical of what many describe as a Keynesian period of welfare social provision.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In Canada, as in many developed countries, the period after World War II and before the 1970s is considered an era of welfare state expansion, and is often referred to as the Keynesian era (McKeen & Porter, 2003). While this expansion of programs and services did not positively impact people equally (women and minorities were often excluded), the federal government was responsible for ensuring adequate employment levels and income supports for those who “fell through the cracks” (p. 114). The role of nonprofits during this period was largely to complement social welfare provision, not to replace it (Evans et al., 2005).

Whereas core-funding ensured long-term sustainability and planning, and offered latitude in spending for the nonprofit, today it has largely been replaced with contract or program funding, which has significantly altered the relationship between the state and nonprofit organizations (Evans et al., 2005).

The characteristics of the relationship between the state and nonprofits has shifted, moving nonprofits closer to the private market economy. As a result, we might expect to see what Baines (2004) describes as a “pro-market, non-market” character among the nonprofits in this study. While nonprofits are non-market (not making a profit), we might see evidence of pro-market, NPM values. This would be evident in their language choices and their programs and services. With the latter, the choices and processes may reveal evidence of a lean work environment with less latitude in spending, alongside a focus on program-based, short-term funding, and increased demands for evidence of accountability and personal autonomy both for workers and for the people in the community. Language may mimic that of the private sector, adopting the use of words and phrases such as client, return-on-investment, key-performance-indicators (KPIs), service-user, and may include sentiments or goals (individual or organizational) that reflect individual autonomy.

The change in relationship between the state and the nonprofit sector has also impacted nonprofits’ capacities to engage in advocacy work, and as a result, we are unlikely to see a lot of this type of work with any of the nonprofits in this study. Yet, if one believes in a structural conception of poverty, then changing the political, social and economic systems that perpetuate poverty are presumably fundamental goals. For nonprofits, policy advocacy is one way to try and engage in this change work. While this was not always the case for nonprofits, some argue advocacy is now a “dirty word in Canada” (DeSantis & Mulé, 2017, p. 3). With other welfare

provision changes identified above, the political landscape also changed for nonprofit advocacy, a shift that can be traced back to the 1990s. Most recently, we saw dramatic changes occurring in the mid-2000s that deeply impacted the role of nonprofits in policy advocacy (Cave, 2016; DeSantis & Mulé, 2017). During this time, the federal government began to systematically abolish or significantly diminish funding to progressive organizations that played an important role in public policy advocacy (DeSantis & Mulé, 2017).<sup>3</sup> In 2012, on the heels of then Natural Resources Minister Joe Oliver's open letter, disparaging "environmental and other radical groups" who "threaten to hijack our regulatory system to achieve their radical agenda" (Natural Resources Canada, 2012), a federal budget was announced, which included \$8 million over two years to fund a political-activity audit program. This audit aimed to uncover nonprofits who were exceeding the limit set by the Canada Revenue Agency, which dictates what proportion of a nonprofit's budget can be spent on political activity. By 2014, according to the Canada Revenue Agency, 52 political activity audits were underway, with mounting legal bills for already cash-strapped nonprofits under tremendous strain (The Canadian Press, 2014). In 2016, the current Liberal government suspended any pending political activity audits, and has just completed a consultation on charities' political activities (Canada Revenue Agency, 2016a).<sup>4</sup>

In addition to fear generated by the previous audit program, nonprofits' advocacy capacity remains guided by strict regulations. Nonprofits (designated as charities, according to

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<sup>3</sup> This is well documented in *The Shifting Terrain: Non-Profit Policy Advocacy in Canada* (DeSantis & Mulé, 2017). Just a sample of institutions that were impacted include: National Council of Welfare, First Nations Statistical Council, Canadian Council for Refugees, Court Challenges Program, Status of Women Canada, Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, North-South Institute, Nova Scotia-based Mersey Biodiversity Centre, and the Canadian Environmental Network (p. 3).

<sup>4</sup> Canada Revenue Agency makes a distinction between nonprofits and charitable organizations, and this is particularly important when considering differences in advocacy regulations. Nonprofit status with the Canadian government affords an organization income tax exemption, but not the ability to issue tax receipts to donors; charitable status (which the nonprofits in this study all have) can issue tax receipts, but, unlike an organization with nonprofit status, a charitable organization has considerably less freedom when it comes to permitted "political activity" (The Canadian CED Network, 2015).

the Canada Revenue Agency) can devote from “10 to 20 percent of their resources annually, depending on their size, to political activities that are linked to their purpose” (The Canadian CED Network, 2015, p. 3). Yet, political activity cannot include any partisan activity, whether direct or indirect such as supporting a particular political candidate. Despite the limited advocacy work a nonprofit can currently do in Canada, the project is interested to know if any of the organizations include such work, even if limited, as part of their programs and services.

### Nonprofits, Programs, and Conceptions of Poverty

While foundational work on the nonprofit sector provides a basis for understanding the landscape (Banting, 2000; Brock, 2002; Brock & Banting, 2003; Evans, 2005; Evans & Shields, 2000; Hall et al., 2005), very little research has been done to grasp the ways that nonprofits understand poverty. This is the case despite the fact that, in 2014, Ontario launched a Poverty Reduction Strategy (Province of Ontario, 2014), which was informed, in part, by partners in the nonprofit sector. The province turns to the nonprofit sector as experts in poverty reduction but lacks an understanding of the ways in which these organizations conceptualize and frame the issue, and of the factors that might inform these conceptualizations.

The literature on organizational culture in nonprofits points toward certain behaviours and pressures that are important considerations in this study. As Bradshaw (2007) keenly points out, there is a built-in tension that runs through many nonprofit anti-poverty programs and services. Even organizations that tend to oppose strategies that aim to “change individuals as a solution to poverty” (p. 13) are likely to have objectives within the organization that focus on “individual needs and abilities” (p. 13). We can therefore expect that organizations that have a structural conception of poverty may nevertheless offer some programs or services that are individual-focused as well. To protect the individuals and cases in this study, a framework for

nonprofit program expectations has been created (Table 2). This framework is informed by nonprofit and social work literature (Bradshaw, 2007; Strier & Binyamin, 2010; Tanekenov, Fitzpatrick, & Johnsen, 2017) and reflects the programs we might expect from nonprofits that have a structural versus individual conceptualization of poverty. Additionally, we can also expect that individuals within organizations may have multiple conceptions of poverty. Some individuals within nonprofits may conform their conceptions to outside pressures from government, for-profit, or other nonprofits (Robichau & Fernandez, 2017), while others may resist such pressures (Binder, 2007). Values, practices, and culture may or may not be cohesive in an organization, and this could impact the likelihood of similar conceptions between staff, volunteers, and departments (Chen et al., 2013). Chen and colleagues argue that cohesive values and practices ought not be without conflict or disagreement. In fact, they argue that conflict is a healthy sign of a democratic organization, where employees, volunteers and people in the community are more likely to feel included, heard and valued. Relatedly, there is evidence to suggest that a nonprofit's organizational authority or structure may impact the way decisions are made, and the degree to which people feel safe to voice concerns or ideas, and generally feel included (Chen et al., 2013).

While rational-legal structures (bureaucratic) encourage decisions, including values, to be made at the top of the hierarchy, value-rational structures (collectivist) flatten the decision-making process, often utilizing participatory methods to gain consensus (Chen et al., 2013). From this view, we can assume that nonprofits exhibit either mostly bureaucratic or mostly collectivist practices, and this may impact the degree to which alignment between conceptualization, framing and programs is possible. Another factor that may impact the degree

Table 2. Program expectations based on structural or individual conception of poverty (adapted from Bradshaw, 2007; Strier & Binyamin, 2010; and Tanekenov, Fitzpatrick & Johnsen, 2017)

<b>Structural Conception</b> <i>Intervention/Programs/Services</i>	<b>Individual Conception</b> <i>Intervention/Programs/Services</i>
<p><i>Poverty reduction through political organization</i>                      -capacity building where people are encouraged and given resources to “represent themselves in initiating and realizing rights and entitlements” (Strier &amp; Binyamin, 2010, p. 1914)                      -aim is to empower those facing poverty to impact positive change at a structural level, with collective action as a “key to genuine empowerment” (Tanekenov et al., 2017)</p> <p><i>Poverty reduction through alternative institutions</i>                      -bridge individuals to community supports, coalitions, advocacy groups, nonprofits, and businesses that prioritize community members’ voices and well-being, particularly those traditionally marginalized                      -aim is to create inclusive, culturally sensitive institutions where people are welcome and pro-actively included</p> <p><i>Poverty reduction through comprehensive programs and capacity building</i>                      -nonprofits, community members and government work together to avoid overlap of services, to learn from each other                      -aim is to avoid a competitive environment, which negatively impacts community members                      -aim is to include community members in the development and implementation of programs or services to build capacity</p>	<p><i>Poverty reduction through socialization</i>                      -programs and services focus on improving individual deficits                      -aim is to move people out of culture of poverty and promote responsibility and accountability</p> <p><i>Poverty reduction through self-improvement</i>                      -training and education opportunities are pursued to secure economic self-sufficiency and autonomy; includes education, self-help, budgeting, job training, etc.                      -in some cases, motivational techniques are used such as rewards for training completion                      -aim is to move individuals off income supports and into the economic market, so self-improvement programs and benefit reduction often co-occur</p> <p><i>Poverty reduction through reactive/emergency services</i>                      -emergency services are provided to fill gap when either individuals cannot afford costs of daily life, or when the amenities of daily life (food, shelter, clothing...) are not accessible or available                      -aim is to solve immediate effect of poverty (i.e., hunger, homelessness, exposure to the elements...)</p>

to which alignment is possible, is organization size. While authors agree organizational size is not the only factor to impact cultural cohesiveness, there is agreement that size is a significant factor (Hall, 2002). In a smaller organization, there are not enough staff to specialize, so people often complete multiple tasks and are more likely to look after other’s tasks when needed. More

frequent communication, along with a greater sense of each other's roles and responsibilities, increase the likelihood of cultural cohesion (Hall, 2002). Thus, we can expect that smaller nonprofits may have a greater likelihood of alignment between conceptualization, framing and programs.

This thesis aims to fill a gap in the nonprofit literature by examining organizations' conceptions and framing of poverty, and the extent to which these align with programs and services; a survey of the literature reveals very few projects that have examined conceptions of poverty in this way. One study used in-depth interviews with local social service agency directors to determine the ways in which conceptions of poverty contributed to the types of nonprofit organizations that a person may choose to work for (Reingold & Liu, 2009). Another studied how conceptions of poverty influence the extent to which nonprofit organizations focus on the poor (Gronbjerg, 1990). Finally, a longitudinal study examined the perceptions of poverty held by social work students in graduate programs over 14 years (Austin, 2007), and Bradshaw (2007) reviewed community development literature to explore competing theories of poverty and how they may shape anti-poverty strategy in the United States.

The literature on nonprofits is limited in three key ways. First, the research that has been done in Canada has focused on precarious workers and low-wage work issues within the sector (Barnes, Cunningham, Campey, & Shields, 2014; Clutterbuck & Howarth, 2007; Gellatly, 2015; Zizys, 2011), on issues of leadership and governance (Evers, 2005; Kimberlin, 2010; Wellens & Jegers, 2014), and on the effects of advocacy (for poverty alleviation) among nonprofit coalitions (Fernando & Earle, 2011; Fyall & McGuire, 2015). Second, while Bradshaw's (2007) work is relevant to this project's research question, his research focuses exclusively on the United States. While the United States and Canada are close neighbours in many ways, their differences in

social policy development are well documented (Myles, 1996; Wallner, 2012). Bradshaw's (2007) work thus does not fill the gap in the literature on conceptions of poverty in the context of Canadian nonprofits. Finally, much of the research focuses on nonprofit staff who are paid to do the work they do, ignoring the fact that the vast majority of organizations rely heavily on volunteers (Scott, Tsoukalas, Roberts, & Lasby, 2006) not only to deliver services and programs, but also to lend considerable authority and decision-making power on steering committees, boards of directors, and the like.

The research questions that guided this thesis, its purposive qualitative methods, and theoretical foundation, address the literature gaps in three ways. First, the research question asks individuals working or volunteering in nonprofits what they think the organization's conceptualizations of poverty are. Thus, the project not only adds to existing literature on nonprofit paid staff, but also values the contribution of unpaid volunteers at every level of an organization. Second, the methods used in this study recognize that organizations are made up of people who each have their own ideas and ways of looking at the world, and thus have an impact on organizational culture, processes, and decisions. Additionally, the literature provides evidence to suggest that the ways that nonprofits conceptualize poverty may differ from the way they frame the issue. For this reason, semi-structured interviews and formal organizational documents are used to address the research questions. This fills a gap in the literature that currently does not adequately address any differences that might exist between how a nonprofit conceptualizes poverty versus how they frame it to stakeholders. Third, this project fills a gap that connects poverty conceptualization with public policy. This research established a novel way to connect conceptualizations of poverty and nonprofit work. Theoretical frameworks were created from across disciplines to establish conceptualizations of poverty (Table 1) and the types of nonprofit

work we can expect if nonprofit organizations have either a structural or individual conceptualization of poverty (Table 2).

### Conclusion

While nonprofits are important policy actors, the sector has experienced substantial change in the last few decades, resulting in significant gaps in our understanding of the sector, including how organizations conceptualize and frame their poverty-related work. While the sector goes by different names and has different characteristics, this study is focused on nonprofits made up of volunteers and paid staff, which fall within the category of SSDH in Canada. Though external pressures from funders such as government or other nonprofits may impact conceptualizations inside an organization (Robichau & Fernandez, 2017), there is evidence that others within the same organization may resist such pressures (Binder, 2007). Additionally, the extent to which values, practices, and culture are cohesive in an organization might impact the likelihood of similar or different conceptions between staff, volunteers, and departments (Chen et al., 2013).

The environment within which these nonprofits operate has changed over the last few decades, as the state has transitioned from a Keynesian welfare model to a neoliberal model, prioritizing the private sector and market economy. There is evidence that NPM and neoliberal values have impacted the relationship between the state and the nonprofit sector, with more pressure on the nonprofit sector to replace responsibilities once held by or shared with the state. There are three primary gaps in the literature that this project aims to fill. This research shines a spotlight on the individuals working or volunteering in nonprofits to better understand what they think the organization's conceptualizations of poverty are, and then compares these conceptions to formal organizational documents. Further, the research investigates the degree to which this

framing and the conceptualizations align with program and service choices. Additionally, this project fills a gap that connects poverty conceptualization with public policy and nonprofit activity, and establishes novel theoretical frameworks from across disciplines, which connect conceptualizations of poverty (Table 1) to the types of nonprofit work we can expect if nonprofit organizations have either a structural or individual conceptualization of poverty (Table 2).

## **Chapter 3: Methods**

### Introduction

The research methods used in this study are informed by two research questions. First, how do nonprofits focused on poverty alleviation or reduction in Southern Ontario conceptualize and frame poverty? Second, how, if at all, does an organization's program choices align with its conceptualizations and framing of poverty? To investigate these questions, I employed qualitative research methods. Semi-structured interviews with nonprofit organizational staff and program participants who were also volunteers within the organization contributed to answering both questions. To examine how a nonprofit organization frames poverty, I also completed a content analysis on data found on their websites, and in other organizational documents. I chose London, Ontario as a location to conduct my research for reasons of theoretical importance and convenience.

Research on this project, including the analysis and discussion presented below, followed ethical guidelines as set out in my Research Ethics Board application (see Appendix A for the Certificate). To protect the confidentiality of all who participated, including the organizations themselves, I have generalized job functions, titles, and programs and services. Further, I have not indicated whether a case is secular or faith-based to further protect the confidentiality of the organization and its staff and volunteers. Any language that is obtained from organizational documents has been paraphrased to protect the organization's confidentiality. I worked diligently to keep the tone and context of the language intact as much as possible.

### Location

The province of Ontario and the city of London were selected for practical and theoretical reasons. First, the province has one of the country's highest levels of household low-income;

second, it also has the largest number of nonprofits per regional capita in the country; and third, it is an area in which the researcher is familiar and currently resides. The research project further limited its case selection to the city of London, Ontario. As Figure 3 illustrates, London’s incidence of low income households is higher than the provincial average, particularly among vulnerable groups including those who are unattached; unemployed; children living in low-income households; children living in female-led lone-parent households; recent immigrants; and, visible minorities. London’s incidence of low income households is higher than other similar sized cities in Ontario such as Kitchener-Cambridge-Waterloo (KCW), also shown in Figure 3. Of those unemployed in London, 25.6 percent fall below the low-income measure after tax (LIM-AT), which is over three percent higher than the provincial average<sup>5</sup>, and 4.5 percent higher than KCW. Even among those employed, London has a higher incidence of low-income



Figure 3. Incidence of low-income among specified groups within Ontario, and the cities of Kitchener-Cambridge-Waterloo and London, retrieved from 2011 National Household Survey, Table 99-014-X2011043 (Statistics Canada, 2011)

<sup>5</sup> Some caution should be used when comparing London with the provincial average since London would be included in the provincial average.

than KCW and the provincial average (by two percent and 0.8 percent, respectively).

Additionally, over 30 percent of unattached (non-senior) individuals in London live below LIM-AT, which is higher than in KCW and across the province (3.3 percent and 4.4 percent higher respectively). Behind all these troubling numbers are children and adults, most of whom must rely on the programs and services of nonprofits in their community to survive.

## Data Collection

### *Determining Cases*

A total of fourteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with staff and volunteers from three SSDH organizations in London, Ontario. Each organization represents one case. Cases were identified using a purposive sampling technique. Liamputtong (2013, p. 14) defines this type of sampling as “the deliberate selection of specific individuals, events or settings because of the crucial information they can provide” (p. 14). Based on the context of nonprofits in Canada, and Ontario specifically, and with guidance from the nonprofit literature (as discussed in Chapter 2), I constructed a theoretical framework, which guided my case selection choices. This type of theoretical sampling “builds in certain characteristics or criteria” (Liamputtong, 2013, p. 17) that could be important to the questions being explored.

Two primary methods were used to select the cases. First, nonprofits were identified using the Canadian Revenue Agency’s Charity Listing website (Canada Revenue Agency, 2017). Second, this database was cross-referenced with London’s *Help Yourself Through Hard Times* social services directory for London and Middlesex (Community Services Directory for London and Middlesex, 2016/2017). To receive tax privilege and issue tax receipts to donors, nonprofits in Canada must register as a charity (Canada Revenue Agency, 2016b). A search within the Canadian Revenue Agency’s Charity database of registered active charities was limited to the

city of London and included those designated as a *charitable organization*; charity designation includes five types, but I limited my search to those types that most related to my research question. Two types were selected: *religion* and *welfare*. Under the *welfare* designation, the category included *all*. This search returned 124 organizations. Under the *religion* designation, the category included *all*. This search returned 319 organizations. Based on Hall and colleagues' (2005) breakdown of nonprofit activities in Canada, these 443 organizations were reduced further to include only those with *Program Area Codes* (program area codes describe the organization's program focus for 2016) for *housing, food or clothing banks, soup kitchens, hostels, employment preparation and training, and other services for low-income persons*. 12 organizations fit these criteria, and formed the cases identified in Table 3.

The second step in case-selection utilized a local social services resource guide. The database from Revenue Canada was cross-referenced with the *Help Yourself Through Hard Times* social services directory for London and Middlesex (Community Services Directory for London and Middlesex, 2016/2017). As noted above, this directory provides London and area residents with "services that provide assistance in basic material aid and emotional or social support to people during times of financial hardship" (Community Services Directory for London and Middlesex, 2016/2017, p. 3). This ensured no vital organizations were missed in the initial Revenue Canada search. Finally, each organizations' number of employees was considered, and organizations employing more than seven people were retained. Selecting organizations with seven or more employees helped safeguard confidentiality for employees who chose to participate. No key nonprofits were found missing from the original Revenue Canada search and all met the criteria of being nonprofit organizations focused on poverty alleviation or reduction, employing at least seven people, and serving the London area.

Within this group of 12 organizations, I established two categories of nonprofits: those that receive more than 50 percent of their funding from government and those that receive 49 percent or less of their funding from government. These categories were selected for two primary reasons. First, government funding can be viewed as a key determinant of an organization's reliance on the state and its priorities. This may impact a nonprofit's capacity to carry out the types of programs and services it wants and can afford to provide. Second, it might also impact the extent to which a nonprofit adopts NPM values espoused by funders, particularly government funders.

Within each category, nonprofits were ranked according to their generalizability outside of the designated area of London, Ontario. Nonprofits whose characteristics and missions are common in other cities in Canada were prioritized and were invited to participate in the project first. While a nonprofit organization may be unique to the city of London, its goals of addressing, for example, homelessness or food insecurity, are ubiquitous among nonprofits in countless cities in this country. By prioritizing cases in this way, I aimed to make my findings generalizable beyond London. Nevertheless, robust generalizations are unlikely due to the design of this study, which includes only three cases. More is discussed on this topic below.

After receiving approval from the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board (see Approval Certificate in Appendix A), I approached the nonprofit organization appearing first in each category with an invitation to participate. In the case where nonprofits did not respond positively, I thanked them for their time and moved on to the next organization within the same category. In one of the two categories (those that received 49 percent or less of their funding from the government), I received either a decline to participate or no response at all from all from the organizations in the category. With a decline, I thanked the organization for their time.

Table 3. Cases identified after theoretical sampling framework was applied

	<b>Nonprofit organizations, ranked by generalizability</b>
<b>Nonprofits receiving &gt; 50 percent of funding from the government</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Nonprofit 1 [Org1]</li> <li>✓ Nonprofit 2 [Org 2]</li> <li>✓ Nonprofit 3 [Org 3]</li> <li>✗ Nonprofit 4</li> <li>✗ Nonprofit 5</li> <li>✗ Nonprofit 6</li> <li>✗ Nonprofit 7</li> <li>✗ Nonprofit 8</li> </ul>
<b>Nonprofits receiving &lt; 49 percent of funding from the government</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Nonprofit 9</li> <li>✗ Nonprofit 10</li> <li>✗ Nonprofit 11</li> <li>✗ Nonprofit 12</li> </ul>

With organizations that did not respond, I used three to four recruitment tactics: I called, emailed, mailed a letter, and in three cases stopped into the organization, but received no correspondence back. Table 3 highlights those cases identified after the theoretical sampling was applied and each nonprofit was contacted. A checkmark ( ✓ ) next to the nonprofit indicates those organizations that responded positively and agreed to participate, while an X ( ✗ ) indicates a non-response or a decline to participate. The nonprofit organizations that agreed to participate are referred to as Org 1, Org 2, and Org 3 from this point forward in the project.

### *Case Profiles*

Organization 1 (Org 1) is a housing-first<sup>6</sup> nonprofit, is self-described as an activist organization, and receives more than 50 percent of its funding from the government. It has a long history in the City of London, and in working with members of the community. Org 2 is also a

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<sup>6</sup> A housing-first strategy prioritizes stable housing, with supports for the person at risk of or at present experiencing homelessness. Housing is not conditional on acceptance of any treatment, program, or service by the person in need of housing. This model also prioritizes choice, so that individuals ideally have a say over where they live. The City of London has committed to a housing-first strategy to address homelessness.

housing-first nonprofit organization that receives more than 50 percent of its funding from government. It too has a long history of work with community members in London. Of the three organizations included in the study, Org 3 has the longest history of working with community members in the city of London. More detailed profiles are included in each case analysis in Chapter 4. The more detailed profiles include each nonprofit's size by staff and budget; characteristics, program and service types; funding details; and the degree to which the nonprofit seems entrenched in NPM and the values of neoliberalism.

### *Participants*

Within each organization, different perspectives were pursued, including those of board members, staff, volunteers, and those who may be both a volunteer and a recipient of the nonprofit's services or programs. In total, I interviewed 14 individuals across the three nonprofits. To protect confidentiality, I have generalized participants' job titles and functions. Six participants were middle management (MM), three were volunteers and recipients, or frontline workers (FLW), and five were executives or board members (EXEC). The volunteer and participant and frontline worker categories were collapsed to protect confidentiality, as were the executive and board member categories. Of the fourteen participants I interviewed, four identified as male and ten identified as female. This is representative of the nonprofit sector, where individuals who identify as female make up the majority of paid and unpaid positions within the sector (Themudo, 2009).

I used semi-structured interviews with each participant (see Appendix B for a list of interview questions). Semi-structured interviews use standardized questions, but leave the interviewer space to digress (Berg & Lune, 2012) and offer an opportunity to "capture, in the participants' own words, their thoughts, perceptions, feelings and experiences" (Liamputtong,

2013, p. 52). Once the semi-structured interview questions were formulated, they were reviewed by Dr. Leah Levac, the project's Advisor and a researcher with extensive qualitative research experience. Additionally, after the first interview was completed, Dr. Levac read through the transcript and suggested ways I could improve the flow of questions by re-ordering them. This change was applied to the thirteen interviews that followed. Immediately following the first interview, I transcribed and coded the transcript. The purpose of this coding exercise early on in the fieldwork process was to evaluate coding suitability and make any necessary adjustments before any further interviews were coded (Pierce, 2008). The interviews were recorded (with the interviewee's permission) to allow interaction between the participant and me (Liamputtong, 2013).

The interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes, with all participants agreeing to the recording of the interview session. I completed 10 interviews in person and four interviews over the telephone. In all cases, I used the same foundational questions, and added other questions where I felt the participant may have had additional helpful information, or where the participant had veered off course, or had not yet answered the question directly. The 10 interviews I conducted in person were all done on the premises of the participating nonprofits. I am grateful for the time and space afforded me by each of the nonprofits, and the welcoming atmosphere I experienced in all cases.

I transcribed each interview and considered this to be the first step in identifying themes (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). As I transcribed each interview, I intentionally left myself space to reflect and think not only about my own a priori knowledge on the topic of poverty, but also reflect on the literature, all while remaining open to new themes. Given my subject matter, I was also very cognizant of the silences, pauses, self-interruptions, physical gestures and responses

throughout the interviews. Because I was recording the interviews, my field notes focused mostly on these items. While the semi-structured interviews provided information on nonprofit members' conceptions of poverty, I required another type of data to be able to say something about how nonprofit organizations formally frame poverty (namely, for their public audiences). This required collecting documents from each of the nonprofits and completing a content analysis.

### *Content Analysis*

Unlike semi-structured interviews, content analysis is an unobtrusive way to obtain information (Berg & Lune, 2012; Halperin & Heath, 2012). While semi-structured interviews offer information that can address how nonprofits' employees, board members, and others conceptualize poverty, a content analysis may reveal the ways that nonprofits frame the concept of poverty more formally. We can expect that the ways that staff and volunteers talk about the organization's conceptions of poverty and their programs and services may differ from the way they present these same ideas in more formalized documents such as strategic plans or annual reports. These documents are used in different ways for a variety of audiences, including people in the community, donors (individual, private sector, government, etc.), potential donors, employees, other nonprofits, territorial or regional head offices, among others. The project is interested in whether the way each organization frames poverty differs from the way staff and volunteers articulate their conceptions in the interviews. We can also examine the degree to which this framing aligns with their programs and services. The goal of the project's content analysis is to "expose the meanings, motives, and purposes" of the selected text (Halperin & Heath, 2012, p. 319). In order to complete the content analysis, I followed Halperin and Heath's four-step process (2012, pp. 318-323). First, I determined which documents were important to

the project's research question. Second, I defined categories. Third, I chose the unit of content, and fourth, I created the coding framework. I will now briefly discuss each of these steps.

Before beginning the content analysis, I determined the documents that would be useful for the research question. For each nonprofit, I sought out the following documents: most recent annual plan, most recent strategic plan and websites. On each organization's website, I looked specifically at: program lists and descriptions, about us page(s), mission statements, visioning and value statements, and goals and objectives. I converted each of these pages to PDF documents for ease of coding and downloaded any supporting documents in WORD or PDF form. To gain access to these three categories of documents, I looked on each nonprofit's website, and when I located the relevant document, I reconfirmed with the nonprofit that this was the most recent version. If the document was not available on the website, I asked for a copy at the time of interview. Table 4 highlights the availability of documents for each nonprofit. A checkmark (✓) within a column indicates the availability of that document for the specified nonprofit, while an X (✗) indicates that this nonprofit does not produce such a document. Note that while Org 3 did not have a strategic plan for its particular location (London), the national organization did have one, which I used in place of a regional version. I was able to make this decision after completing the interviews and feeling comfortable that the relationship between national and regional offices was very close. In total, I examined 28 documents across three organizations.

Table 4. Documents used for content analysis by case

	Annual Plan	Strategic Plan	Website Documents
<b>Org 1</b>	✓	✓	✓
<b>Org 2</b>	✓	✓ <sup>7</sup>	✓
<b>Org 3</b>	✓	✓	✓

Step two in the content analysis was determining the categories from which the coding framework would fall. I will discuss this in greater detail in the next section, *Coding*. The categories are directly related to the research question and come from the poverty literature reviewed earlier in the paper. They include: conceptions of poverty, and programs and services (goals, descriptions and process of development).

Third, since what I am most interested in is two categories, namely, framing of poverty and programs and services, I focused my analysis by theme and strings-of-words, sentence or paragraph. A single word, taken out of context risks misinterpretation; instead, I focused on strings-of-words, sentences or paragraphs, while being cognizant of a “single idea” that may illuminate attitudes or beliefs (Halperin & Heath, 2012, p. 321). For example, one nonprofit’s document contained the word “difficult” to describe their work. Taken alone, this might reflect negatively on the service and programs provided by this nonprofit. That an organization would describe their work in this way implies that they are laden with onerous tasks and undergo undue hardship perhaps with the people who use the nonprofit’s services and programs. In fact, the

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<sup>7</sup> In understanding how Org 2 frames poverty, I completed a content analysis on their annual plan and website documents. A strategic plan was not available, but I did locate a publicly available presentation done by the organization to an alliance focused on homelessness. While this document is not a strategic plan, it did contain content related to the organization’s mission and strategies, so I felt it was a suitable substitute.

document goes on to say that the difficulty of their work lies in the system itself, not the participants. Isolating the word “difficult” removes the necessary context of the statement.

Finally, step four was applying a coding framework. To investigate how nonprofit organizations formally frame poverty, it was important that I used the same framework that was applied to the semi-structured interviews. This ensured consistency across the two data collection methods and enabled me to compare and contrast the two results. In this way, I was relating both data collection methods back to the research question and am able to report not only on the ways that nonprofits conceptualize poverty, but also on how they frame it.

In the results that follow, no direct quotations from any nonprofit document are used. This is to protect the confidentiality of each organization. The documents and websites I analyzed are publicly available, which would make it easy for an organization to be connected to the content I am analyzing. Instead, as noted above, I have paraphrased content while adhering to tone and intent as much as possible.

### Coding

I used a combination of manual and software-assisted coding for this project. The project documents, including the interview transcripts were uploaded into NVivo, a qualitative analysis software. Before beginning the coding process, I identified each participant with the code Participant1\_Org1, Participant2\_Org1, Participant1\_Org2, etc., so that each participant’s name and organization were removed from the transcript. Additionally, I changed all pronouns to plural to further protect confidentiality and to maintain gender-neutral language. This report contains only plural pronouns, which is in accordance with ethical guidelines. Additionally, each person’s job title was changed to reflect a general title, as discussed previously. I began an open coding process where I read and re-read transcripts, making margin notes about themes that

surfaced in the text. These themes were initially based on the literature and my research question and included:

- nonprofit role in London; core work as it relates to reducing or alleviating poverty
- conceptions of poverty
- types of programs and services and the ways these related to goals of poverty reduction

My initial coding framework (see Table 5 below) was derived from conceptions of poverty located within the literature and my research question, and I added to this framework as I engaged further with the text. Additional themes surfaced including challenges for nonprofits (in achieving their goals), the role of government in creating, changing or ending a program or service, and the presence of NPM at the nonprofit. As I continued to read through the transcripts, I noted quotations from interviewees that I felt would be useful later in the analysis.

During initial read-throughs and notations, I coded for each conception of poverty theory outlined in Table 1 of the Literature Review; however, after completing the first round of coding for all interview transcripts, I found that collapsing the theories into larger categories of individual versus structural was more useful. This decision was made because many of the conceptualization codes were not used. Additionally, I found some interviewees had conceptions that fell into both individual and structural, so a combination category was created. I created separate codes for the question, *Who can address issues of poverty?* in case participants' answers did not align with their general conceptualization of poverty. This was important because, as discussed above, public policy literature suggests that how a problem is defined constrains the types of responses that seem possible to address the problem (Campbell, 2002). I was interested

to know if nonprofits’ conceptions of poverty seemed to inform their ideas about who could best address issues of poverty.

Table 5. Coding Framework

Interviews	Documents
<p><i>Conception of Poverty</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual; Structural; Combination</li> </ul> <p><i>Who can Address Issues of Poverty?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government/Policy; Individuals; Nonprofits; Combination</li> </ul> <p><i>What Programs or Services are Offered?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual; Structural; Combination</li> </ul> <p><i>What Challenges do you Encounter Running Programs/Services?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding, Participants, Other nonprofits...</li> </ul>	<p><i>Conception of Poverty</i></p> <p>Individual; Structural; Combination</p>

Limitations

There are four key limitations to consider when interpreting the results of this study. They include small sample size, access to diverse individuals within the organization, access to varied job functions, and the inclusion of only one faith-based organization.

My research method was guided by purposive sampling, which limited selection bias and makes basic generalizations beyond London possible; however, due to resource barriers, such as time and money, the sample size was limited to three nonprofits. While a small-N study has allowed me to do a rich, in-depth analysis of each case, there are issues that represent limitations in this study. The most important of these is that I cannot make robust generalizations with only three cases. I can suggest what we might expect to see across other nonprofits, in other parts of Canada and beyond, but strong generalizations would only be possible if I were to continue testing my results across more cases.

Second, I did not have access to diverse individuals within the organizations. In fact, in all cases, participants were selected for me by an EXEC within each organization. This presents three issues. First, there is a risk that the individuals were strategically chosen to avoid any internal tensions being revealed. Second, I did not have an opportunity to interview many FLWs (only 4 out of 14 participants fell into this category). The literature suggests that those on the frontline of service delivery can often use their discretion to alter program or policy rules or delay the implementation of new programs or policies (Walsh, 2000). FLWs thus have the capacity to use their conceptualizations of poverty, even if they conflict with the organization's, to impact the ways they deliver services and programs. This limitation was most problematic in Org 3, where I was not given access to any FLWs. Finally, among those I interviewed in person (10 of 14 participants) there was a lack of racial diversity within my sample. A report by the Mowat Centre for Policy Innovation and the Ontario Nonprofit Network (McIsaac, Park, & Toupin, 2014) indicates that leadership within Ontario's nonprofit sector is primarily held by Canadian-born white individuals, and few nonprofits make any active effort to recruit from visible minority communities generally. While the participants in this study unfortunately mirror the lack of nonprofit sector diversity, it remains the case that a lack of diverse perspectives concerning conceptualizations of poverty is a limitation. As has been argued in this paper, problem definition is in part informed by a problem's image. Problem images are subjective because they are based on our own experience in the world. Racialized people may experience the world differently because of systemic issues of racism and racial discrimination, which remain persistent in Canada (Ontario Human Rights Council, n.d.). One might thus expect their conceptualization of poverty to be informed by systems of oppression, which have impacted their own lives or the lives of people they know and love.

Finally, while this study attempted to recruit four FBO nonprofits, only one agreed to participate. This limitation could impact the findings. The history of FBO nonprofits, and their role in addressing issues of poverty, is well documented (Gilbert, 2002; Powell, 2013). They remain an integral part of the nonprofit sector in Canada, particularly in Ontario, which has a larger share of FBO nonprofits than the Canadian average (Imagine Canada, 2006). While some argue that the term FBO does not adequately describe the nuanced ways that these organizations might express religion or its associated values within the nonprofit organization (Sider & Unruh, 2004), there is reason to believe that secular and FBO nonprofits operate differently. Each may rely differently on government funding and volunteers, and their involvement within advocacy and policy spaces might also differ (Hackworth, 2013; Kearns, Park, & Yankoski, 2005). While some argue FBOs have much to contribute to “the lives of the disadvantaged” (DiIulio, 2002, p. 50), others feel that FBOs are more likely to conceptualize poverty from an individual perspective (Hackworth, 2013). Important nuances of this debate ought to be considered in future research.

## Chapter 4: Results and Findings

### Introduction

#### *Individual Approaches to Poverty Reduction*

In Chapter 1, the literature revealed eight ways we can think about poverty. These can be grouped together by the policy level response required to address the issues of poverty. Solutions to poverty that suggest individual responses are to be expected with theories of Labour Participation (Demand), Culture of Poverty, and Political Organization. These three theories focus on the individual living in poverty and provide a response framework for policy actors. As was argued previously, while the culture of poverty literature offers a structural conception of poverty, related policy responses are frequently focused on changing individual behaviour which, in turn, is expected to shift the culture. In sum, these theories suggest that for individuals to escape poverty, *they* must:

- adjust their behaviour to fit with norms, values and standards outside of the culture of poverty (Price Wolf, 2008)
- enter the labour market through (re)training, educational upgrades and life-skills coaching; access to social safety nets becomes limited as one enters the labour market (Sarilo, 2013)
- gain motivation to participate in political processes by upgrading education and expanding social network (Jacobs & Skocpol, 2005; Oche, 2012)

#### *Structural Approaches to Reducing Poverty*

Structural approaches to poverty veer away from the individual and focus instead on political, economic and social institutions. These institutions are both the cause and solution to the issues of poverty. As was introduced in Chapter 1, structural theories include Economic

Inequality, Labour Participation (Supply), Social Stratification, Exclusion, and Misrecognition, Equality of Opportunity and Capability, and Settler Systems of Oppression. These structural perspectives suggest that political, social and economic systems are responsible for the existence of poverty. In sum, we can say that if poverty is caused by structural systems, escaping poverty involves (Block, 2017; Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2014; Lewchuk et al., 2015):

- actively pursuing decolonizing actions by the state including acknowledging the links between historical and persistent settler colonization and racism that have displaced and dispossessed Indigenous peoples (Thistle, 2017) and contributed to their over-representation in low-income and homeless communities
- having barrier-free access to, without being required to, engage with education, training and skills upgrading
- maintaining social services and programs at a minimum level even while a person is working, with consideration given for location, family size, capability, and culture
- having barrier-free access to labour unions and employment equity policies
- paying into and receiving benefits (redistribution) from a fair tax system to address income inequality

### *Case Characteristics and Profile*

Contained within each case profile are characteristics relevant to this study. These key characteristics are drawn from the literature, and where necessary, evidence has been generalized to protect individuals' and nonprofits' confidentiality. Within each case profile are both descriptive and analytical details regarding: participants interviewed (by generalized job title),

size of organization (by employees and revenue), funding breakdown by donor (namely, level of government and other nonprofits) and types of programs and services offered. Tables 6, 7 and 8 provide an overview of programs and services that are offered by the three nonprofits that participated in this study. These tables use the Program Expectations framework (Table 2) as a guide to protect confidentiality. Finally, the degree to which NPM is embedded in the nonprofit is also discussed in the case profile. If values and language associated with NPM are present, they will be evident in the data collected through the semi-structured interviews and the content analysis and through the organizations' programs and services. With the latter, we may see evidence of: limited autonomy for the nonprofit around program design and implementation, a signal that points toward bureaucratic control; program-based funding instead of core funding; a competitive funding environment; and, evidence of privileging accountability and personal autonomy for people in the community.

### Organization 1 (Org 1)

#### *Introduction*

All participants in Org 1 conceptualize poverty from a structural perspective and a content analysis of their formal organizational documents reveals a structural framing of poverty. Their programs somewhat align with their conceptions of poverty, although a core program falls within the individual conceptualization of poverty (see Table 6 for summary). We know this is likely to be the case among many nonprofits that espouse structural conceptualizations of poverty (Bradshaw, 2007). Of all the nonprofits in this study, Org 1 participants share the most consistent understanding of poverty. Participants conceptualized poverty from a structural perspective and the organization's framing of poverty matched this. Additionally, compared to Org 2 and Org 3, Org 1 most closely aligns its programming choices to this conceptualization. Org 1 was the only nonprofit among the three in this study to demonstrate a consistent desire for advocacy. This was

demonstrated by participants from Org 1, and in Org 1’s formal organizational documents. Like the other nonprofits in this study, evidence of NPM was found in the language of Org 1 participants, as well as within formal organizational documents and programs.

*Table 6. Summary of Findings for Org 1: conceptualizations of poverty by participant, framing of poverty by the nonprofit, types of programs and services offered, and evidence of NPM*

		Evidence of NPM	Conceptualizations of Poverty		
			Individual	Structural	Dual
<b>ORG 1</b>		✓			
Conceptualization of Poverty				✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	
Framing of Poverty				✓	
Evidence Found in Org 1’s Programs and Services:					
Structural Conceptions	Political organization	✓			
	Alternative institutions	✓			
	Collaboration resulting in inclusive and comprehensive programs	✓			
Individual Conceptions	Socialization				
	Self-improvement				
	Reactive/emergency services	✓			

#### 4.1 Case Profile

Org 1 is a nonprofit that has been in operation for over 15 years and describes itself as an activist nonprofit. They have a board of directors, and a relatively flat hierarchical structure, with few middle management positions. Org 1 demonstrates value-rational authority (Chen et al., 2013) through participatory methods of management, creating space for feedback and collaboration between people in the community, FLWs and EXECs. Org 1 has little in the way of MM, so we can say their structure is relatively flat. In fact, of all the organizations in this study,

Org 1 has the flattest organizational structure. Below is an overview of the participants from Org 1, the nonprofit's size, programs and services, and the degree to which NPM was present.

The participant characteristics for Org 1 generally align with the literature, as do the programs and services. Within this study, five of the fourteen participants are from Org 1, with three FLWs and two EXECs. Any mention of FLWs or EXECs within Chapter sections 4.1 to 4.3 will refer to individuals in Org 1, unless otherwise stated. Two FLWs are women, and one is male; one EXEC is female, and one is male. The group of participants from Org 1 are representative of the literature by gender and lack of racial diversity. As of 2016, Org 1 had between 30 and 50 full and part time employees. This is the smallest organization by staff size of the three organizations in this study. Part time employees made up approximately 30 percent of total staffing. Org 1 operates all (three out of three) program types classified within the structural side of the program expectations framework (Table 2). At Org 1, people in the community can engage in programs that encourage political organization, make use of alternative institutions, and build capacity. As was indicated in the literature (Bradshaw, 2007), even though Org 1 prioritized programs and services that aligned with a structural conception, they also had objectives and programs that focused on individual need and ability. Included in this was reactive/emergency services.

Org 1 was the only nonprofit in this study that articulated a commitment to advocacy and it was articulated in all semi-structured interviews and in the formal organizational documents. This is a significant challenge faced by Org 1, and likely any other nonprofit in Canada, wishing to engage in policy advocacy work. As was argued in Chapter 2, advocacy became a dirty word for nonprofits in the 1990s. In real terms, this means that Org 1 is limited in how much of their budget is spent on political activities, and there are restrictions on the type of political advocacy

work it can do. For example, Org 1 cannot support a candidate who they feel will support their structural conceptualization of poverty, and thus aim for structural policy change. EXEC 2 articulates the frustration and push-back they feel when being political:

We're dealing with a capitalist system that is failing and one of the features of capitalism is it always tries to co-opt you, right? Like if you have a radical super-duper social agency going, you're a threat to their whole system because we're saying rich people have to pay more taxes and they don't want to hear that [laugh]. So, you know they're going to do their best to, you know, co-opt you, or crush you with their audits or regulations, or whatever. So, it's about creating a political... these little political and social spaces where you can move ahead but you get to be too successful, you're a threat to somebody and they squash you (EXEC 2).

EXEC 2 seems to be making reference to the audits that took place under the Harper administration. While the current Liberal government has paused these audits, the current restrictions on how much money Org 1 can invest in political advocacy, and in what ways it can be political, remain unchanged. The strain of being political, but not too political, adds to the strain of doing traumatic work. EXEC 2 also articulates why advocacy is important and necessary to make changes happen at the system level. Without system level changes, nonprofits are faced with the pressures of addressing urgent day-to-day crises. So urgent are these crises that EXEC 2 uses the analogy of daily plane crashes:

Why is housing not a priority with government? When we say that homelessness is a crisis it really is. But it goes on and on and on and on, you know. It's not like a plane crash with these 300 bodies and then you go clean it up and forget about it because every day there's 300 more bodies that are piling up (EXEC 2).

The trauma suffered by those faced with poverty, and those who work to address the issue, is real and ongoing.

As of 2016, government funding and funding from other nonprofits made up 65 to 75 percent of total revenue at Org 1. Of these two sources, the clear majority (approximately 94 percent of their combined total) of funding comes from the provincial level of government. The bulk of this funding is not program-funded and comes from one specific Ontario Ministry policy initiative,<sup>8</sup> which funds Org 1's core reactive/emergency services program. In addition to these funding sources, Org 1 also raises about 25 to 35 percent of total revenue from alternative sources (such as events, auctions, etc.) and from donors who are issued a tax receipt. Total revenue as of 2016 for Org 1 is between \$1 and \$2 million.

While the use of NPM language in Org 1 was sometimes couched in participatory models of service delivery, the language also stressed individual responsibility; so, while their conception of poverty was structural, the language did not always reflect this. Accountability and personal responsibility were documented throughout Org 1's semi-structured interviews and data gathered from their documents. Multiple examples were located that contained evidence of individualism. "Their crisis" (EXEC 1; FLW 1; FLW 2; ORG 1, Documents); "their barriers" (EXEC 1; FLW 2; ORG 1, Documents); and, "their plan for success" (FLW 1; ORG 1, Documents) are examples of language that convey an individualistic understanding of poverty and its resolve. While Org 1 conceptualizes and frames poverty from a structural perspective, these examples reflect a more individualized conception of the problem. If Org 1 feels that poverty is caused and maintained by structural issues, then is it really "their" crisis or is it a crisis that has developed because of issues related to the social, economic and political systems to which they are subjected? And, is it really the individual's barriers, or are these not structural

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<sup>8</sup> The type of funding is not named to protect confidentiality.

systems that create and maintain major barriers? It may also be the case that Org 1 is reflecting upon the consequences of the crisis, which falls on the individual, thus making it wholly “theirs”.

Individualized language risks minimizing the impact of poverty. Located within Org 1 documents, people in the community are described as requiring Org 1 services during “their moment of instability” (ORG 1, Documents). Using the pronoun “their” individualizes the experience of instability, and of poverty. Additionally, this language risks minimizing the long-term impact and lasting trauma of living in poverty, in not gaining access to affordable housing, food and other necessary items for long periods of time. FLW 3 described to me their experiences with abject poverty that extends over many years. In fact, FLW 3 was present at the organization, and was experiencing the effects of poverty, before Org 1 was officially organized as a nonprofit over a decade ago. Surely this cannot be described as a moment. Finally, evidence of NPM was also located in the data collected from the semi-structured interview with EXEC 2, where they shared, “We're basically kind of like a contracted-out city welfare agency. Shitty, but true.” (EXEC 2). EXEC 2 draws attention to the public role they are playing as a nonprofit. From this perspective, Org 1 receives funding from the government to do the work the state ought to be doing (shitty, but true). They are contracted out to do the government’s work and EXEC 2 is fully aware of this.

While NPM was found in the language of Org 1 participants, it was also found in language used by an Org 1 funder. EXEC 1 describes an opportunity with a local funder, and articulates the requirements that risk pushing Org 1 away from its structural conceptualizations of poverty:

A few years ago, we tried to get funding from the [non-governmental funding agency] for this [...] program, but it didn’t fit right in their boxes at the time, but a life-skills coordinator did, which I never wanted in the first place, but we made

one up. Fine! [laugh] Right? We can make that work, I guess [laugh]. ‘Cause life-skills was the catch-phrase at the time (EXEC 1).

EXEC 1 describes a type of control that is synonymous with NPM. While this funder is non-governmental, it is a good example of the governance change that took place in the late twentieth century. It is what Osborne and Gaebler (1992) describe as steering, instead of rowing. The government (and funders who similarly adopt NPM values) moved away from welfare provision (the rowing), and focused instead on policy development and coordination (the steering) (Evans et al., 2005).

#### *4.2 How is Poverty Conceptualized?*

All participants (5 out of 5) associated with Org 1 conceptualized poverty within structural theories. While participants ranged in the theory(ies) that might best support their conception, they all rejected poverty from a strictly individual conception. Additionally, when asked, *Who is in the best position to address issues of poverty?* all participants (5 out of 5) answered either *government* or *elected officials/politicians*. Major themes that came up during these interviews included poverty as a consequence of events or circumstances; staff imagining poverty could happen to them; and poverty occurring for a great many people as a result of the drug crisis and as a result of local economic changes. These themes are indicative of structural conceptions of poverty, each of which is discussed in turn.

Participants felt that poverty was something that “happens to” people, but “not something that defines an individual” (FLW 1). That poverty happens to people implies that it is an event or circumstance that is put upon people’s lives; it is a consequence of something outside the individual’s immediate control. This idea of an occurrence pushing individuals beyond their social or economic limits came up repeatedly in interviews and reflected a solidarity between Org 1 staff and the people they serve. For example, a frontline worker (FLW) looked out the

window to where people congregated, waiting for lunch to be served, and nodded their head remarking:

...that could be me. As a [...], I did drugs and that sort of thing. And all I think is, wow, I'm glad crystal meth wasn't around when I was drinking. Do you know what I mean? That could be me. So, I have that knowledge that anyone of us is a couple drinks away or whatever, a couple pay cheques away from the same situation" (FLW 1).

Similarly, FLW 2 describes their own experience with poverty, and this idea that poverty can happen to anyone:

I think we get it. Honestly. I think we have lived experience growing up in our own impoverished homes. We understand the smallest little mishap, or the littlest thing as far as not having enough money could have ended up with my family out on the street (FLW 2).

FLWs 1 and 2 see themselves in the stories and circumstances of the people they serve. As was articulated, they have the knowledge and some of that knowledge comes from their own experiences or the experiences of their family or friends. They relate their own success in staying out of poverty as one of timing and luck, not individual decisions or choices. FLW 1's acknowledgement that "that could be me" (FLW 1) indicates that they can actually imagine themselves as part of that group who had been waiting for lunch. While they sit with me, they imagine that it could have easily been them outside and someone else sitting where they are now. This extends beyond empathy to a genuine acceptance that the shoes of the poor could easily and realistically be on the FLW's own feet. With FLW 2, there is also an assumption that we, anyone of us, are more similar than we are different. "The smallest little mishap" (FLW 2) indicates that they are aware of their own vulnerabilities and that stability in life can be disrupted at any time. This disruption does not have to be something catastrophic. FLW 2 believes poverty can happen because of small things occurring in our lives. It is important, however, to recognize that the consequences of the same event on two different lives, can result in different outcomes. When

someone with resources loses a job, they have time, space and money to find another one. For others, a lack of resources may mean job loss, which leads immediately to losing one's apartment.

The recognition of themselves in the people they serve extends from FLWs to EXECs at Org 1. Each person's story is affirmation of the path that brought them to the nonprofit. One EXEC in Org 1 recounts stories they have heard repeatedly in their nearly 15 years at the organization. In each case, the consequences of a particular event began a sequence of events that they admit, "would test any of us. All of us" (EXEC 2). They continue:

A lot of the homeless people were actually small business people and they ran like, a roofing company of two or three workers, right? And the owner fell off the roof and wrecked his back. And then the business went down the tubes. And then he was on painkillers and then he ended up a drug addict. And so then he loses his health and his ability to work and his job, and he's become addicted because the doctor wasn't paying attention to the pain medication (EXEC 2).

The circumstances that have led this worker to a life of addiction and subsequent poverty began with a work-related accident. The person went from being an employer to losing his company and being unable to keep himself safe. The historic prescribing of opioids for pain medication has impacted Canadians greatly. According to The 2017 Canadian Guideline for Opioids for Chronic Non-Cancer Pain, admissions into public treatment programs for opioid-related issues more than doubled from 2004 to 2013, from 8,799 to 18,232 cases (Butte, 2017). Staggeringly, the Guideline outlines that "[o]verall, 1 of every 550 patients started on opioid therapy in Ontario died of opioid-related causes a median of 2.6 years from his or her first opioid prescription; the proportion was as high as 1 in 32 among patients receiving 200mg morphine equivalent dose per day or higher" (Butte, 2017, p. 9). EXEC 2, further notes that, "poverty causes drug problems,

but drug problems also cause poverty and the drug crisis is affecting middle class people. And then they end up poor because it causes downward mobility” (EXEC 2).

The failure of government to respond to the drug crisis is evident at this organization. According to FLW 1, it has changed the reality for people living in poverty and for nonprofits. FLW 1, in responding to a question regarding their role in the organization, comments on how their job has changed since they started a decade ago:

[T]he drug culture has changed so much, so you gotta be prepared for that. You have to be on your toes. Um, and the whole overdose thing has been happening a lot more and that is how you know the shift in the drug culture has happened. Me, myself, I have had to resuscitate three people in the last four months. Um, and I, like I’ve said, I’ve been here 10 years and never have I ever had to do that before (FLW 1).

While the drug culture that FLW 1 describes has changed over their many years at the nonprofit, so too have the economic conditions. Although it was announced in 2017 that London’s gross domestic product (GDP) rose 2.7 percent (Daniszewski, 2017), for Org 1, the spoils of economic growth seems to exclude the people in the community. London, like many cities in Southwest Ontario, has experienced a decline in its industrial economic base. Recently Kellogg Co. and Caterpillar shuttered their doors and left a combined 1,000 people out of work (Radwanski, 2014). Org 1 staff see the impact of businesses closing. EXEC 2 comments on the economic impacts in the city of London on the people in the community:

Most people don't realize this because they have this perception of London as being either the hoity-toity University of Western Ontario or London Life Insurance, a very middle class, prosperous place. It's an idea from sort of the 50s and 60s, but London has always had a very large industrial sector... All the multinational corporations that came in here after the War, half of them bugged off: Kelloggs, Caterpillar, Ford, GM, Siemens, Northern Telecom... they all closed down and there just aren't the jobs that people need. A lot of the homeless people should actually be working in factories. If the economy were working properly they would have been in a factory right now with a permanent job and be well-paid. But instead, their jobs are being automated and the factories are

leaving. And so the real...it's not just about understanding poverty, it's about understanding the factors that are driving that increasing inequality (EXEC 2).

EXEC 2 asks us to think not just about understanding poverty, but also understanding the factors driving inequality. Here they point toward structural changes like globalization, where multi-national companies are free to relocate to other jurisdictions with lower labour and operational costs. In the case of Caterpillar, the company moved its location to Indiana, which has right-to-work legislation, making union formation more difficult (Keenan, 2012). Additionally, EXEC 2's reference to the fact that "a lot of the homeless should actually be working in factories" indicates that jobs requiring a certain education and skill level are absent in the London economy. The class of jobs that existed in the 50s or 60s, when the idea of London being a prosperous town was actualized, have not only left, but have "buggered off" (EXEC 2). The participant can very quickly list the large employers that no longer exist in London because they see the impact of these closures on the people in the community.

In addition to industrial job losses, there seems little confidence at Org 1 that poverty can ever be eradicated with the current economic system in place. When asked to consider who best can deal with the issues of poverty in London, EXEC 1 laughed. They laughed and then went quiet, eyes cast downward as they clasped their hands together. From my notes, I wrote, EXEC 1's "laughter seems to reveal an acceptance of what is possible." They smiled, and said:

As long as we have a capitalist system [laugh]...ya know, the idea that money relates to success, relates to entitlement, relates to all that shit, there is always going to be people who have less than other people who want to control the resources that exist. I'm not very hopeful for solving poverty. Homelessness, maybe we can get there if we increase social assistance rates to match rent that people can actually afford, which they can't right now (EXEC 1).

According to EXEC 1, poverty is a by-product of capitalism. EXEC 2 shared a similar concern, revealing that poverty is an outcome of capitalism. They comment, "in terms of understanding

poverty, it is a symptom of a whole economic system that's not working” (EXEC 2). The sentiments shared by EXECs 1 and 2, point toward issues of inequality and job losses that have disproportionately impacted certain groups over others. Ontario has experienced fifteen years of growing inequality, where the “top half of Ontario families take home 81 per cent of earnings; the bottom half of families take home only 19 per cent” (Block, 2017).

For participants in Org 1, there is a difficult tension on the one hand of holding structural conceptions of poverty, and on the other hand, being asked (by the state, and by other funders) to fulfil the “trope of individual responsibility” with a narrow focus on “individualized programming, and individualized outcome measurement and accountability” (Woolford & Curran, 2012, p. 49). There seemed to be a feeling amongst Org 1 participants that they were limited in their ability to address systemic issues. This frustration is reflected in the literature, and is recognized as a result of the structural changes that have taken place in social service delivery (Woolford & Curran, 2012).

#### *4.2 How is Poverty Framed?*

Org 1’s conception of poverty is structural. To determine how this organization frames poverty, a content analysis was completed on their annual report, strategic plan and website. Through an analysis of these sources, it is clear that Org 1 frames poverty in the same way participants from the nonprofit conceptualize it: the organization frames poverty as a structural issue. While conceptions and frames align, a tension was identified between Org1’s structural frame and evidence of NPM and neoliberal values, which encourage individuals toward a life of autonomy and self-reliance. Org 1’s tone, throughout all three documents can be described as determined, compassionate and urgent. The content itself reveals four main themes. First, it is evident that Org 1 believes the ‘system’ is primarily reactive. Second, the issue of poverty is not

currently being given the urgent attention that is required, and there seems to be a lack of progress in addressing the issue. Finally, from the semi-structured interviews, solidarity was evident between Org 1 and the people it served. This solidarity, the act of seeing themselves in the people they serve, was reflected in the content analysis as well. Each of these will be discussed in turn, and I will begin with the overall tone of the documents I analyzed. To protect confidentiality, direct quotes are paraphrased, and I have done my best to accurately reflect the context and tone of the language.

Org 1's tone throughout all three documents was determined, compassionate and urgent. The core beliefs of Org 1, as expressed in their mission, vision and values are rooted in compassion. Unprompted, the values of the organization were recited by most (3 out of 5) participants at Org 1. They spoke of the nonprofit's values passionately and connected them with examples in everyday happenings at the organization. This commitment to the values of the organization (regard for others, kindness, kinship and teamwork) are portrayed in images, with staff and the people in the community, where people in the community help run the programs, and where neighbouring business owners are seen supporting services. The images portray kindness and compassion.

Urgency and determination are evident as Org 1 aims to, "effect immediate change in our community in order to ensure social justice" (ORG 1, Document). Org 1's goal of "immediate change" implies organizational action and that action's consequences will ensure the goal of social justice. This statement supports Org 1's structural frame of poverty. To achieve social justice, change must be made in the community. It is not the individual who must change, but the community in which they live. And, it is not Org 1 alone that pursues this aim. Elsewhere they

talk of “wisdom gained through the community” (ORG 1, Document). Change will come through the efforts, knowledge and experience of Org 1 *and* people in the community.

For Org 1 change is required because the ‘system’ is primarily reactive to the needs of the people they serve, never resolving the root causes of poverty. This is the first theme identified in Org 1’s documents. They see people coming into this system and then watch as they are unable to escape it. Within an Org 1 document, they state:

Community members continually come into ‘the system’. Affordable, secure shelter and nutritious food are not possible in most cases and people cannot afford the costs of daily life. Poverty is the birthright of our current economic system (ORG 1, Document).

Org 1 sees themselves as part of this system but understands the complexities of navigating a way out. This is a system whose aim is to prevent or alleviate poverty, but which rarely, if ever, does.

The second theme emerging from Org 1’s content analysis is that the issue of poverty is not currently being given the urgent attention that is required. They look back at their long history in the city of London and see that little has changed. They are still talking about the same short-term, reactionary measures to address poverty that were discussed when Org 1 first formed as an organization. Within their documents, Org 1 comments, “twenty years we have been in London and we are all still at the same table, discussing short-term responses, instead of committing to real change and real policy solutions to real issues of poverty” (ORG 1, Document). As part of a visioning statement, this expresses Org 1’s frustration with a lack of policy progress. It sees the gap they fill as a “short-term response,” as necessary action because the system itself has failed (ORG 1, Document).

Finally, solidarity seemed to exist between Org 1 and the people they serve. This was identified in the data collected in the semi-structured interviews and we see this reflected in their formal organizational documents as well:

There is nothing very challenging about the people we work with. The challenge is navigating and dealing with a system that persists only to react to crisis. All this does is create an environment where nonprofits like us can provide programs and services. We are not a solution; we cannot provide a solution. The solution lies in the creation and maintenance of housing that everyone can afford, living wages and universal social supports (ORG 1, Document).

Org 1 reinforces that they work within a reactive system, and that this system represents their work's challenge. The organization seems to push back against any idea that the people they work with are challenging, which represents a solidarity with people in the community. They reject the often-used label that the people in the community are difficult or hard to serve.

According to Org 1, the challenge is not with the people, but with the system.

#### *4.3 Do Programs and Services Align with Conception and Framing?*

Org 1's conception and framing of poverty can be described as structural, but on the surface, their programs and services reflect both a structural and individual conception of poverty (see Table 6). While their core programs are individual-focused, addressing the effects of poverty, Org 1 demonstrates a commitment to empower those that use the nonprofit's services in ways that help build capacity. Capacity building is a core commitment, and one that is not limited to those using their services. They work with many other nonprofits and governmental agencies in the community to connect individuals with programs that will serve their needs and goals. EXEC 1 describes Org 1's service delivery as being designed around the needs of individuals:

... when you talk about being nonjudgmental and then actually doing that...ya know, it's a lot more complex in practice, but it's what we do all the time. So, we

have this thing where we're saying, if something's not working for someone accessing our services, then it's because we haven't figured it out yet – the right way to work with them. It's on us, not them. We have to change (EXEC 1).

The services Org 1 provides must be accessible and available to those who need it, and if that is not the case, then they commit to changing how those services are offered or how they operate.

The idea of being “nonjudgmental” aligns with data gathered in semi-structured interviews with

Org 1. The personal stories of each person they work with, “the contextual nature of poverty”

(Strier & Binyamin, 2010, p. 1913), seem important to Org 1. They emphasize the fact that

saying you will be nonjudgmental, and actually creating an organization culture that stands by it

are two different things. Org 1 relies on feedback from people who use their services, along with

those who do not. Staff leave the property and try to engage with people who could perhaps

benefit from their services but have not or no longer visit. The staff I spoke to all agreed that they

are encouraged to share this feedback and feel safe to do so. Change in programs and services

seems a natural evolution at Org 1.

For people in the community, this approach to programming makes a significant impact on their experience. One FLW talked not just about the programs and services, but about the

general atmosphere, what it is like to arrive at Org 1 in crisis, or to come “home” after curfew

(FLW 3):

[Org 1 staff] aren't like jail guards. Not like the [other nonprofit] or the [other nonprofit], ya, know? They are always screaming and yelling at people. They are not kind. And, they are always kicking people out, or telling you got [access to services] only 24 hours. That just adds stress and makes me feel so little. At [Org 1], if you're 10 or 15 minutes late, they don't hound you or nothing. If you really need help, or a shower, or whatever, they listen. They talk to you if you're late coming home, but they let you settle in first. You're not afraid (FLW 3).

What FLW 3, Org 1 describes is a space where they feel respected (not yelled at, or made to feel

small), safe (they are not afraid), heard (Org 1 listens), and treated with compassion (Org 1 is

kind, and spoke to FLW 3 once they had settled in). This is what Karabanow (2004) describes as a “symbolic space – a place where marginal populations can feel safe and respected” (p. 53).

All nonprofits in this study offer people in the community self-improvement programs and services, including Org 1, but all the organizations operate them differently. As is illustrated in Table 2, self-improvement is among the program expectations we expect based on individual conceptualizations of poverty. EXEC 1 explained how they came to offer these services. While it was not in their programming model to offer a “life-skills coordinator” (EXEC 1), it came down to choosing between missing out on much needed funding, or finding a creative way to introduce that staffing position in a manner they could justify. EXEC 1 laughed as they described this process. Org 1 pursued funding for a particular program that fit into their structural conception of poverty, but the funding agency had particular requirements, which Org 1’s program did not meet. As EXEC 1 puts it, “it didn’t fit right in their boxes at the time.” They go on to say that what the funding agency was looking for was a life-skills program – “the catch-phrase” of the moment (EXEC 1). EXEC 1 reveals much in this quote. First, their laughter once again exposes an acceptance of the system. Okay, they say, if you will fund a life-skills coordinator, then a life-skills coordinator we will have. Even though this decision shifts the organization away from its mission, and focuses on individual deficit, they are resigned to the fact that an opportunity for funding cannot, in today’s competitive climate, be turned down. EXEC 1, continues:

Okay. Fine. So, we experimented with that; the [non-governmental funding agency] loved the idea. But, really, it wasn’t giving...some people were coming and talking about budgeting and talking about some other shit...they think life-skills is an A-to-Z checklist. Most people come in here with tons of skills, ya know? They don’t come in here with a bunch of deficits. It doesn’t work like that. And so, we struggled with that over time. We realized we should be looking at people’s strengths, not deficits, so we make it work. (EXEC 1).

EXEC 1 seems skeptical of budget training, and any other type of self-improvement that is assumed appropriate and useful for individuals. This is evident when they comment, “some people were coming and talking about budgeting and talking about some other shit...they think life-skills is an A-to-Z checklist” (EXEC 1). A checklist implies universality, that each life-skill can be applied to each person uniformly. So, while EXEC 1 believes each person comes with strengths, not deficits, the funding agent believes differently. Despite this difference in belief, Org 1 accepted the funding and the requirements. Over time, and thanks to a very strong relationship with this particular funding agent, Org 1 now has control over the development and execution of their life-skills program. People only receive budget training, or training related to any other ‘life-skill’, if it is something they want.

While self-improvement is a program we might expect based on an individual conceptualization of poverty, Org 1 has designed it in such a way that it supports their structural conceptions of poverty. The life-skills program at Org 1 includes budgeting for those people in the community who identify it as a personal goal, but it also includes advocacy work and training, community engagement, and capacity building based on individual strengths and goals.

## Organization 2 (Org 2)

### *Introduction*

Unlike Org 1, where all participants conceptualized poverty from a structural perspective, Org 2 participants’ conceptualizations were mixed: Two of the five participants had structural conceptions, while another two of the five had dual conceptions (both structural and individual). Further, one participant at Org 2 expressed individual conceptualizations of poverty. With mixed conceptualizations of poverty, it is difficult to say whether and to what degree these conceptualizations align with Org 2’s programs and services. Ultimately, Org 2’s programs and

services offer what we would expect (see Table 2 for program expectations) from an organization that has an individual conceptualization of poverty, but they also demonstrate capacity building and collaboration, which we would expect from an organization that has a structural conceptualization of poverty. While Org 1 uniformly frames poverty along structural lines, Org 2 frames poverty from an individual conception (See Table 7 for summary). While Org 1 articulated a commitment to advocacy, there was no evidence of advocacy at Org 2. But, like Org 1, there was evidence of NPM found in the language of Org 2 participants, in programs and services, and within formal organizational documents and programs.

*Table 7. Summary of Findings for Org 2: conceptualizations of poverty by participant, framing of poverty by the nonprofit, types of programs and services offered, and evidence of NPM*

		Evidence of NPM	Conceptualizations of Poverty		
			Individual	Structural	Dual
<b>ORG 2</b>		✓			
Conceptualization of Poverty			✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓
Framing of Poverty			✓		
Evidence Found in Org 2's Programs and Services:					
Structural Conceptions	Political organization				
	Alternative institutions				
	Collaboration resulting in inclusive and comprehensive programs	✓			
Individual Conceptions	Socialization	✓			
	Self-improvement	✓			
	Reactive/emergency services	✓			

#### *4.4 Case Profile*

Like Org 1, Org 2 is a nonprofit that has been in operation for over 15 years, but unlike Org 1, Org 2 has several buildings and offices around the city of London, along with offices and buildings in locations outside the city. Like Org 1, they too have a board of directors, but unlike Org 1, Org 2 has a hierarchical structure, with several layers of middle management between the staffing and volunteer positions of FLW and EXEC. Org 2 demonstrates both legal-rational and value-rational authority (Chen et al., 2013). While they pursue some participatory methods, Org 2 is limited in this regard. In many cases, they are at the mercy of NPM criteria set by funders, which limits their capacity to involve an inclusive community at any level of program development or implementation. Below is an overview of the participants from Org 2, the nonprofit's size, programs and services, and the degree to which NPM was present.

As was the case in Org 1, the participant characteristics for Org 2 generally align with the literature. Within this study, five of the fourteen participants are from Org 2, with one FLW, three MMs, and one EXEC. Any mention of FLWs, MMs or EXECs within sections 4.4 to 4.7 will refer to individuals in Org 2, unless otherwise stated. The FLW and MMs are female, and the EXEC is male. Like Org 1, the group of participants from Org 2 are representative of the literature by gender and lack of racial diversity. As of 2016, Org 2 had between 70 and 90 full and part time employees, more than double Org 1. Part time employees made up approximately 30 percent of total staffing at both Org 1 and Org 2. Org 2 operates all (three out of three) program types that sit within the individual side of the program expectations framework (Table 2). People in the community can engage in programs that focus on socialization and self-improvement and can receive reactive/emergency services at Org 2. When Org 2 develops and reviews programs, they engage and build capacity with people in the community.

As of 2016, government funding and funding from other nonprofits made up 65 to 75 percent of total revenue at Org 2, which is similar to Org 1. Of these two sources, the clear majority (approximately 91 percent of their combined total) of funding came from the government. Unlike Org 1, who only received funding from the provincial government, Org 2 receives funding from all levels of government: The ratio of funding between federal, provincial and municipal is approximately 16 to 70 to 14 percent. The bulk of the provincial funding came from one specific Ontario Ministry policy initiative,<sup>9</sup> which funds Org 2's core self-improvement program. In addition to these funding sources, Org 2 raises about five to ten percent of total revenue from alternative sources (such as events, auctions, etc.) and from donors who are issued a tax receipt. This compares to Org 1, which raises about 25 to 30 percent. Total revenue as of 2016 for Org 2 is between \$6 and \$8 million.

Org 2 formal organizational documents, programs and services, and participants in the semi-structured interviews used language or had evidence that pointed toward NPM adoption. Additionally, semi-structured interviews also revealed programming and funding issues related to NPM. Org 2 exclusively refers to the people in the community as "clients." There were incidences of this in every interview transcript and within each document analyzed. As was discussed in Chapter 2, the term client, borrowed from the private sector, refers to someone who is a customer or consumer who receives a service or product. I have argued that the nonprofit sector is an extension of the public sector, and therefore the same tensions that exist for NPM in the public sector exist in the nonprofit as well. When we call community members clients, we are applying more than a label. We are protecting an identity that is based on consumption within a

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<sup>9</sup> The type of funding is not named to protect confidentiality.

market economy. Within this context, a person loses any connection to the state. They exist as an individual, with their primary purpose defined: passive consumption of goods or services.

Org 2 has programs directly and completely funded by the government, and the evaluation requirements often include reporting through statistical performance indicators, which alter the nonprofit's focus to NPM criteria. In the day-to-day life of a nonprofit, this can mean quantifying the qualitative work they do (Wright, 2013); it adds a heavy administrative burden, and can be viewed as a type of bureaucratic control (Evans et al., 2005). Org 2 has several programs within the self-improvement category (Table 2) that are directly and completely funded by the government. This represents NPM at work, as the state outsources services and programs to nonprofits. One of these programs takes an estimated "20 hours per person" (MM 1) in paperwork. Another participant from Org 2, also felt weighed down by the administrative work associated with their job and comments:

With that kind of funding [government], for an example, if there is an hour with one [community member] in your day, half that time is spent documenting what you did with them, which is ridiculous. There should be five minutes, like maximum five minutes, spent documenting what you did with them. In order to get the funding in or get the work done, it's what we have to do. Whereas if you didn't have to... I can see it's useful, for other staff to refer back to what's been done, being absolutely important, but at the same time, when you're spending all your time documenting, you limit the kind of impact you can have (FLW 1).

While funders can add a heavy administrative burden, they can also add strain to staffing levels, and limit the amount of engagement a nonprofit can do. Through a provincial Ministry, Org 2 receives funding for a self-improvement program, and is often required to run programs at short notice. MM 2 recalls an incident during the summer of 2017:

I think a goal for the future would be to have more youth engagement as part of the design process, but often, particularly with the provincial government, they tend to come and say this program starts Tuesday and it's the Thursday before,

with no notice, and you're getting the training. So, you're just quickly trying to pull everything together and start it so you can get your feet right in (MM 2).

In this case we see the state rushing to get a program operating, giving the nonprofit less than a week's notice before it is set to begin. And, this does not seem to be an isolated incident, as MM 2 describes this as an occurrence that happens "often". In this case, the government is providing program-based funding, a type of funding that has become more common over the last few decades. This type of funding, supported by NPM's commitment to efficiencies and control, gives little flexibility to the nonprofit, and usually comes with specified pre-determined outcomes (Evans et al., 2005).

#### *4.5 How is Poverty Conceptualized?*

Participants from Org 2 were mixed in how they conceptualized poverty. Two of the five participants clearly viewed poverty from a structural perspective, while two out of the five articulating both a structural and individual conception of poverty. One participant conceptualized poverty from an individual perspective. The major theme present in the individual conception of poverty was the "culture of poverty" (EXEC 1), although the literature suggests other factors may be at work. Like Org 1, major structural themes that came up in interviews with Org 2 included poverty as a consequence of events or circumstances, and poverty as a result of service and program gaps, or general system ineffectiveness. For two participants, these themes fell in tension with individual conceptions of poverty. Themes will be discussed in turn, along with identified tensions.

As was seen with all five participants in Org 1, two participants in Org 2 described circumstances or events, which explained why people in the community live in poverty. This view is consistent with a structural perspective. As was argued previously, the belief that poverty

can happen to anyone as the result of an event or circumstance suggests it is a consequence of something outside the individual's immediate control. FLW 1 articulates these feelings:

I think we just look at [poverty] as, it can just happen to anyone. And, we just need to be here and support the individual in the moment, whether it's been mental health, addictions, family breakdowns or just lack of supports. And, ya, meet the individual, with no judgement (FLW 1).

The participant reveals no matter which paths have brought the person to the nonprofit, the service provider is there, without judgement, to provide support. FLW 1 stresses the importance of "being here," with "the individual in the moment" (FLW 1). MM 1 echoes the belief that it is important to be there for people in the community without judgement and feels there are important moments that should be embraced to establish trust and respect between people in the community and the nonprofit. MM 1 comments:

So, I think there used to be a rule [here] like I would say 10 years ago...that if a client was 15 minutes late to an appointment or to a workshop we wouldn't let them in...I think that's terrible. Don't do that! And so, I think we have learned to be like, hey it's really great to see you... It's about making people realize that you are there for them. You know you still have a schedule you have to meet, but that you still really are glad to see them. And you know, in that moment they might be told like hey, this is the situation I just left something really crazy here. The [person in the community] is like, here is what I'm experiencing. And you can actually build an authentic relationship where you can really understand what's happening, as opposed to just turning people away (MM 1).

MM 1 understands that the rule that excluded someone from a workshop was not supportive and warm, and importantly, did not place the community member's situation within the context of his or her own life. Instead, according to MM 1, Org 2 now sees the benefit of understanding what might make someone late and using that opportunity to build a better relationship. FLW 1 and MM 1 articulate what Strier and Binyamin (2010) describe as a necessary part of developing anti-oppressive alliances between service providers and people living in poverty: "a warm, supportive, non-bureaucratic and non-hierarchical organizational approach" (p. 1915). While a

nonprofit's goal might be to create a warm and supportive environment, it can be difficult when resources are limited. Resource scarcity is evident in MM 1's comments above, where time allocation per "client" does not allow for the flexibility of fitting in a person when they arrive late. Instead, their appointment must be pushed to a later time, forcing the person living in poverty to return at another time or date. This is an important consideration given that spending time at an appointment may cost the person living in poverty money for transportation, child care, lost wages, etc.

While FLW 1 and MM 1 from Org 1 believe poverty can happen to anyone, they also believed that, in part, individuals are in the best position to address the issue of poverty. This creates a tension with their previously identified structural conceptualizations of poverty. In response to the question, *who can best address the issue of poverty?*, MM 1 said firmly, without hesitation, "it is the [member of the community]," and then after a pause, "but I think all service providers, too" (MM 1). Similarly, FLW 1 answered this question by stating "people in poverty" (FLW 1) and added that the government's role should be to "provide funding. That is all they should do. Give us money and let us do our jobs" (FLW 1). Despite previous comments about the structural dimensions of poverty, these comments suggest that it is the individual who can best address the problems of poverty. Yet, with an adequate social safety net, no one should be vulnerable to poverty. A social safety net ought to provide economic support when unexpected events impact one's life (such as an injury, disability, loss of employment, family care obligations or wants, etc.). It is only when the safety net is inadequate that people become vulnerable to poverty. While vulnerability to poverty (namely, poverty can happen to anyone) points toward a structural conception, assigning responsibility to the person in poverty to address

the issues of poverty in their life points to an individual conception. MM 1 and FLW 1 seem to articulate both structural and individual conceptualizations of poverty.

In addition to describing poverty as an outcome of circumstances and events, there were indications that poverty can happen because of an ineffective social system, or more specifically, social service or program gaps. This ties in with the idea that poverty can happen to anyone precisely because the social safety net is inadequate and supports a structural conceptualization of poverty. MM 2 describes a social service system that allows people to fall through the cracks. According to MM 2, poverty is complex, having many elements, but at its core, it is mostly gaps in services. According to MM 2 there are gaps in the services operated by the nonprofit sector and government. Their conception of poverty is an indictment on the system at large, which includes their own sector, the nonprofit sector, and reflects a general frustration that those establishing “criteria” ultimately have power over the lives, the literal lives, of society’s most vulnerable (MM 2). MM 2 explains:

Poverty has a lot of elements. Mostly, it’s individuals falling through our social services cracks where there's holes in our policies such as, trying to access Ontario Works<sup>10</sup> or trying to access homeless mission services [long pause]. Not being able to access those services because they don't meet certain criteria, this is just wrong and can mean the difference between life and death (MM 2).

From my field notes, I documented how MM 2 paused for an extended period. I interpreted this pause as sober consideration of the impact of these criteria, and of the seriousness with which MM 2 takes these gaps in service. Access to services can include different criteria for different government and nonprofit services and programs, even if they are similar services. These can include length of stay; age limits, whether maximum or minimum; gender; sobriety; companion animals (often excluded from shelters, or drop-ins); family make-up; etc. Criteria can also

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<sup>10</sup> Ontario Works is the income support and employment assistance program operated by the Ontario government.

include income, particularly when accessing services involving emergency food. MM 1 echoes similar thoughts about a system people cannot access or seem to get stuck in and comments, “I think our own vision, our understanding of poverty is that people really can get stuck in a really terrible system or cannot navigate the system on their own” (MM 1). Similar to findings identified in Org 1, MM 1 feels part of their role is to help navigate a “terrible system.” They go on to describe how this system has let people down over time:

Frontline staff have been really challenged [Org 2] around trying to find funding so that we can always have food here. So, it's like any [person] who comes in we just have to have food available, no matter what reason brought them here... that's definitely been something that's changed in my time is that I think the cost of living has really gone up and the rate of Ontario Works really hasn't responded to that... And they don't even have the money to buy the cheap food that they used to buy, like they just don't have food. Period. So, they're coming here and we're just feeding them and how that changes people. People can't function when they're hungry all the time (MM 1).

That Org 2 must provide food for participants, no matter what program or service they are running, gives a dire picture of the day-to-day struggles for the members of the community they serve.

While two of the five participants from Org 2 seemed to have both structural and individual conceptions of poverty, and two of the five had structural conceptualizations, it was initially unclear what EXEC 1's conceptualization of poverty was. Evidence presented in the literature review was helpful in determining whether their conception of poverty was structural or individual. EXEC 1, Org 2 identified the organization's conceptualization of poverty as:

Not just a lack of income and money, but also the social isolation and distress caused by poverty...poverty isn't just about a living wage. Of course, that's a component of it. But, you can currently have a home, a good job, and still be experiencing the culture of poverty. That social isolation and feeling that you're different (EXEC 1).

While EXEC 1, understands poverty as being about more than income, they point toward a social isolation that is caused by poverty itself, suggesting that once someone is in a “culture of poverty” it is more difficult to get out (EXEC 1). Even with a good job, one still feels “different” (EXEC 1). Different than whom? EXEC 1 continues:

Even when you get a job, how can you stand around at the water cooler and talk about how long you’ve lived in your apartment, when just before that you lived in a shelter? How can you share in the excitement when your colleagues talk about what school or university they attended or their kids are going to go to? Or their family vacation? Not that you’d ever begrudge them, but you have nothing to contribute to that. And so, you feel out of step. Poverty goes to the depth of those issues. If you truly want to help people in poverty, you’ve got to help them out of the culture of poverty. Help them understand differently who they are (EXEC 1).

At the heart of EXEC 1’s conception of poverty seems to be social and class conflict. The individual who has shelter experience, now standing around the office water cooler, feels isolated because they cannot share in the same middle- and upper-class conversations (and values) concerning vacations, higher-education, and housing, all freedoms afforded by time and money.

The social isolation that results from this is what EXEC 1 refers to as the “culture of poverty”. While this project has identified culture of poverty as an individual conception, EXEC 1’s understanding differs from the literature. The person at the water cooler with shelter experience does not seem to have a high acceptance for behaviour deemed socially unacceptable, as the culture of poverty literature would suggest (Price Wolf, 2008, p. 51); they are in the workforce, and presumably have acted in ways that are socially acceptable in order to gain employment. What EXEC 1 seems to point toward is more aligned with the Social Stratification, Exclusion and Recognition literature (Table 1), specifically the work of Nancy Fraser (2001) and Lea Caragata (2009). Fraser (2001) identifies misrecognition as a form of “social subordination

in the sense of being prevented from participating as a peer in social life” (p. 24) Similarly, in her work on social exclusion for lone mothers, Caragata (2009) argues that conceptualizations of social exclusion are complex, involve one’s capability, relational deprivation, which impact one’s status in society, and material deprivation, or lack of goods and resources. For Fraser (2001) and Caragata (2009), social exclusion, including a rejection or lack of recognition by one’s peers and society at large, is a systemic issue, which can be addressed through public policy. Instead of recognizing the issue of social exclusion and subordination as being one of structure, EXEC 1 suggests that eliminating poverty requires “[helping] them understand differently who they are” (EXEC 1). The problem to solve lies with the individual and with the individual’s perception of themselves. Based on the scenario presented by EXEC 1, the literature suggests the issue faced by the person with shelter experience is structural, while EXEC 1 identifies the issue as individual.

#### *4.6 How is Poverty Framed?*

While two of the five participants articulated structural conceptualizations and another two of the five articulated both structural and individual conceptualizations, the organization frames poverty from an individual conceptualization in formal documents. Throughout all documents analyzed, Org 2 never mentions poverty, but does mention associated terms (such as unemployment, but even these are sparse), which were used for coding purposes.<sup>11</sup> Through the semi-structured interviews, we know poverty is a documented issue for Org 2’s target population. The absence then of the word poverty is significant and will be discussed below.

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<sup>11</sup> Using NVIVO, and following Smith-Carrier and Lawlor (2017), I identified all instances by sentence where each formal organizational document “was coded as possessing the lexical traits of none, one or more than one discourse” (p. 117). First, I identified discourse related to poverty which included poverty challenges (homelessness; employment, economic or food insecurity; mental health related challenges; addiction), and of being poor. Then, I identified discourse related to structural issues including system, welfare, discrimination, social isolation, racism, safety net, income, and support.

Additionally, one other theme identified in the content analysis is that Org 2 frames poverty primarily as an issue of deficit in the person living in poverty, and often uses the language of empowerment to communicate this in formal documentation.

Despite evidence gathered in the semi-structured interviews with FLW 2 and MM 1, which indicated that poverty is an issue for people in the community, Org 2's formal documentation is largely void of direct language concerning poverty. Whereas terms associated with poverty are prevalent in the formal organizational documents of Org 1 and Org 3 (incidents by sentence were 37 and 64 respectively), Org 2 had only 4 incidents. The somewhat hidden reality of the lives of people in the community also serves to hide the structural issues at work. Terms associated with structural issues raised in semi-structural interviews, were largely absent in formal documentation. For example, during semi-structured interviews, there was evidence that supports are needed at a system level to address issues of poverty. MM 1, during the semi-structured interview, commented:

[People in the community] are just in really terrible situations and *they're very limited in what they can do on their own*. But I think just seeing people really want to make that difference for themselves and feeling like they have a whole team of people pushing them and knowing there is *system to support them*, it would make such a difference... I think as an organization we're really mindful that we're working with [people in the community] who are experiencing poverty. I think our own vision, our understanding of poverty is that people really can get *stuck in a really terrible system*" (MM 1, Emphasis added to indicate incidence of structural conceptualization of poverty).

Instances within Org 2's formal documentation that point toward structural issues were limited to three, whereas instances cited in semi-structured interviews, as is illustrated above with MM 1's comment, total 79 (across all five interviews). This indicates that Org 2 frames poverty differently than the way participants conceptualized it. Given Org 2's focus on self-improvement, it may be the case that they want to project the work they do and people in the

community they work with in a so-called positive light, which could encourage community (including business and other funders') support. The brush with which they paint people in the community in their formal documentation denies the reality of homelessness, and food and income insecurity, along with the challenges of getting "stuck in a really terrible system" (MM 1). Within one document Org 2 explains what people in the community need is "direction" and "leadership", and to be provided "a roadmap so they can reach their potential" (ORG 2, Documents). This language individualizes the experience of poverty, and suggests that "problems lie in an inability of individuals to access the appropriate supports, rather than deficiencies associated with such provisions" (Smith-Carrier & Lawlor, 2017, p. 119).

Org 2 frames poverty primarily as an issue of deficit in the person living in poverty, and frequently uses the language of empowerment to communicate this in formal documentation. Within its mission, Org 2 prioritizes empowerment of people in the community, but this empowerment seems connected to employment and the independence income security provides. Some authors have identified empowerment as "shorthand to serve a variety of different (and sometimes contradictory) agendas" (Tanekenov et al., 2017). For Tanekenov and colleagues (2017), these include prioritization of autonomy from the state, the advancement of participatory methods among service users, and the arrangement of more generous social safety net mechanisms. According to documents, empowerment is gained principally through employment. It is through self-improvement that employment is possible and from employment, the individual gains self-respect, confidence, self-determination and independence from the state. Empowerment affords independence according to Org 2, but it is not clear from whom people in the community seek independence. Is it independence from the state? From poverty? From each

other? In any case, we know from the literature that participation in the labour market does not necessarily guarantee someone a life free from poverty (Lewchuk et al., 2015; McBride, 1999).

#### *4.7 Do Programs and Services Align with Conception and Framing?*

Overall, Org 2 conceptualizes poverty from both a structural and individual perspective, but frames poverty from an individual perspective. Their programs and services mostly align with an individual conception of poverty. However, having been to Org 2, and having gathered data through semi-structured interviews, there is evidence to suggest a structural conception that informs collaboration between Org 2, members of the community, government, and other nonprofits to develop some inclusive and comprehensive programs.

Through interviews, examples were given of projects including the design of some programs and services where members of the community are involved in the development. FLW 1 describes how the organization reviews existing programs and researches opportunities for new programs and services. They explain:

Okay, so which programs we run and how, it's pretty much on the need of the [people in the community]. So, we do focus groups with the [people in the community]. We meet with them. Just look at, ya know, what are the needs? What kind of programming do they want? What kind of program do they benefit from?... The staff and [people in the community] will develop programs and then staff will implement and facilitate but in the future we'd like [people in the community] to be able to facilitate if that's something they want (FLW 1).

EXEC 1 also spoke about focus groups, and the ways that Org 2 looks to people in the community when creating new programs, or in this case, creating new space. They explain, before they designed any plans, or set any budgets, Org 2:

...had focus groups with [people in the community] before we embarked on creating new [type of service] for [people in the community] – that's the priority clientele for that. So, we had focus groups with [people in the community] that access our services now. Is this a good idea... or not a good idea? Should it be in the downtown, not in the downtown?...So we listen to [people in the community].

What would be the feel of the place? What would you want it to be like? Tell us all that. We listened to all that stuff, and then we went ahead and started building a model based on that (EXEC 1).

MM 1 adds that an engagement group made up of people in the community formed and plays a role in programming choices. MM 1 also explains the ways that engagement can be challenging for Org 2:

...[O]ne of the things that one of the staff here has done is create a [people in the community] engagement group where they come and they look at things we're doing and they make suggestions and make recommendations. They say this is how you should change it... So I think that's a piece that I know for sure we really want to get stronger at and we're trying to get stronger at. But, I think when you're relying on government funding, you don't always get the luxury of sitting down and saying, how would we design the program? (MM 1).

This tension MM 1 identifies relates to NPM, and the control that government has over programs, particularly program-based funding, which Org 2 receives. Unlike Org 1, that does not receive much government program-based funding, Org 2 is under considerably more pressure to design and implement programs as instructed by the government, and this often means excluding any engagement with the people in the community.

### Organization 3 (Org 3)

While all participants in Org 1 conceptualized poverty from a structural perspective, and Org 2 participants' ideas included structural, individual, and dual conceptualizations, all the participants from Org 3 had dual (both structural and individual) conceptualizations of poverty. As with some participants at Org 2, Org 3 had mixed conceptualizations of poverty, and it is therefore difficult to say whether and to what degree these conceptualizations align with Org 3's programs and services. Ultimately, Org 3's programs and services fall under what we would expect (see Table 2 for program expectations) from an organization that has an individual conceptualization of poverty. Their programs and services align with their framing of poverty.

While evidence was given in the semi-structured interviews to indicate some coordination between Org 3 and other service providers, this evidence is complicated somewhat by evidence presented from Org 1 and Org 2, which seemed to contradict this. For this reason, the activities of Org 3 related to collaboration resulting in inclusive and comprehensive programs are inconclusive. I have indicated this with an \* in the summary table below (Table 8). While Org 1 uniformly frames poverty along structural lines, Org 3, like Org 2, frames poverty from an individual conception (See Table 8 for summary). Unlike Org 1, which articulated a commitment to advocacy, Org 3 showed no evidence of advocacy, which mirrors the findings for Org 2. Like Org 1 and Org 2, there was evidence of NPM found in the language of Org 3 participants and within formal organizational documents and programs.

*Table 8. Summary of Findings for Org 3: conceptualizations of poverty by participant, framing of poverty by the nonprofit, types of programs and services offered, and evidence of NPM*

		Evidence of NPM	Conceptualizations of Poverty		
			Individual	Structural	Dual
<b>ORG 3</b>		✓			
Conceptualization of Poverty					✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
Framing of Poverty			✓		
Evidence Found in Org 3's Programs and Services:					
Structural Conceptions	Political organization				
	Alternative institutions				
	Collaboration resulting in inclusive and comprehensive programs	✓ * <sup>12</sup>			
Individual Conceptions	Socialization	✓			
	Self-improvement	✓			
	Reactive/emergency services	✓			

<sup>12</sup> Collaboration between Org 3 and other nonprofits is evident in the semi-structured interviews, but other evidence from Org 1 and Org 2 contradicts this.

#### *4.8 Case Profile*

Org 3 is a nonprofit that has been in operation for over 15 years. Unlike Org 1, it does not have a board of directors, but Org 3 has a complex hierarchical structure, with many layers of middle management between the staffing and volunteer position of FLW and the multiple layers of EXEC. Org 3 demonstrates legal-rational authority (Chen et al., 2013), where decisions are made at the top. Below is an overview of the participants from Org 3, the nonprofit's size, programs and services, and the degree to which NPM was present.

As was the case in Org 1 and 2, the participant characteristics for Org 3 generally align with the literature. Within this study, four of the fourteen participants are from Org 3, with two MMs, and two EXECs. Any mention of MMs or EXECs within sections 4.8 to 4.11 will refer to individuals in Org 3, unless otherwise stated. The MMs are female, and one EXEC is male and one female. Like Org 1 and 2, the group of participants from Org 3 are representative of the literature by gender; however, racial diversity was not observed as these interviews were conducted over the telephone. Unlike Org 1 and 2, I did not interview any FLWs from Org 3. This represents a limitation to the study, as was discussed in Chapter 3, and will be discussed further in Chapter 5. As of 2016, Org 3 had between 150 and 170 full and part time employees. Unlike Org 1 and Org 2 that both had approximately 30 percent of total staff designated as part time, Org 3's part time contingent is approximately 57 percent of their total staff team. Org 3, like Org 2, operates all (three out of three) program types that sit within the individual side of the program expectations framework (Table 2), but unlike Orgs 1 and 2, Org 3's work within the structural side of the program expectations framework (Table 2) seems contested and is therefore inconclusive. People in the community can engage in programs that focus on socialization and self-improvement and can receive reactive/emergency services at Org 3.

As of 2016, government funding and funding from other nonprofits made up 85 to 95 percent of total revenue at Org 3, which is larger than either Org 1 or 2. Of these two sources, the majority (approximately 73 percent of their combined total) of funding came from the government. As a percentage of these types of funding (government and nonprofit), Org 3 receives the most funding from other nonprofits. Org 3 receives about a quarter of all funding from other nonprofits. Org 2, for example, receives about eight percent of its total funding from other nonprofits, and Org 1 receives about five percent. Org 3 receives government funding from both provincial and municipal governments, as does Org 2 (although Org 2 also receives federal funding). The ratio of funding between provincial and municipal is approximately 24 to 76 respectively, compared to Org 2 who receives provincial and municipal funding at a ratio of 70 to 14, respectively. The bulk of the municipal funding comes from one specific city policy initiative,<sup>13</sup> which accounts for the funding of a large reactive/emergency service that Org 3 operates. In addition to these funding sources, Org 3 raises about one to five percent of total revenue from alternative sources (such as events, auctions, etc.) and from donors who are issued a tax receipt. This is lower than Org 2 that raises five to ten percent, and Org 1 that raises about 25 to 30 percent. Total revenue as of 2016 for Org 3 is between \$6 and \$8 million.

As in Org 1 and 2, there was evidence of NPM at Org 3. NPM was evident in Org 3 through language that prioritized individual responsibility and autonomy, and within programs that are wholly funded by the government. The presence of NPM is consistent across all nonprofits in this study, no matter what participants' conceptualizations were, or how the organization frames poverty. Language used in Org 3 stresses individual freedom and autonomy. Individuals who are now "self-sustaining" are celebrated (MM 2); programs aim to "help those

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<sup>13</sup> The type of funding is not named to protect confidentiality.

in need become independent and self-reliant” (ORG 3, Documents) and assist people to experience “real independence by learning how to budget and deal with addiction” (ORG 3, Documents). Formal organizational documents focused on the independence and autonomy people in the community can expect to acquire when engaging with Org 3. As one document explains:

...our programs are created to assist people in the community in order for them to know true freedom and self-sufficiency. People in the community learn how to deal with addiction through our in-house addiction programs and services. These programs also include learning how to create and spend within a budget and how to do this while providing your family with healthy meals (ORG 3, Documents).

Independence and self-sufficiency for people in the community are prioritized throughout all formal organizational documents.

NPM is also evident in the programs that Org 3 operates that are wholly funded by the government. As we saw with programs in Org 2 that are funded through program-based funding, Org 3 experiences strict demands on how they implement and evaluate certain city-funded projects. Additionally, the bureaucratic control that is synonymous with NPM is exacerbated by the complex ways Org 3 must administer the programs. Because Canada does not have an official definition of poverty, different levels of government set different criteria even when the programs are similar (both programs below relate to a grant offered to people in the community). MM 1 tries to explain the process Org 3 goes through when a person from the community uses two similar programs, which are funded by different levels of government:

[Program X] is not available if someone's income is more than the low income cut off. So, when we offer [this program], it's based on the low income cut off. When we offer [Program Y] which we do for [people in the community] in the beginning of the year, that's the low-income measure. And for the low income cut off, it's before deductions; low income measure, it's after deductions, not including government credit like child tax, trillium or GST. So, it can be very confusing for us to keep track of all that. And then also

some other exceptional circumstances would be like maybe if someone has children in the home, say, but they haven't lived in London for six months" (MM 2).

Program X is funded by the province, and Program Y is funded the city, and each has different criteria. If MM 2 understandably finds this confusing, one can only imagine how confusing this would be for a person in the community with no experience administering government programs. Without the assistance of someone like MM 2, how would someone from the community ever know if they are eligible for either of these programs? When asked how long it takes to explain this to someone in the community, MM 2 comments, "Oh gosh, I wouldn't ever explain it. I would just say, here, you're eligible for this, or no, you're not eligible for that" (MM 2). The complex rules around eligibility prohibit a clear line of communication between the service administrator (MM 2) and the person in the community.

#### *4.9 How is Poverty Conceptualized?*

While some participants at Org 2 conceptualized poverty both from a structural and individual conception, all the participants from Org 3 conceptualized poverty in this dual way (four out of four participants). Major themes that came up during these interviews included poverty as an inability for individuals to pay for basic needs, as a place where people's survival depends on their willingness to change behaviour, and as an individual responsibility. All participants from Org 3 had challenges articulating what they felt their organization's conception of poverty was. Most (three out of four) took considerable time answering questions that related directly to poverty, with long pauses. All the interviews for Org 3 were conducted over the telephone, so I was unable to make notes of any physical reactions to questions.

Two of the four participants from Org 3 that had mixed conceptualizations held absolute views of poverty. This was not a theme that surfaced in Org 1 or Org 2. This is an absolute view of poverty such that, if basic needs like food, shelter and clothing are met, the person is no longer

considered to be in poverty. MM 1 illustrates this when they say, “ HmMMM...[pause] In my own words? How would they [Org 3] conceptualize poverty? I would say basically that [significant pause]...it's somebody who does not have enough to make...to meet their own basic needs. To meet their basic needs. Mostly through no fault of their own. Right?” (MM 1). MM 2 relates similar feelings about poverty, talking about it in absolute terms, but they also associate poverty with individual actions and decisions:

Well, um [pause]...I think that it would be [pause] individuals and families [pause]...I mean I think [Org 3] believes poverty is where people cannot meet the necessities of daily living. They can't pay for it. Sometimes there's nothing they can do. So, that would be like being able to provide enough food for their family on a daily, weekly, monthly basis or shelter, clothing, like those kind of basic things. And I guess [pause] poverty is also, like, because of things someone maybe does. Like people have addictions, and such (MM 2).

MM 2 places drugs outside of basic need, and yet for someone who suffers from addiction, fulfilling that need to use is often all consuming, and far more complex than simply making a choice to pay rent or buy drugs. To present this scenario in such a binary way implies personal choice, and subsequently, personal responsibility. For them, poverty is “because of things someone maybe does” and presumably can choose not to do.

While MM 1 and MM 2 had absolute views of poverty, they both also articulated structural conceptualizations. MM 2 illustrated this when they commented that “...poverty is where people cannot meet the necessities of daily living. They can't pay for it. Sometimes there's nothing they can do” (MM 2). This is more in line with other structural conceptualizations we have seen thus far in the paper, where participants feel poverty can happen to anyone. If there is nothing they can do about not affording food or rent, then responsibility for their poverty is pushed away from the individual and onto the safety nets that have failed to support them. MM 2 therefore seems to espouse both a structural and individual conception of

poverty. Similarly, MM 1 also seems to have a dual conception. They reflect on a conversation they had with a community member and show significant compassion:

He said, “I can't afford to buy groceries. I don't go the grocery store.” He said, “by the time I pay my rent and I pay my rent every month, I don't have any money left to buy food.”...What an awful thing to have to choose between being responsible and being hungry. That's not right (MM 1).

MM 1 shows compassion for the community member and the impossible position they are in, having to choose between rent and food. MM 1 points toward an injustice, saying it is not right that someone is put in this position. Unfortunately, many Canadians are put in this impossible position. According to a recent report, the average person using a food bank spends over 70 percent of their income on housing (Campaign 2000, 2015). MM 1 also highlights the fact that they are being responsible by paying their rent. It is as if it is more responsible to meet a contractual commitment and to starve, then to back out of your commitment, and be fed.

EXEC 1 also conceptualized poverty from both a structural and individual perspective. EXEC 1 talks about the importance of “[being] at the table” where important policy decisions are being made. This implies EXEC 1 recognizes that policy impacts not only the work they do, but also the people in the community. To recognize that policy has a part to play in addressing issues of poverty is a structural conception. However, EXEC 1 also talks about the importance of Org 3 being a positive influence on people in poverty. They illustrate this when they say: “We know that [poverty] just affects so many families...you want to help the families and be the positive influence for them” (EXEC 1). This suggests that Org 3 has a role to play in influencing some aspect of community members' lives, such as behaviour or attitude changes, which is more aligned with an individual conception.

Like all other participants in Org 3, EXEC 2 articulates both a structural and individual conceptualization of poverty. Several (four times) times during the interview, EXEC 2 articulated the importance of rehabilitating the life of someone in poverty. In this context, rehabilitation seems akin to development, and implies a return to some former state of dignity and stability. EXEC 2 comments, “I really think we have a part to play in the overall rehabilitation of people’s lives and helping them, facilitating a process where they work toward and feel a sense of justice and rightness in their lives” (EXEC 2). Org 3 facilitating this process implies a somewhat balancing of power between the nonprofit and community members. Yet, while attention to justice implies a structural conception, there is also a focus on the individual and an assumed indignity that comes with poverty. Assuming people living in poverty feel undignified or live without dignity is a projection of middle- and upper-class values. It assumes that the dignity and respect we receive from others derives from wealth. EXEC 2 further illustrates this when they say: “If we all made [people living in poverty] our focus to try and help restore dignity to people’s lives, then everybody doing their part will help complete the larger picture” (EXEC 2).

#### *4.10 How is Poverty Framed?*

Org 3’s conceptualization of poverty was both structural and individual. As with the other organizations involved, to determine how Org 3 frames poverty, a content analysis was completed on their annual report, strategic plan and website. The results of my analysis suggest that Org 2 and 3 frame poverty the same way: they both frame poverty from an individual perspective. These nonprofits contrast Org 1, which frames poverty from a structural perspective. The content analysis reveals three main themes. First, Org 3 seems to frame poverty as a set of barriers and challenges that people can overcome. This places the individual at the heart of the

solution to poverty. Second, the effects of poverty are prioritized throughout all documents; this is framed as an issue that can be addressed through community work. The effects of poverty were also included in Org 1's poverty frame, but their documents prioritized solutions, not the effects themselves. While Org 1 admits their programs and services are not going to solve poverty, Org 3 claims that through their community work, people in the community can achieve "independence and self-sufficiency" (ORG 3, Document). While participants from Org 2 were aware of the effects of poverty on people in the community, this was not evident in their framing of poverty. The final theme found in the content analysis centres on poverty as framed from an absolute perspective, focusing on meeting people's basic needs. Each of these will be discussed in turn, and I will begin with the overall tone of the documents I analyzed. As in the other two cases, to protect Org 3's identity, direct quotes are paraphrased, and I have done my best to accurately reflect the context and tone of the language.

Throughout the three documents analyzed from Org 3, the tone is sympathetic and deeply informed by their values. Sympathy is illustrated through case studies, where volunteers and those impacted by the programs and services are profiled, their stories told in the first person, along with a first-person response from an Org 3 volunteer. However, feelings of compassion in many cases focus on the effects of poverty. Statistics are offered to indicate how many Canadians go hungry, how many will use a foodbank, and how many Canadians experience homelessness. Org 3 expresses compassion, particularly for children, but there is a lack of evidence that this compassion is linked to any sense of injustice. Instead, poverty is something to overcome. Poverty is individualized, as if it happens when people cannot handle what life throws at them. This is articulated in the following passage: "Addressing all these issues are [Org 3] staff and volunteers, who aim to improve the life of those having trouble coping (ORG 3,

Documents). Suggesting that issues arise because people have trouble coping individualizes poverty and blames people in the community for their situation. Values identified in formal organizational documents include, “regard for others, sympathy, being the best, teamwork, usefulness, recognizing achievements in their work” (ORG 3, Documents). Images contained within Org 3 documents reinforce the nonprofit’s working principles, namely teamwork, usefulness, and recognizing their achievements. Illustrating these principles is a picture of the Prime Minister with a volunteer or staff member from Org 3. The Prime Minister recognizes the contribution Org 3 made in an emergency response scenario by shaking their hand and offering thanks and congratulations on a job well done. Also illustrating the principles is another image, which highlights teamwork, as staff or volunteers pack food stuffs, also in response to an emergency. In all cases, photos are a snapshot that capture Org 3’s response to an event or circumstance, and often feature affected people from the community.

In their formal organization documents, Org 3, frames poverty as a set of barriers and challenges that people can overcome. Poverty alleviation is possible if people are given tools and methods to change behaviour. No document indicates any structural issues associated with poverty; instead, effects of poverty and the culture of poverty are addressed by:

...providing everyday support for families. We share tools to ensure families are eating well, and help people work on coping skills. We also run practical workshops such as life-skills training with the goal of removing barriers and making people more productive. Other practical assistance includes food and shelter programs. Ultimately, our goal is to ensure families and their children escape generational poverty (ORG 3, Documents).

Org 3’s individual framing of poverty is clear. Escaping poverty requires identifying deficits (coping skills), engaging in self-improvement (life-skills training), which will eliminate barriers,

making job market activation possible (productivity), and putting an end to a cycle of generational poverty (changing behaviour for future generations).

The second theme identified within the content analysis is the effects of poverty, which is prioritized throughout all documents. Prioritizing the effects of poverty means that the issue of poverty is understood through the outcomes of poverty: hunger, homelessness, exposure to the elements without adequate clothing, etc. Conceptualizing poverty in this way individualizes it, removing the issue from any structural context. This conceptualization also limits what we consider as possible responses to poverty. To solve the issue of hunger, the most impactful solution in the moment is to provide food. It is a necessary and humane course of action. That is undisputable. But, if we focus conceptualizations on the effects of poverty – such as hunger – in that moment, we risk never addressing *why* the person is hungry to begin with. We also risk focusing on absolute poverty, as opposed to poverty from a relative perspective.

This brings us to the third theme identified: Org 3 seems to align with an absolute perspective of poverty. As discussed in Chapter 1, an absolute perspective of poverty prioritizes income over other resources, and defines poverty as living below a specific income required to avoid physical harm from deprivation (Sarlo, 2013). When Org 3 focuses so heavily on the effects of poverty, issues of hunger and homelessness are pushed to the forefront and programs are designed to address immediate needs. Long-term needs are tied to self-improvement with the goal of labour force entry, and a move to a more “productive” life (ORG 3, Documents).

#### *4.11 Do Programs and Services Align with Conception and Framing?*

Org 3 frames poverty from an individual conception and this aligns to a great degree with their programs and services. All participants from Org 3 had mixed conceptualizations, so we can say that programs align with participants’ individualized conceptions, but whether and to

what degree programs align with participant's structural conceptions remains unclear, and this is discussed in more detail below. The clear majority of programs and services can be described as focusing on poverty reduction through reactive/emergency services, socialization, and self-improvement. A program or service that does not fit an individual conceptualization is the work Org 3 does with other nonprofits. Collaboration with people in the community ensures programs are relevant and are informed by lived experience, but collaboration between nonprofits has also been identified as important to avoid unnecessary duplication, share knowledge and learn from one another (see Table 2). Through semi-structured interviews with Org 3 there was evidence to suggest that they collaborate with other nonprofits, but there was also evidence (from Org 1 and Org 2)<sup>14</sup> that collaboration was challenging. For this reason, the project is inconclusive about whether and to what degree Org 3 collaborates with other nonprofits. This was the only work identified as structural.

Programs are developed through a complex, multi-step hierarchical process and must be informed by the values of the organization. Even those programs that are offered as reactive/emergency responses must be designed with these values in mind. EXEC 2 explains that when they think about developing a program, or evaluating its impact, their mission, which includes bringing people closer to these values, is at the forefront of their decisions. EXEC 2 comments:

And for us it's, it's about the mission of the [organization] right? To make sure that we meet our mission statement and our vision of bringing people alongside, bringing them to [our values]... We know that poverty is a need. We know that people are hungry, but we know that we always have to align programs for the services that we do with our mission (EXEC 2).

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<sup>14</sup> While the evidence is excluded here to protect the confidentiality of participants, it is substantial. Five of five participants at Org 1 and two of five participants at Org 2 spoke unprompted about challenges of collaborating with Org 3.

Addressing poverty and the effect of hunger on the people in the community is done with two purposes. First, Org 3 recognizes the need. People in the community are hungry and they can address that through a reactive/emergency program. Second, they have an obligation to attend to this need while also serving a greater purpose, which is to bring people closer to their values.

A participant from Org 3 described similar programs being run by multiple organizations, which the participant felt was a waste of resources. While program duplication, without need or relevance to the community, is not supported within a structural conceptualization of poverty, one can imagine an instance where criteria limits use of a reactive/emergency service. People in the community may be limited to how many times they can access a service within an allotted time. But, there are situations that would require emergency access that exceeds the established limits of one organization's services. In these cases, duplicate services can be life saving for individuals, but frustrating for nonprofits who see duplication as a potential for wasted resources. As MM 1 points out, "That's one thing that drives me crazy, is when we find out that these little food pantries are opening up all over the city! I really hate that! It's like, you know, is it really necessary?" (MM 1). Programs and services, particularly ones that provide reactive/emergency provisions, ought to be coordinated in such a fashion that people in the community can clearly understand the rules and criteria, and are offered alternatives if for some reason they do not qualify.

### Conclusion

Conceptualizations of poverty, the framing of poverty and the degree to which these are aligned with programs and services was inconsistent across, and in some cases, within, the nonprofits in this study. Participants across the three nonprofit organizations conceptualized poverty differently; in the case of Org 2, they also conceptualized it differently within the

organization. In total, seven of the fourteen participants conceptualized poverty structurally, six conceptualized poverty both structurally and individually, and one participant conceptualized poverty individually. All participants (five of five) from Org 1 conceptualized poverty structurally. From Org 2, two participants conceptualized poverty both structurally and individually, while two others conceptualized poverty structurally, and one conceptualized poverty individually. Participants in Org 3 all (four of four) conceptualized poverty both structurally and individually. Org 1 was the only nonprofit to offer programs in all areas we would expect when an organization conceptualizes poverty from a structural perspective, and these programs aligned with their conception of poverty. Org 2 and 3 offered programs in all areas we would expect when an organization conceptualizes poverty from an individual perspective. Both Org 2 and 3 had mixed conceptualizations, so their programs aligned somewhat with their conceptualizations, but not to the same degree of alignment found within Org 1. Org 1 was also the only nonprofit whose framing of poverty aligned with both its conceptualization and its programs and services. Orgs 2 and 3 frame poverty from an individual conceptualization, which aligns with their programs and services, but only aligns somewhat with their mixed conceptualizations. Funding for each nonprofit varied considerably by source. Orgs 1 and 2 receive similar amounts of funding from government and other nonprofits (65 to 75 percent of total revenue), though Org 1 receives all government funding from the provincial government, while Org 2 receives funding from all levels of government. Org 3 receives the most funding from government and other nonprofits (85 to 95 percent of total revenue) and receives the least amount of funding from alternative sources (such as events, auctions, etc.) and from donors who are issued a tax receipt (one to five percent), whereas Orgs 1 and 2 receive 25 to 30 percent and five to ten percent of total revenue from these categories respectively. There

was evidence in Orgs 2 and 3 that program-based funding, which originated from the provincial and municipal governments respectively, has limited their capacity to engage with people in the community, and to design and administer particular programs as the organizations see fit. Additionally, program-based funding seems to add substantially to administrative work, which included work that required reporting on NPM criteria set by funders. There was evidence of the adoption of NPM across all nonprofits, particularly with language (three out of three nonprofits), bureaucratic control by funders (Org 2 and Org 3), and a focus on individual responsibility and autonomy from the state (three out of three nonprofits).

## **Chapter 5. Discussion**

### Poverty Conceptualizations, Framing and Misalignment

There was no agreement among the three nonprofits about how they conceptualized poverty. While all participants from Org 1 conceptualized poverty from a structural perspective, Org 2 and Org 3 were mixed in their conceptions. Similarly, Org 1 framed poverty from a structural perspective, while Org 2 framed poverty from an individual perspective, and Org 3 framed poverty from a mixed perspective. Across the organizations included in this study, programs and services did not necessarily align with the organization's conceptualizations of poverty according to its staff members and volunteers, or with how poverty was framed by the organization through its public literature. Programs aligned with both individual and structural conceptualizations for Org 1 and Org 2, but exclusively with individual conceptualizations for Org 3. In the case of Org 3, participants had a difficult time articulating the ways their organization conceptualized poverty. One possible explanation is that I did not interview any FLWs at Org 3. FLWs have the capacity to use their conceptualizations of poverty, even if they conflict with the organization's, to impact the ways they deliver services and programs. The literature suggests that those on the frontline of service delivery can often use their discretion to alter program or policy rules or delay the implementation of new programs or policies (Walsh, 2000). These people are either working or volunteering with people in the community or are volunteers and use the services of the nonprofit, so are faced with the day-to-day challenges of people living in poverty. The FLWs I spoke to in Org 1 and Org 2 articulated clearly how they felt their organizations conceptualized poverty. In the case of the participant from Org 2, their conceptualization did not align with their colleagues', but they nonetheless spoke with conviction. The participant's lack of hesitation suggests that they felt confident about how the organization conceptualizes poverty. In all cases, across Org 1 and Org 2, all FLWs articulated

structural conceptualizations of poverty. This represents an opportunity for future study and is discussed in Chapter 6.

The theoretical framework on ways of conceptualizing poverty was necessary for this project, and it provided guidance on the ways that poverty was conceptualized and framed. There was evidence that theories within Economic Inequality informed some participants' conceptualizations in Org 1. There was also evidence in Org 1 and Org 2 that theories associated with Equality of Opportunity and Capability grounded participants' ideas about poverty. Some participants felt a sense of injustice related to circumstances and events in community members' lives. Finally, Social Stratification, Isolation and Misrecognition was also evident in Org 2, although the participant (EXEC 1) who discussed this point seemed to identify the individual as the source of change required to address issues of poverty.

Unfortunately, the theoretical framework did little to provide guidance on the contradictory ways that people within some nonprofits (Org 2 and 3) talked about poverty. Six of fourteen participants across the three nonprofits conceptualized poverty in both an individual and structural way, creating tensions between their ideas about (often) individual responsibility and structural issues such as access to benefits, and low social safety net supports. The majority of participants (four of six) who had both a structural and individual conceptualization of poverty had trouble articulating what they thought their organization's conceptualization of poverty was. It might be the case that some people who articulated both conceptualizations had not previously thought about it and were caught off guard by the question. Instead of saying they did not know, they might have guessed, and spoke in contradictory ways. If this is the case, it is concerning that those working with vulnerable community members may not consider how their organization understands poverty, the very issue faced by the people in the community.

While there was alignment between Org 1's conceptualization (5 of 5 participants) and how the nonprofit frames poverty, Org 2 and Org 3 had considerable misalignment. There are four possible explanations for these differences between organizations. These explanations may interact with each other to further explain misalignment. The possible explanations include: organization size; hierarchical structure and type of authority; funding sources; and clear framing.

The size of the nonprofit may impact an organization's cultural cohesiveness (Hall, 2002) and the degree to which alignment exists between conceptualizations of poverty, framing of poverty, and programs. Org 1 is the smallest organization of the three by size and by revenue, and this may allow for and encourage a more cohesive culture, where norms and values are shared and adopted more easily. Size likely influences the amount of hands-on work done by all staff and volunteers, which may result in more interactions with people in the community and more senior staff than would happen at a larger nonprofit. Engagement with people in the community was certainly evident among all participants from Org 1. Both EXEC 1 and 2 related personal stories of people in the community. Contrasting this, Org 2 is more than twice as large by staff and revenue size and has multiple locations in London, as well as outside of the city. Staff are based in various locations and do not have contact with one another to the degree that staff at Org 1 do. This might explain why Org 2 participants expressed a variety of conceptualizations (1 participant = individual; 2 participants = structural; 2 participants = mixed). The organizational culture, which would serve to reinforce values, is perhaps not as cohesive at Org 2 as it is at Org 3. Similarly, Org 3 is larger than both Org 1 and Org 2 by size and revenue. And, unlike Org 1 and Org 2, it is part of a very large global organization. Org 3's size may help explain the hesitation most participants had when communicating what Org 3's

conceptualization of poverty was (3 of 4 participants) and the mixed conceptualization all participants communicated. While Org 3 had the largest staffing complement, they also had the largest percentage of part time staff. While part time staff made up approximately 30 percent of total staffing at Org 1 and 2, they made up approximately 57 percent at Org 3. While none of the staff I interviewed at Org 3 (no FLWs were interviewed) were part time, they clearly work with many part time people. Perhaps the cohesion of the organization is impacted when more than half of the staff work less than full time hours.

Second, hierarchical structure, along with whether and to what degree a nonprofit demonstrates legal- or value-rational authority (Chen et al., 2013) may impact the degree to which alignment exists between conceptualizations of poverty, framing of poverty, and programs. Org 1 had the flattest hierarchical structure of all the nonprofits in this study. EXEC 1 and 2 knew the stories of people in the community, and FLWs provided input that shaped processes and decisions. Similarly, FLWs at Org 1 knew they were safe to communicate issues they or people in the community had with processes, programs or services. Where Org 1 is a collectivist nonprofit, with value-rational authority, Org 2 demonstrates both value- and rational-legal authority. The rational-legal authority is in part driven by the NPM criteria that originate from funders, and ultimately limit the participatory approaches that are available to the organization. In contrast to both Orgs 1 and 2, Org 3 demonstrates rational-legal authority, rooted in bureaucratic processes that are top-down in the hierarchy. While rational-legal structures encourage decisions, including values, to be made at the top of the hierarchy, value-rational structures flatten the decision-making process, often utilizing participatory methods to gain consensus (Chen et al., 2013). When it comes to alignment it seems to be the case that Org 1, a value-rational nonprofit with collectivist practices, is more likely than Orgs 2 and 3 (mostly

legal-rational nonprofits with bureaucratic processes) to foster a culture where alignment is possible and encouraged. The degree to which the nonprofit is fully legal-rational (Org 3) versus a mixture of both legal- and value-rational (Org 2) may determine the extent to which misalignment is present.

Third, the type of funding that each nonprofit receives seems to impact the degree to which they can pursue alignment between conceptualizations of poverty, framing of poverty, and programs. Org 1's funding is different from that of Orgs 2 and 3 in two key ways. First, Org 1 receives the largest amount of funding from alternative sources (such as events, auctions, etc.) and from donors who are issued a tax receipt (25 to 35 percent of total revenue). These sources are likely coming from individuals who are familiar with the organization, and do not espouse NPM values, which impact bureaucratic control, reporting criteria, program design and implementation, etc. These funders likely expect transparency and accountability through the issuance of an annual report or, if the funds were raised for a specific initiative, an update on impact or results. Otherwise, Org 1 is free to spend these funds where they feel the funds are required. Second, unlike Orgs 2 and 3, Org 1's funding is not primarily program-based. This gives them more freedom and slightly more funding predictability. This means less employee turnover due to short program contracts. All participants I interviewed at Org 1 had worked there at least five years, with most (four out of five) working there for more than ten years. Two of the five participants from Org 2 had been there less than two years, and one was on a short-term contract. All participants I interviewed at Org 3 were long-term employees, so it may be the case that the hierarchical structure and type of authority is more important than the stability and tenure of employees and volunteers when considering impact on alignment.

Finally, clear and consistent framing may impact the degree to which alignment exists between conceptualizations of poverty, framing of poverty, and programs. Frames consist of “normative and sometimes cognitive ideas that are located in the foreground of policy debates...[E]lites strategically craft frames and use them to legitimize their policies to the public and to each other” (Campbell, 2002, pp. 26-27). We know that framing is a tool aimed at influencing how others conceptualize and understand an issue, and this includes people internal to the organization, namely, FLWs, MMs, and EXECs. Themes identified in Org 1’s poverty framing include language which points toward a “system” that: a) is primarily reactive and does not see poverty as an urgent issue; and b) uses language that reinforces solidarity between Org 1 and the people in the community. These themes were consistent, not just across all documents analyzed, but also in the semi-structured interviews. The way Org 1 talked about poverty was the same way it writes about poverty in formal documents and is the same way it runs programs and services. In contrast, Org 2 talked about poverty very little in formal documents, sending a signal that this was not an issue faced by people in the community, though evidence gathered in the interviews indicated otherwise. This sends a conflicting message not just to internal staff and volunteers, but also to people in the community who are not likely to see themselves and the issues they face reflected in the work Org 2 does. Org 3 generally frames poverty through the lens of poverty outcomes, which depoliticizes the issue, and disconnects poverty from any structures that work to maintain it. Org 3 frames poverty individually, and this does not seem to reflect the complex ways that individuals think Org 3 understands poverty.

## Challenges for Members of the Community

People in the community experience programs differently in part because different conceptualizations of poverty result in different ways of administering and implementing programs. For example, programs that are similar in provision operate under vastly different parameters, and with varied eligibility criteria. This experience was articulated by FLW 3 at Org 1 when they said:

[Org 1 staff] aren't like jail guards. Not like the [other nonprofit] or the [other nonprofit], ya, know? They are always screaming and yelling at people. They are not kind. And, they are always kicking people out, or telling you got [access to services] only 24 hours. That just adds stress and makes me feel so little. At [Org 1], if you're 10 or 15 minutes late, they don't hound you or nothing. If you really need help, or a shower, or whatever, they listen. They talk to you if you're late coming home, but they let you settle in first. You're not afraid (FLW 3).

FLW 3 compares their experience at Org 1 with their experience at two other nonprofits in London and describes it with emotion. They were negatively impacted by the treatment at the other nonprofits and made to feel afraid. Because Org 1 participants all conceptualized poverty the same way, it stands to reason that they would each approach a person in the community, a situation, or a challenge they face at the nonprofit through this lens. While the nuances of how they deal with a challenge, or the ways that they interact with a person from the community will differ, it seems to matter that their work is informed by a uniform conceptualization of poverty. At Org 3, MM 2 explained the different eligibility rules for two different grant programs. The rules were complex, in large part because one grant program was funded by the provincial government, and the other was funded by the municipal government, and without the assistance of someone like MM 2, a person from the community would have a difficult time knowing if they were eligible for either of these programs. MM 2 admitted that they do not bother to explain to someone why they were or were not eligible because it is far too complex. They said, "Oh

gosh, I wouldn't ever explain it. I would just say, here, you're eligible for this, or no, you're not eligible for that" (MM 2). The complex rules around eligibility prohibit a clear line of communication between the service administrator (MM 2) and the person in the community.

### NPM and Nonprofits

NPM was evident in all three cases in this study, no matter how participants from nonprofits conceptualized poverty, and no matter how poverty was framed by the organization. Even as Org 1 firmly conceptualized poverty from a structural perspective, they also seemed to embrace some of the values and logic of NPM, as did the other two nonprofits. The organization that embraced the language of NPM to the greatest extent was Org 2. The language reflected a pro-market stance, consistently calling people in the community, clients. Additionally, they have programs directly and completely funded by the government, and the evaluation requirements often include reporting through statistical performance indicators, which alter the nonprofit's focus to NPM criteria. All three cases in this study rely on substantial government funding. As noted above, the composition of each Org's funding was variable, with Org 3 receiving the most funding from government and other nonprofits (85 to 95 percent of total revenue) and the least amount of funding from alternative sources (such as events, auctions, etc.) and from donors who are issued a tax receipt (one to five percent). This might explain why Org 3 had such mixed conceptualizations of poverty. While funding originated at different levels of government, and there was evidence that this contributed to complex program administration, the greatest impact might be mission creep. This occurs when an organization shifts its values and mission over time as it obtains funding for programs it might not have otherwise run (Gibson, O'Donnell, & Rideout, 2008; Scott, 2003). One of the unfortunate hallmarks of NPM is the contracting out of services, which results in a highly competitive short-term funding environment (Gibson et al.,

2008) . Org 3 was deeply informed by its values, but the organization's conceptualization of poverty as articulated by participants was mixed and often contradictory. Perhaps these contradictory ideas are born from the administration of programs that focus on individual conceptualizations of poverty, which sit in tension with participants' ideas of how Org 3 conceptualizes poverty. There is evidence in Orgs 2 and 3 that program-based funding, which originates from the provincial and municipal governments respectively, limits the Orgs' capacities to engage with people in the community, and to design and administer the programs as they saw fit. Org 3 receives more of this type of funding as a percentage of total funding than Org 1 or 2, and this might contribute to why participants (4 of 4) expressed mixed conceptualizations of poverty.

NPM impacts funding design and has changed the way nonprofits think and talk about people in the community. Program-based funding seemed to add substantially to administrative work. Org 1, where all participants conceptualized poverty from a structural perspective, had some level of adopting NPM language. We see evidence in government documents (Community Services Directory for London and Middlesex, 2016/2017) that point toward NPM at work at the municipal level. Additionally, at the provincial level, we see similar evidence (Province of Ontario, 2014), with private sector language and a stress on individual autonomy and independence. With government providing the bulk of funding for all three nonprofits, it stands to reason that the language of NPM that they use and promote, will eventually find its way into nonprofits.

The values associated with NPM risk creating a power dynamic where the nonprofit is the provider of goods, and the person in the community is the passive recipient. There was evidence of this in Orgs 2 and 3, although Org 2 did make efforts to collaborate with people in

the community. We saw, though, how difficult that collaboration can be when nonprofits like Org 2 have so little control over program delivery or design. In the case of programs funded 100 percent by the government, the nonprofit has little to no say in program development and implementation. This contracting out of public services presents a challenge for nonprofits to anticipate and build capacity around one-off programs. When funding is provided by non-governmental agencies or through funding that is not program-based, nonprofits seem to have more flexibility, as was the case for Org 1. They had the autonomy to successfully alter a self-improvement program so that it was more in line with their conceptualization of poverty.

#### Inadequacies of the Social Safety Net

My analysis suggests that the status quo is a reactive social system that is largely designed to keep nonprofits out of the business of creating structural change. There was substantial evidence provided by nonprofit staff and volunteers in this study (Orgs 1 and 2) that suggest the social service system is failing the most vulnerable members of society. The majority of participants (nine of fourteen) articulated that poverty can happen to anyone. This is one of the most important findings of this research, and a damning statement about the condition of our public social safety net. Nonprofits are necessary to fill gaps in social services exactly because the state has systematically decentralized and privatized social policy in this country. Participants shared their thoughts regarding the inadequate rates of social assistance and one thing is clear: nonprofits provide services to fill the gap where Canada's public social programs have failed.

In order for nonprofits to successfully fill these gaps, four key challenges must be addressed at the state level. First, a formal definition of poverty must be co-developed and supported by the state, provinces and territories, First Nation, Métis, and Inuit communities and governments, nonprofits, and people in the community. Without a definition, policy actors

around the country are left to determine their own answer to important questions. Additionally, an established definition will make it easier to hold the government to account when the state makes policy decisions related to the issue of poverty (Pasma, 2008). Finally, when the Canadian state is more precise and transparent with its problem definition we can move toward solutions to poverty with a more clear understanding of the “fundamental causes at work” (Pal, 2014, p. 113).

Second, the state must evaluate the impact of the hierarchical relationships of power between it and nonprofits, which are rooted in neoliberalism and NPM. The values, principles and language of NPM were evident to varying degrees among all three nonprofits in this study. The evidence of NPM found in state documents and in program design and implementation impacts the way nonprofits deliver services, and how people in the community experience those services. People in the community ought not be seen or identified as clients and this is important for two reasons. It re-establishes a necessary link between people in the community and the state, and it re-confirms and reinforces the role of the state in the provision of public social services. Third, while only one nonprofit in this study (Org 1) articulated a need and want for greater advocacy capacity, the finding is an important one. If one believes in a structural conception of poverty, then changing the political, social and economic systems that perpetuate poverty are assumed goals. For nonprofits, policy advocacy is one way to try and engage in this change work. Like establishing a formal definition of poverty, advocacy is a key way to hold the state to account. Nonprofits, and the people within them, are closest to people in the community and ought to have a mechanism like advocacy to encourage structural change. Fourth and finally, the state must re-evaluate the way it funds nonprofits, and return to a core-funding model. Two of the three nonprofits received large portions of their funding through program-based, short-term funding, and this seemed to impact the degree to which they could plan for and design programs.

Core-funding better ensures long-term sustainability and planning, and offers latitude in spending, creating opportunities to serve communities in ways that recognize the unique needs of those who live there (Evans et al., 2005).

## **Chapter 6. Conclusion**

### Contribution

Nonprofit organizations are considered important players in public policy (Bryce, 2005; Casey, 2016a, 2016b; Evans & Shields, 2000; Heitzmann, 2010), and yet we know very little about how these organizations, and the staff, volunteers, and recipients within them, understand the problem of poverty. This research contributes to filling this gap. I speculated that the ways organizations conceptualize poverty may impact the decisions they make around programming. This research demonstrates that the way we think about poverty matters, but it seems external forces such as funding models and competitive funding environments, and internal forces such as poverty framing, and an organization's characteristics and culture, also matter; they may influence the likelihood of alignment between a nonprofit's conceptualization of poverty, how it frames poverty, and the programs it offers. This is important for policy makers and non-governmental funders who design program-based funding models in such a way that it encourages competition and discourages input from people closest to the community. Additionally, the findings also point toward a need for a formal definition of poverty at the state level. There was evidence in the research of the impact of different levels of government measuring poverty differently: it added administrative work to the nonprofit (Org 2), but more importantly, the complexity represents a barrier to someone in the community who would no doubt struggle to figure out the eligibility requirements of the two programs in question. This research has also demonstrated that without a definition of poverty, policy actors like nonprofits will conceptualize poverty in complex and often contradictory ways. These conceptualizations inform programming decisions, which impact people in the community.

### Areas for Further Inquiry

While this research contributes significantly to existing literature on nonprofits as policy actors, and connects their role in the public sphere with alignment between conceptualizations of poverty, problem framing and their programs and services, further lines of enquiry and alternative methodological decisions are important moving forward. To make more robust generalizations, future research would benefit from: a) a focus on FLWs and their role in responding to and using their discretion for the benefit of people in the community; b) an examination of the structure and authority within nonprofits, which might further illuminate the pathways to alignment; c) more inclusive case studies, which reflect both secular and faith-based nonprofits, and a greater representation of value-rational organizations; d) the inclusion of more diverse individuals, at varied levels of the organization; e) the exploration of alternative research methods, which could aim for a more independent technique for recruitment to protect participant confidentiality and to ensure that no selection bias is occurring within the organization.

In all cases, across Org 1 and Org 2, all FLWs articulated structural conceptualizations of poverty. This represents an opportunity for future study. Are FLWs within nonprofits more likely to suggest their organization has a structural conceptualization of poverty than others within the same organization? Does the hierarchical distance between people in the community and staff or volunteers offer a clue about whether someone is more or less likely to suggest their organization has a structural or individual conceptualization of poverty?

Hierarchical structure and authority seem to impact alignment of conceptualizations of poverty, framing of poverty, and programs. Org 1, which has the flattest hierarchical structure of all the nonprofits in this study, was most aligned in its structural conceptualization of poverty, its

structural framing of poverty, and its programs and services, which mostly fell into the structural side of the anticipated program framework (Table 2). This provides some evidence that the closer staff are to people in the community, the more likely they are to suggest their organization has a structural conceptualization of poverty. When organizations are structurally flat, and when most staff and volunteers are therefore closer to the community, it may be the case that the organizations as a whole are more likely to espouse structural conceptualizations of poverty (Org 1). Further, organizations that have significant hierarchical distance (Org 2 and 3) and geographical distance (Org 2) between people in the community and staff and volunteers, may have opportunities to create unique spaces where they can shorten the hierarchical and geographical distance to support localized problem definition and meanings (Binder, 2007). Further research ought to explore more deeply what connections, if any, exist between a nonprofit's authority structure (legal- versus value-rational) and its capacity to align conceptualizations of poverty, framing and programs.

There is evidence in the literature to indicate that organizations structured by value-rational authority, which prioritizes participant-led and run programs and high degrees of collaboration, have had success in resisting NPM and values of neoliberalism, and in mobilizing people in the community, with the aim of structural change (Karabanow, 2004; McNeil, 2012; Saul & Curtis, 2013; Woolford & Curran, 2012). A future project would benefit from including more organizations with value-rational authority to illuminate the ways they are and are not able to create spaces of resistance and change.

Further research in this area of study should aim to include more diverse individuals, at varied levels of the organization. While the nonprofit sector does not reflect the diversity of our society (McIsaac et al., 2014), it remains the case that problem definition is in part informed by a

problem image. Problem images are subjective because they are based on our own experience in the world. Racialized people experience the world differently because of systemic issues of racism and racial discrimination, which remain persistent in Canada (Ontario Human Rights Council, n.d.). Given this fact, we can expect conceptualization of poverty to be informed by people's experiences (or lack thereof) with systems of oppression. This seems important whether the organization is legal- or value-rational. If decisions about problem definition are being made in an organization where individuals have never been subject to, or have never considered the impact of, systems of oppression, their problem image may differ significantly.

Further research should also explore research methods other than those used in this study. There is a concern that selection bias may have influenced the participants chosen for this project. In all cases, EXECs selected who I interviewed. To avoid this in future studies, a more independent technique for recruitment ought to be prioritized. This should focus on protecting participant and organizational confidentiality and on ensuring that no selection bias is occurring within the organization.

### Conclusion

This project was guided by two research questions. First, I asked, how do nonprofits focused on poverty alleviation or reduction in southern Ontario conceptualize and frame poverty? Second, how, if at all, does an organization's program choices and conceptualizations and framing of poverty align? I used purposive sampling based on criteria developed from the literature to ensure the cases selected for this research would allow me to speak more broadly about the nonprofit sector in Canada, which has bared witness to the structural changes to the welfare state brought about by the introduction of NPM. My argument is grounded in the work of those who note that in Canada, the last two decades have brought about public sector

restructuring, which has resulted in a larger role for nonprofits in the delivery of public goods (Evans et al., 2005; Evans & Shields, 2000). Further, these changes have resulted in what some argue is a de-politicization of complex social issues, such as poverty (Curtis, 2005; Newman & Clarke, 2009).

Through semi-structured interviews and document analysis, it became clear that conceptualizations of poverty, and the way organizations frame poverty, are as diverse as the nonprofit sector itself. At times, individuals felt confident and certain of how their nonprofit organization conceptualized poverty, articulating conceptualizations in similar ways, and with consistent tone and language (Org 1). In other cases, individuals had more difficulty consistently conceptualizing poverty, hesitating when they spoke, and sometimes expressing both a structural and individual conceptualization of poverty, placing things they previously said in tension with new thoughts and ideas about poverty (Org 2; Org 3).

Ultimately, the findings of this study point toward a reactive, patchy, asymmetrical system of social services, with several associated consequences. First, this likely impacts how someone in the community experiences and has access to programs. As one participant shared (MM 2, Org 2), complex eligibility rules between funders can lead to a breakdown in communication between those who administer programs and those who receive the service. Additionally, we might expect that some people in the community who may be eligible for programs and services miss receiving them because of these complexities. Second, while NPM is present in all nonprofits in this study, the nonprofits that had the most exposure to what Evans and colleagues (Evans et al., 2005) call the “new [neoliberal] modes of control” (p. 73) also had the most misalignment with their conceptualizations of poverty, their framing of poverty, and their programs (Org 2, Org 3). This exposure seems to interact with each nonprofit’s authority

and impact their capacity to resist the values of NPM. While Org 1 demonstrated value-rational authority, Org 2 and 3 demonstrated legal-rational authority. The modes of control identified with NPM impacted some nonprofits' (Orgs 2 and 3) capacity to engage in program design, administration or evaluation processes. While Org 1 used language we associate with NPM, they were least exposed to the aforementioned NPM modes of control; Orgs 2 and 3 were more exposed. This might explain why Org 1 is able to more clearly demonstrate value-rational authority and has strong alignment between conceptualizations of poverty, framing of poverty, and programs. Finally, and importantly, neoliberal values and principles of NPM, which often inform our system of social services, maintain the status quo. This is a reactive system which too often prioritizes individual autonomy and responsibility over the need for creating structural change. This approach necessarily forces nonprofits to also be reactive, or lose essential funding, and results in keeping these organizations out of the important business of creating real, structural change.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Research Ethics Board Approval Certificate



#### RESEARCH ETHICS BOARDS

*Certification of Ethical Acceptability of Research  
Involving Human Participants*

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**APPROVAL PERIOD:** September 19, 2017  
**EXPIRY DATE:** September 18, 2018  
**REB:** G  
**REB NUMBER:** 17-08-017  
**TYPE OF REVIEW:** Delegated  
**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** Levac, Leah (llevac@uoguelph.ca)  
**DEPARTMENT:** Political Science  
**SPONSOR(S):** N/A  
**TITLE OF PROJECT:** Conceptions of poverty and nonprofits in Ontario

The members of the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board have examined the protocol which describes the participation of the human participants in the above-named research project and considers the procedures, as described by the applicant, to conform to the University's ethical standards and the Tri-Council Policy Statement, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition.

The REB requires that researchers:

- Adhere to the protocol as last reviewed and **approved** by the REB.
- Receive approval from the REB for any **modifications** before they can be implemented.
- Report any **change in the source of funding**.
- Report **unexpected events or incidental findings** to the REB as soon as possible with an indication of how these events affect, in the view of the Principal Investigator, the safety of the participants, and the continuation of the protocol.
- Are responsible for **ascertaining and complying with all applicable legal and regulatory requirements** with respect to consent and the protection of privacy of participants in the jurisdiction of the research project.

The Principal Investigator must:

- Ensure that the ethical guidelines and approvals of facilities or institutions involved in the research are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research protocols.
- Submit an **Annual Renewal** to the REB upon completion of the project. If the research is a multi-year project, a status report must be submitted annually prior to the expiry date. Failure to submit an annual status report will lead to your study being suspended and potentially terminated.

The approval for this protocol terminates on the **EXPIRY DATE**, or the term of your appointment or employment at the University of Guelph whichever comes first.

Signature:

Date: September 19, 2017

Stephen P. Lewis  
Chair, Research Ethics Board-General

## Appendix B: Structured Research Questions

1. Tell me about your work with \_\_\_\_\_
2. Tell me what else \_\_\_\_\_ does, especially related to poverty reduction
3. Ok, and are you involved in these things too? Who else is involved?
4. What about program development?
  - Subquestions:
    - How do programs get developed?
    - *If staff*, So, are staff generally involved in decisions about program development
    - How do you decide what programs to develop?
    - Do you do any program evaluation?
    - How do you decide to start or stop a program?
    - Can you identify challenges related to operating these programs?
5. How does the organization understand poverty? Alternative, if interviewee struggles: Can you help me understand why the organization feels poverty persists? *Or ...*Why does the organization think a person ends up living in poverty?
  - Are programs based on a specific definition of poverty that the organization uses?
6. Who do you think is best positioned to address poverty? (prompt: for example, do you think it's government, or individuals or organizations like this?)
7. How about you? How do you think about poverty?