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MAKING EDUCATION WORK:
THE EFFECTS OF WELFARE REFORM ON THE EDUCATIONAL GOALS AND EXPERIENCES OF TANF PARTICIPANTS

by

A. FIONA PEARSON

Under the direction of Wendy Simonds

ABSTRACT

After U.S. welfare was reformed in 1996, many states eliminated their educational programs and replaced them with "work-first" options. This study uses in-depth interviews and content analysis of current and proposed welfare legislation to examine how these policy changes have shaped the experiences of postsecondary students participating in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program and to determine whether or not proposed policy changes in TANF reauthorization legislation meet the needs of students. To fulfill the first objective of this study, I conducted interviews with 20 TANF participants who were using enrollment in a postsecondary institution as a means of satisfying their TANF work requirements and 10 TANF case managers who were familiar with the program's policies and procedures. The interviews were conducted in Georgia, one of 13 states that until 2003 explicitly allowed participants to use postsecondary education as a means of meeting work activity requirements. To fulfill the second objective of this study, I analyzed the content of the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) and current

legislative proposals reauthorizing the act. I find that a variety of internal and external forces -- including one's beliefs regarding education and parenting, one's familial obligations and support systems, and one's receipt of academic and financial aid -- collectively shape students' experiences and likelihood of educational success in various ways. I also determine that the TANF program itself, in particular the emphasis on increasing participation rates and restrictive definitions of acceptable work activities, prevent students from succeeding. These findings are relevant for researchers and policymakers intent on more fully understanding the effects of contemporary U.S. welfare reform and reveal the limitations of current welfare reauthorization acts that seek to further limit educational opportunities of economically-poor women.

INDEX WORDS: Welfare, Poverty, Education, Inequality, Gender, Race, Social Policy, Culture, Self-concept, Discourse

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A. FIONA PEARSON

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Georgia State University

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THE EFFECTS OF WELFARE REFORM ON THE EDUCATIONAL GOALS AND EXPERIENCES OF TANF PARTICIPANTS

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INTRODUCTION

Two and a half months prior to the 1996 United States' presidential election, William Jefferson Clinton signed Congress's Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). Welfare as we knew it had ended.[1] The federal government no longer would be directly responsible for fiscally and administratively overseeing state and local welfare agencies. Instead, block grants would be divided among the states to be spent as localities deemed fit in accordance with generally defined federal guidelines. These federal guidelines, however, would fundamentally alter both the look and feel of future state-run welfare programs. Replacing the 61-year-old federal assistance program Aid for Dependent Children and Families (AFDC),[2] the newly established Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program promoted marriage and "family values"; emphasized work over education; and, as the word "temporary" implies, imposed strict time limits. These large-scale changes to welfare law would drastically alter the daily routines of thousands of individuals then receiving welfare benefits.

Four years after the implementation of PRWORA, I met Tammy, who every Tuesday afternoon sat in the back row of my "Introduction to Sociology" class in the fall of 2000. She always looked tired and rarely participated in discussions, but she listened attentively and turned in assignments regularly. I honestly didn't take much notice of her

---

[1] In this paper, the term "welfare" refers to public assistance programs designed to assist parents and children, and more specifically refers to the now defunct Aid For Dependent Children (AFDC) and its replacement program Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF).

[2] Before 1962, AFDC was known as Aid to Dependent Children (ADC), one of three public assistance programs that with social insurance programs were established by the Social Security Act, passed by Congress in 1935 (Abramovitz 2000).

presence until she spoke one day, passionately and vehemently, about welfare stereotypes. As we studied a section examining social stratification, we began to discuss the myths and realities of welfare programs in the United States. Tammy raised her hand. She began to talk about the stigmatization and the shame of applying for welfare and her sheer frustration with raising children in a country where mothers are really not respected, unless, of course, they are wealthy enough and thin enough and willing to take the blame for all their kids' problems. At the end of class, she disappeared. That was the last time I saw her. She emailed me once to let me know that she was a single mother and was having difficulties in getting a babysitter — she lived an hour away from campus and her daughter was autistic, so finding a new babysitter was going to take some time. Also, she had to miss some classes due to work, which she needed to prioritize because she needed to pay bills. She was trying to balance school and work and motherhood, but she knew something was going to have to give. Clearly it ended up being school.

I never saw Tammy again, but I thought about her any time I read about or discussed issues pertaining to welfare. Could I have done something to have helped her pass my class? Is she still in school? What about her child — did she ever find a babysitter for her daughter? As a teacher, I know that there were and will always be obstacles facing my students beyond my influence, but as I continued to teach about issues of social inequality, I watched many more students like Tammy fall by the wayside. The teacher and feminist in me grew increasingly concerned with understanding how institutional systems in place are facilitating or obstructing the

potential success of thousands of single parents, the majority of whom are mothers, struggling to move their families out of poverty.

As legislators have prepared to reauthorize TANF, federal officials, including current President George W. Bush, have recommended increasing recipients' required work hours and decreasing their educational opportunities.[3] Such proposed changes have resulted in mounting federal pressures on states to limit existing educational and training programs as has clearly been the case in the state of Georgia. In 2002, the Center of Law and Social Policy (CLASP) and the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) listed Georgia as being one of only 12 states in the nation that has allowed welfare recipients to use participation in postsecondary education as a primary means of satisfying state and federal work requirements. However, by 2004, when this study was conducted, I learned that the practice of allowing TANF participants to use postsecondary education as a means of satisfying state and federal work requirements had changed. Postsecondary education could count only as a *secondary* activity after participants had met their primary work activity requirements, which was for most individuals the completion of 20 or more hours a week of work. Recently proposed educational restrictions would further limit the number of months TANF recipients could participate in vocational education

[3] Currently TANF is reauthorized until March 30, 2006. In February of 2003 the House passed H.R. 4, which was very similar to President George W. Bush's reauthorization proposal presented in 2002, when TANF was initially scheduled for reauthorization. Included within H.R. 4 were several changes including the following: the number of work hours required increased from 30 to 40, the number of activities that may be used to fulfill work requirements was reduced, the amount of education that can count toward the work requirement was reduced, the caseload reduction credit was phased out, and participation rates were increased. Since that time, no other bills have been passed by either branch of Congress. The most recent bills to receive considerable attention are the Senate's bill S.667 and the House of Representative's bill H.R.240. Both bills were proposed in the 109th Congress and neither made it past the level of Committee approval. See Table 10 in Appendix C for a summary description of the contents of each bill (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities 2005, Haskins and Offner 2003, Reauthorization Roundup 2003).

from 12 consecutive months to four months every two years and would reduce the number of hours individuals could participate in part-time education to a maximum of 16 hours, requiring the remaining 24 or more hours to be spent working (Haskins and Offner 2003).

Such proposed changes serve as a disincentive for individuals interested in pursuing postsecondary education because the limitation on educational participation in tandem with general time limits for cash assistance — which is 48 months in the state of Georgia — leaves recipients with very few degree options. Furthermore, as the emphasis on work mounts, the likelihood of attaining an education becomes less feasible. Program participants, like all of us, have a finite number of hours in a day to devote to work, family, and education; and when those participants are dealing with young children or family members with special needs and/or medical issues, as was Tammy with her autistic daughter, it becomes increasingly clear that attaining an education is not a reasonable goal.

Reading about such issues has led me to ask some of the following questions: How are the experiences of economically poor parents receiving welfare benefits while going to college affected by family members, friends, TANF case managers, program supervisors, and legislators? How do federal laws which directly influence local government and departmental policies shape the lived realities of welfare participants? How is it that despite increasing unemployment and poverty rates, both of which are notoriously low estimates,[4] leading legislators and the general public are so willing to

[4] See Brady (2003) for a summary analysis of the weaknesses of official U.S. measures of poverty.

support proposals placing more intensive restrictions on our country's poorest citizens and, in particular, on their educational opportunities? Addressing these questions is one goal of this study. Perhaps more importantly, this study aims to provide a voice for those individuals who will be most affected by decisions made by legislators in the years to come, individuals like Tammy, who are participating in public welfare programs while simultaneously working to improve their life chances and those of their children by going to school.

To address these goals, I begin in the first chapter to historically situate the issues of welfare and welfare reform, examining connections between welfare and poverty, particularly as both have become distinctly gendered and racialized as a result of a variety of economic, political, and social processes. In the second chapter I present my research questions and methodology, briefly explaining my uses of feminist, action-oriented, and grounded theories in this study of welfare experiences and welfare policy. The third chapter presents an in-depth analysis of the dynamics resulting in the production of stigmatized welfare stereotypes and an exploration of the ways welfare participants negotiate these stereotypes. In the fourth chapter, I examine the many micro- and macro-level forces shaping individuals' educational and occupational trajectories, paying particular attention to the ways these trajectories result in or thwart long-term economic stability. In the fifth chapter, I more specifically examine the effects of current welfare policies with an emphasis on how those policies facilitate or hinder economically poor individuals' educational opportunities. In the sixth and concluding chapter, I present a brief summary analysis of two state-run educational programs that have been identified as

successful and present general recommendations for policymakers and welfare administrators based on findings gleaned from this study.

In order to make any sense of the experiences of individuals attempting to navigate our public assistance systems, we need to first understand the personal and social issues shaping their lived realities. It would be dishonest of me, however, to forgo acknowledging that which is obvious but so often overlooked in much literature examining the lives of welfare participants. The group of individuals currently participating in this nation's welfare system is far from monolithic. The needs, obligations, skills, and aspirations of each welfare participant I interviewed were as varied as their faces. I do not hesitate to acknowledge that certain similarities exist, and in my analysis of the data, replications and patterns emerged, but my overall impression throughout the researching process was an awareness of the infinite differences defining the lives of the individuals with whom I spoke. No single situation was like that of another. I feel it important to acknowledge this fact explicitly because, taken in its entirety, the following analysis may belie the complex confluence of forces shaping various participants' lives. In conducting this analysis, I do not wish to deny participants their individuality and agency; however, I do want to draw attention to those institutional and social factors that may be influencing their day-to-day and long-term strategizing, factors that may fundamentally affect their opportunities for success.

CHAPTER 1

LESSONS LOST: WELFARE HISTORY AND REFORM

To present an adequate history of welfare, one must simultaneously present an analysis of the history of poverty. The two histories are intimately related. This simple fact, however, is conspicuously absent from the air-brushed legislative pictures of welfare. Nowhere in the first section of a 156 page summary report of PRWORA, which was prepared for the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Ways and Means, can readers find the words "poor" or "poverty." In lieu of explanations tying the emergence of welfare programs to larger structural inequalities in the economy and educational systems, readers reviewing the section titled, "Historical Background and Need for Reform," instead find multiple references to moral issues and perceived individual-level problems such as "illegitimacy" and "out-of-wedlock births." Women, men, and children requiring assistance are not described as "poor" but as "needy," a term within this culture weighted with negative connotations. Needy children. Needy women. Needy men. To be "needy" too often subtly connotes a fault within the individual, indicating an absence in that person's psyche rather than an absence in the provisions of larger social institutions. Such is the language of welfare reform as attention to social inequality is deflected, and the general public is fed images of immoral breeders and of parasitic "needers."

To make sense of the ways welfare has evolved from New Deal policies targeting respectable white widows to welfare reform, which purports to be militaristically

"*attacking* the dependency" (emphasis mine, U.S. House of Representatives 1996:5) of generations of welfare queens, we must simultaneously examine the ways poverty itself results from a legacy of distinctly racist and gendered political, economic, and social processes. Such an analysis of U.S. social institutions provides the grounding for exploring the complexities of ideologically wrought renderings of the meanings and purposes of welfare and provides some insight regarding the contradictions permeating much of the public debate on the role of education and welfare.

HOW WHITE WIDOWS BECAME "WELFARE QUEENS": A HISTORY OF WELFARE'S WOMEN

When the market fails, public assistance programs are introduced to buffer the pain; so was the case with President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal policies implemented in the latter years of the Depression. The Social Security Act of 1935 transformed social welfare, shifting responsibility for the nation's poor from local and state governments, which varied greatly in their offerings and effectiveness, to the federal government (Abramovitz 2000).

From the beginning, public assistance programs such as Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) were distinguished from social insurance programs providing pensions to former employees, later popularly referred to as Social Security, and unemployment insurance. Debates in Congress regarding the Social Security Act focused on old-age and unemployment insurance—two programs that would affect large numbers of people including many African Americans, which was a prime concern of many Southern

legislators—and little attention was accorded to ADC and the other two public assistance programs, Old Age Assistance (OAA) and Aid to the Blind (AB) (Neubeck and Casenave 2001). But even among the public assistance programs, ADC received proportionately less federal support, both monetarily and administratively, than both OAA and AB programs; and by 1940, "two-thirds of all eligible children remained uncovered—despite the fact that the ADC caseload had doubled since 1936" (Abramovitz 2000:65).

ADC was a product of the Mother's Pension Movement, itself borne out of the Progressive Era politics of the late 19th and early 20th century. Mother's Pension laws, which allocated funds to female-headed households so that mothers could stay home and care for their children, had been passed in 46 of the then 48 states by 1932 (Abramovitz 2000). However, as researchers of Mother's Pensions have pointed out, the recipients of such benefits were overwhelmingly white; in 1931 only 3% of recipients were black and 1% were women of color, while the remaining 96% were white (Neubeck and Casenave 2001). Such explicit racism was translated into subsequent early ADC programs and policies which resulted in its being publicly perceived as a "white widow's program." In fact, all of Roosevelt's New Deal programs ultimately served to maintain white hegemonic control as is evidenced in the debates surrounding the passing of the Social Security Act. Southern legislators, whose constituents feared that offering government benefits might lure away their underpaid, primarily black male and female laborers, demanded the removal of two key clauses in the Social Security Act that 1) limited states' rights and 2) obligated states to provide "reasonable subsistence compatible with decency and health" (cited in Quadango 1994:21). As a result, ADC benefits, which

were offered only to children and not mothers, were denied to children of many black mothers who were deemed by ADC administrators capable of working, usually in domestic positions or as seasonal farm labor, for rates that were argued to be "reasonable" by local authorities.

ADC guidelines and practices had been shaped not only by racist but paternalistic dominant ideologies as well. ADC recipients were the only group of social insurance and public assistance beneficiaries to endure so-called "morals tests" manifest in the surveillance tactics employed by many local agencies to ensure that women were providing "suitable" homes and were modeling an "acceptable" lifestyle. Importantly in 1939, widows receiving benefits were moved from ADC to social security, leaving ADC to serve primarily the children of women who were never-married, divorced or separated, a group already stigmatized in a society equating a mother's morality with her marital status (Abramovitz 2000).

After World War II, welfare rolls slowly expanded as the program itself provided more resources for the poor — for example, women, and not just their children, were provided with cash assistance beginning in 1950. Additionally, the number of black women receiving welfare steadily increased so that by 1961, black women comprised 48 percent of the welfare rolls (Abramovitz 2000). Such increases of all recipients, however, were primarily evidenced in the North and were focused in urban centers. During the 1960's the number of individuals receiving welfare nearly tripled in the Northeast and West; whereas they rose only 54 percent in the South (Piven and Cloward 1993). Such increases are in part explained by well-documented mass migrations of

Southern and rural residents to primarily northern urban centers in search of jobs during and after World War II (Wilson 1996). Between 1940 and the late 1960's, twenty million individuals relocated to primarily urban centers "marking it as one of the greatest mass dislocations in United States history" (Piven and Cloward 1993:214). Not all of those who migrated were greeted with the opportunities supposedly available in northern city centers, and many individuals, particularly African Americans attempting to escape from Southern oppression and discrimination, faced equally prohibitive discrimination in the employment, housing, and educational institutions of the North.

Responding to problems incurred by male unemployment and its effects on female-headed households, legislators amended the Social Security Act in 1962 to provide limited benefits for two-parent households, a move that resulted in the program being renamed Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC).[5] Two years later, in an attempt to deal with growing public awareness of existing poverty and social inequality, prompted in part by civil rights movements of the 1950's and 1960's, President Lyndon B. Johnson launched his "war on poverty" in 1964. During this time as the federal government aggressively promoted civil rights legislation and implemented public assistance programs, the number of families on the welfare rolls increased from 803, 000 in 1960 to just under 3 million by 1972 (Abramovitz 2000).

As welfare rolls swelled, criticism of AFDC programs increased as did the general public's concern that welfare, as then implemented, encouraged dependency and not independence. So began a new era in public and legislative welfare discourse that

emphasized the role of work and education as a means of moving families off of public assistance. In 1967, the Work Incentive Program (WIN) was implemented by legislators led by Wilbur Mills, chair of the House of Representatives' Ways and Means Committee. This program required that women with children over the age of six participate in work or job-training programs in order to receive AFDC benefits. In 1971, WIN was replaced with WIN II which strengthened non-compliance sanctions and increased work or training requirements. WIN II remained in place until 1988, when the Family Support Act resulted in the creation of Job Opportunity and Basic Security Program (JOBS). To receive federal funds, states were expected to enroll 15% of welfare recipients in the JOBS program, which required recipients to work, search for a job, or enroll in an educational program (Abramovitz 2000). In the late 1980's and early 1990's, however, reports began to surface that many state training programs associated with WIN and JOBS were not significantly helping welfare recipients to leave welfare rolls nor were many such programs resulting in increased salaries for those recipients involved (Lichter and Eggebeen 1994; Long and Wissoker 1994; McGroder, Zaslow, Moore and Brooks 2002). In response to these and other documented failures of the welfare system, failures that were exacerbated by the prevailing public myth that welfare recipients were undeserving and abusing a system of social support, a Republican-dominated congress with the support of centrist Democrats re-hauled welfare via the passing of PRWORA in 1996. At that time, AFDC was replaced with Temporary Assistance to Needy Families

[5] Such benefits for two-parent households were offered for only a limited amount of time, but the name persisted until 1996.

(TANF), which eliminated entitlements, created life-long time limits, emphasized job placement, and imposed new limitations on education and training opportunities.

Before the implementation of TANF, parents receiving benefits were able to receive cash assistance while remaining enrolled in job training programs or postsecondary institutions and were not required to work in exchange for benefits. Although TANF rules do not prohibit the use of education to fulfill program hourly requirements, new and proposed rules greatly limit the number of people who can participate in education-focused programs and the type of education that can be pursued. Unsurprisingly, this change in focus has resulted in dramatically reduced overall spending for education and training. In 2000, fewer than 1 percent of all TANF funds was spent on education and training programs, a figure that has been growing steadily smaller since the implementation of PRWORA in 1996 (Center for Law and Social Policy 2001). The predictable effect of such spending cuts has resulted in fewer welfare recipients attending school. The City University of New York reported that in 1995, over 27,000 welfare recipients were taking classes or were enrolled in associated or baccalaureate programs, whereas in 2000, the number of welfare recipients enrolled in similar programs decreased 81.5 percent to only 5,000 (National Urban League Institute for Opportunity and Equality 2002). The number of TANF recipients pursuing an education is expected to decrease further due to legislative changes recently proposed by President George W. Bush and passed by Congress, increasing work requirements and decreasing the proportion of recipients eligible to pursue an education.

The implementation of such programs as WIN, WIN II, JOBS, and replacement of AFDC with TANF resulted from increasing perceptions that women on welfare were undeserving of cash assistance and that they should be expected to work in the formal economy. Furthermore, this emerging emphasis on "workfare" reveals how the labor of "mothering" — in particular the labor of poor individuals' "mothering" — is and has not been popularly perceived as legitimate work (Crittenden 2001). The decisions shaping the form and future of these programs have resulted from a long history of discriminatory practices and assumptions based on recipients' gender, race, and class background and their supposed "deservingness." In the following section, I look more specifically at the ways race and class intersect with an historically-contextualized understanding of poverty, and how such intersections have played out in public perceptions of welfare.

THE PRODUCTION OF SEGREGATION, POVERTY & "WELFARE QUEENS"

In his analysis of contemporary poverty in the United States, *The Undeserving Poor*, Michael Katz (1989) amply demonstrates how social processes and organizations have worked to produce individualized explanations of poverty that ultimately serve in rationalizing the status quo. By demonizing the able-bodied poor, maligning them as "undeserving," and by ignoring the intricate interplays of power within governing social organizations and institutions, Katz argues, we are obscuring the truth of the matter: *poverty is not an accident*. Poverty is created, and, as many proponents and detractors of capitalism have nonetheless agreed, poverty in many ways serves a necessary function in an economic system fueled by the need to maximize profit.

Not only have the causes of poverty often been narrowly defined in many public debates, but segments of the poor themselves have been publicly represented in ways that defy their actual reality. Kenneth Neubeck and Noel Casenave (2001) comprehensively trace the ways representations of welfare and poverty have become gendered and racialized in contemporary debates regarding the fate of the poor. These representations have ultimately shifted focus from the gendered and racialized social and political processes producing poverty to the individuals most negatively affected by such processes, women and people of color. Noting the widespread use of terms and phrases in much political discourse on poverty such as "welfare queen," "welfare chisler," "generations of welfare dependency," and "children having children," Neubeck and Casenave argue that such verbal expressions "routinely conjured up images of an inner-city, largely African-American welfare population, notable for its allegedly deficient group values and political behaviors" (p. 4). Such images have persisted despite the reality that until 1996 more white than black individuals received welfare benefits (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1998) and that in 1993 only 5.1 percent of welfare recipients were under the age of 19 (U.S. Census Bureau 1995).

The social processes resulting in the racialization of political discourse surrounding welfare are arguably some of the same social processes that have resulted in residential segregation and the production of poverty, all of which, as will be demonstrated below are clearly interrelated. The terms "urban," "underclass," and "welfare" emerged as racialized concepts at about the same time in U.S. history, and the racialization of all three concepts can be traced in the "growth machine" dynamics that

have come to define many of our contemporary urban centers (Logan and Molotch 1989). William Julius Wilson (1987, 1996) has often been cited for his analyses regarding the social creation of predominantly black, predominantly poor, urban ghettos. The flight of companies and industries and of white and black middle-class residents to the less expensive suburbs, argues Wilson, prompted the decline of inner-city neighborhoods. Losing both jobs and individuals who might be willing to invest in inner-city neighborhoods, the remaining poor were left to eke out a living via participation in the local underground economy or welfare programs. Wilson deftly demonstrates how the loss of economic resources and outside investments came to produce economically and, eventually, racially isolated pockets of poverty.

In their groundbreaking analyses of poverty and residential segregation, Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton (1987, 1989, 1993) more explicitly and comprehensively than Wilson examine how the fundamentally racist underpinnings of many governmental policies, rentiers pushes for profit, and regional cultures and histories simultaneously served to produce and *continue to maintain* racialized realities and representations of poverty in the U.S. Like Wilson, Massey and Denton acknowledge the ways federal loan officers, developers, and real estate agencies employed racist practices as a means of maintaining not only class but racial distinctions between neighborhoods and, for developers and real estate agents, such practices were a means of ensuring ready profits. Over time, “blockbusting,” a tactic used by real estate agents to devalue home prices and prompt “white flight,” and “redlining,” the denial of home loans to applicants living in areas designated as “risky” because of economic and racial factors, contributed to the

steady segregation of neighborhoods. First-time, white homeowners used newly constructed highway systems to leave the cities, while many black residents, systematically denied resources and access, remained mired in quickly deteriorating city centers. Unlike Wilson, however, Massey and Denton argue that the disproportionate levels of concentrated poverty in many predominantly black urban neighborhoods are caused and exacerbated not only by the loss of inner-city jobs to outlying suburbs that are difficult for inner-city residents to access but also by the persistent racial segregation of U.S. neighborhoods and the persistent racist practices of employers, rentiers, and lenders who effectively maintain this segregation. Spatial position and mobility are linked to socioeconomic well-being—that is, where one lives or is able to move directly influences one's access (or lack of access) to educational, economic, civic, and social resources. Therefore, understanding how race, residential segregation, and socioeconomic status interact is necessary if we are to effectively confront problems of persistent poverty.

Massey and Denton clearly demonstrate how race, urban centers, and concentrated poverty became entangled as a result of a conflux of social and institutional practices and processes. However, these practices and processes are for the most part invisible to the general public, as is revealed in Martin Gilens' (1999) analyses of representations of poverty in latter 20th century popular media. Tracking nearly 50 years worth of pictures representing poverty in three popular magazines—*Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News and World Report*—Gilens finds that although the percentage of blacks who were poor between 1960 and 1992 was relatively steady, "from 1967 through 1992, blacks averaged 57 percent of the poor people pictured in these three magazines—about

twice the true proportion of blacks among the nation's poor" (p. 114). Even though the number of stories focusing on issues related to poverty was relatively low in the early 1960's, Gilens notes several trends: those stories focusing on Kennedy's and later Johnson's proposed anti-poverty programs tended to feature white women and children whereas stories focusing on welfare abuses and fraud most often featured pictures of black women and children. Gilens concludes, "the pattern of associating negative poverty coverage with pictures of blacks persists over the years and is too widespread and consistent to be explained as the product of any particular anti-poverty program or subgroup of the poor" (p. 118).

Gilens attributes such inaccurate coverage to the covert racism guiding many journalists' and editors' individual decisions, an insidious racism that serves to maintain white hegemonic control. By increasingly focusing poverty coverage on black urban residents, the terms "urban" and "underclass" became synonyms for "poor blacks," who were viewed as individuals responsible for their own plight. In his analysis of popular magazines, Gilens finds that between 1988 and 1992 *every* picture in articles covering the "underclass" featured African Americans. Such a finding augments Michael Katz's (1989) assertion that within the realm of politics, ideologies of the "undeserving poor" are shaped by a language of "family, race, and culture rather than inequality, power, and exploitation" (p. 8). Katz highlights that it is simply much easier to point to an individual — particularly those individuals with the least amount of economic, social and cultural capital — and assign blame than it is to identify systemic deficiencies and problems.

Nowhere is this more clear than in current debates regarding welfare. The term "welfare," which as described above had already become gendered and racialized with the implementation and reorganization of federal assistance programs, steadily became associated with poor, black, urban women and children as levels of concentrated poverty increased. In the late 1970's during his presidential campaign speeches, Ronald Reagan created the term "welfare queen" to describe the mythical, usually black, usually urban, Cadillac-driving, welfare-abusing women who were to become the focus of welfare debates in the 1980's and early 1990's. Although Reagan's welfare queen — who purportedly defrauded the government of $150,000 — never fully materialized,[6] her myth has served to perpetuate fundamentally misogynist and racist ideologies that some citizens are simply undeserving of receiving public assistance. In *Killing the Black Body*, Dorothy Roberts (1997) aptly summarizes how the systematic castigation and persecution of black women in U.S. society has shaped public perceptions and promotes stereotypes: "Black mothers are portrayed less as inept or reckless reproducers in need of moral supervision, and more as calculating parasites deserving of harsh discipline" (p.18). For Roberts, Reagan's "welfare queen" epitomizes the stereotype of the lazy, manipulative, black mother in need of social control.

The effects of such myth-making are dire. In a study of individuals' perceptions of welfare mothers, Gilens (1999) found that when welfare mothers are perceived to be black, respondents are nearly twice as likely to feel negatively about spending on welfare

[6] Douglas and Michaels (2004) cite Reagan as being the "politician most responsible for the gendering of welfare in the popular imagination" (p. 185). In their review of televised media sources, they found that major network reporters found only two such "queens," one in 1978 and one in 1983, whose stories were

than if the mothers are white (p. 99). Furthermore, respondents were more likely to agree that "Most people on welfare could get by without it," "People are poor because they don't try hard enough," and "Most people who don't succeed in life are lazy," when such statements are directed at black welfare mothers (p.100). Gilen's findings reveal the cumulative effects of decades of racist patriarchal oppression that have resulted in highly racialized and gendered conceptualization of welfare that is intensified by negative stereotypes and individualized notions of poverty, particularly amongst those experiencing poverty firsthand.

The emphasis on marriage and employment in current welfare policies and proposals is a direct result of such beliefs and stereotypes that ultimately serve to maintain white, patriarchal hegemonic control. Not once in TANF's purpose statement is the systemic problem of poverty ever addressed. Instead legislators chose to focus attention on an individual's culture and life choices.[7] In the following section, I review several studies presenting the lived realities of welfare mothers that diverge dramatically from those renderings presented in many media accounts and on legislative floors. Only by contrasting realities and myths can we then begin to understand the manifest and latent effects of current policies.

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repeated and often exaggerated on subsequent news programs and therefore served to feed and perpetuate myths regarding levels of welfare fraud.

[7] In 2003, the federal government's four stated purposes of TANF were to 1) provide assistance to needy families so that children can be cared for in their homes or in the homes of relatives, 2) end the dependency of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage, 3) prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies, and 4) encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families (U.S. Congress 1996).

DISJUNCTIONS BETWEEN LIVED REALITY AND PUBLIC DEBATE

Present and past policies under TANF are steering welfare recipients away from educational and training programs and toward work. Underlying such changes rests the assumption that in the past welfare recipients chose to receive benefits in lieu of working. As shown above, such an assumption is ahistorical and attributes the condition of being poor to individual failings and a "culture of poverty" that essentially pathologizes and blames the poor for their impoverished predicaments. Issues of discrimination, residential segregation, and concentrated poverty, are in effect ignored. According to such arguments, welfare mothers choose not to work because working is not perceived as normative in their community. However, as will be demonstrated below, the reality of women receiving welfare is for the most part quite different.

Upon interviewing 379 single women living in four different cities across the U.S., Edin and Lein (1997) found that contrary to popular belief, the majority of women receiving welfare benefits pre-TANF were already working—albeit such work was often not reported out of fear that they would lose their benefits—because their monthly welfare benefits were not enough to cover basic expenses. Furthermore, those women who were not receiving any welfare cash assistance were not significantly better off economically than those who were receiving such benefits. By the time costs for transportation, childcare, and work clothes were considered, women who worked full-time without receiving cash assistance spent only $20 more per month on non-essential items than those women receiving cash assistance (p. 222). Edin and Lein argue that the meager economic benefits were not necessarily outweighed by the stresses incurred by

working low-wage jobs with little flexibility and few opportunities for advancement. More often, Edin and Lein argue, as a result of these added stresses, individuals working low-wage jobs were more likely to encounter health-related hardships than those who were receiving welfare, partially an effect of lost Medicaid coverage when jobs without health insurance were attained.

Because many welfare recipients who leave the welfare rolls are leaving for low-wage jobs that are often unstable and fail to lift them out of real poverty, it is of little surprise that many former recipients eventually return. Within their comprehensive review of lived welfare experiences, Bane and Ellwood (1994) identify three types of welfare recipients: 1) those who are on welfare once and never return to the rolls (leavers), 2) those who have persistently been on welfare (stayers), and 3) those who return to the welfare rolls intermittently (cyclers). Harris (1996) found that the latter group constitutes the largest percentage of welfare recipients, with over 42 percent of individuals returning to the welfare rolls within two years of leaving. Recent surveys of TANF recipients have produced somewhat lower return percentages. Loprest (2002) determined that of those individuals who left the welfare rolls between 1997 and 1999, 22 percent returned to the rolls by 1999. African Americans were the most likely racial demographic group to return (34 percent), Hispanics were the second most likely to return (24 percent) and Whites were the least likely to return (13 percent). The lower total percentage of cyclers can be attributed to a variety of factors including higher employment levels due to the strong late 1990's economy and the increasingly complex surveillance and application process for potential welfare recipients, processes that

ultimately served to intimidate and dissuade otherwise qualified individuals from applying for assistance. Differences among racial and ethnic groups can in part be explained by various structural dynamics described in the previous section that have likewise produced concentrated poverty. Racial and ethnic minorities were often the casualty of socio-spatial processes — processes that were shaped by not only consumers, renters, and rentiers but by federal laws and lending institutions — that resulted in residential segregation along class and race lines. Such segregation was both caused and is exacerbated by persistent racial and ethnic discrimination in employment and housing, which has made it difficult for those individuals receiving public assistance who are and have been most negatively affected by residential segregation to remain off the rolls permanently.

Harris forcefully argues that work is not the solution but rather the problem for many women juggling family and one or more jobs, while earning insufficient wages. Like Edin and Lein, Harris determines that pre-welfare reform the percentage of women receiving AFDC who were also working was in fact very high, and that policymakers' persistent emphasis on the development of a work ethic that is popularly perceived to be lacking among welfare recipients is fundamentally misplaced. Instead, issues such as providing a living wage and opportunities for improved work achievement, and hence, improved earnings, should be explored.

Clearly, as the research documented above illustrates, the vast majority of welfare recipients are and always have been working. At issue is not work itself, but the *type* of work that is locally available and the insufficient compensation such work affords, yet

public debate and subsequent policy has instead focused on motivating recipients to do what most have been doing all along. The reasons for such a disjuncture between lived reality and public debate and policy are varied and complex, but are undeniably rooted in ideologies of the "undeserving poor" augmented by racialized images of welfare mothers.

To understand in part how individuals might come to be blamed for their own plight, below I review the complex roles that educational institutions serve in U.S. society. Such an examination provides a means of understanding why despite the general public's adherence to a dominant ideology that preaches the values of receiving an education, the same public might deny such an opportunity to those individuals deemed "undeserving."

EDUCATION: THE GREAT EQUALIZER?

The correlation between education and income has been well documented both in theoretical and statistical analyses. According to figures released by the U.S. Census Bureau, in the year 2000, a woman without a high school education earned approximately $9,996; whereas a woman with a high school degree earned on average $15,119. If she has an associate's degree, she may earn on average $23,269, and with a bachelor's degree, earnings increase to an average of $30,487 (U.S. Census Bureau 2004). Not only may attaining degrees affect income levels, but simply enrolling in postsecondary classes has been shown to increase an individual's earning potential. Kane and Rouse (1999) in their summary analysis of research examining the relationship between years of education and income found that for every year's worth of college credit attained by

individuals, income increased by 5-8 percent, whether or not the individual actually attained a degree. Individuals completing an associate's degree could expect to see their annual incomes increase by 15-27 percent. Although in general, the annual income increases of women attending college are lower than those of men, those women earning two-year nursing degrees were found to experience annual earnings increases equal or more than those experienced by men earning a two-year degree.

Attaining a college education not only increases the likelihood of improving one's economic prospects, it simultaneously increases the likelihood that one's children will attend college. Ellwood and Kane (2000) found that the children of college educated parents are on average 75 percent more likely than those of non-college educated parents to attend some kind of postsecondary institution. When Ellwood and Kane examined income differentials, they found that the same patterns existed for all income brackets, although it is clear that within the top income bracket, more parents are likely to be educated and therefore a majority of the children within that bracket were likely to attend college. Not only do parents' experiences matter, but research has also determined that parents' attitudes towards education will significantly influence their children's likelihood of finishing high school and attending college (Crosnoe, Mistry and Elder 2002). These findings clearly demonstrate the significance of parents' educational experiences and attitudes on children's academic and later economic success; however, such findings must be tempered with the knowledge that experiences and attitudes are not created in social isolation.

Educational systems have long been recognized by social and educational theorists as facilitating only very limited levels of upward class mobility while fundamentally serving as a mechanism that reproduces and perpetuates existing social inequalities (see Blau and Duncan 1967, Bourdieu 1977, Bowles and Gintis 1976). As Bourdieu (1977) famously determined, the acquisition of educational credentials for individuals coming from a lower-income background is more important in terms of potential economic returns than for an individual from a higher income background. That is, those children from higher-income brackets who choose not to attend higher-level postsecondary schooling have, by virtue of their birth to wealthy parents, social and economic capital which provides them with resources not as readily available to individuals in lower income brackets. Such resources enhance the likelihood of economic success for children of the wealthy whether or not they choose to attend higher-level educational degrees. The great irony here, of course, is that those individuals with the greatest access to higher education have the least need of it for advancement.

So what about those students with the *most* need? Unfortunately, students with the most needs are cheated doubly. For one, Bourdieu also argues that schools serve as sites where cultural capital — which can be generally understood as consisting of knowledge of the intellectually dominant class's linguistic, artistic, and etiquette preferences — is a valued commodity that if possessed can serve as a means of attaining success within educational institutions. Students who are familiar with the dominant culture's preferred linguistic modes, artistic expressions, and social etiquette are more likely to succeed in schools that highly value such cultural capital; and given their

propensity to succeed in academia, they are more likely to succeed in the workplace as well. Where are students most likely to obtain such cultural capital? In the home. Which group of students is most likely to have access to such knowledge in the home? Those with the least need of such knowledge.

Secondly, one's educational experiences are not only very much influenced by the economic, social and cultural capital bestowed upon her by her parents at home, but also by the school she attends, which is very much affected by the *location* of her home. As any history of poverty in the U.S. highlights, racial and class segregation has by default produced what Jonathan Kozol (1991) came to term "savage inequalities" in this nation's schooling system. Because most public schools in the United States continue to rely primarily on local property taxes for their funding, the socio-economic resources of a neighborhood are most often directly correlated with the quality of its schools. Across the nation, the property values of white residents are consistently regarded more highly than the property values of black or brown residents, even when class is considered (Hoerlyck 2003). Such discrepancies reveal how racialized social institutions and processes not only facilitate the production of residential segregation, they have also produced and continue to produce racially and economically segregated schools (Orfield 1996). It is no sheer social accident that in this country many poor individuals and a disproportionate number of people of color have lower educational attainment levels than their wealthy and disproportionately white counterparts across town and that the educational and income trajectories of children are similar to those of their parents. Such analyses highlight the various complex forces shaping individuals' formal educational

experiences and provide a means of understanding why certain individuals may fail out of or ostensibly choose to leave school. Furthermore, these analyses demonstrate how the educational failures of one generation directly affect the educational outcomes of later generations. So, ultimately, those students with the most need of a higher education for occupational advancement have the least access.

Is the answer then to provide educational opportunities for those individuals who have historically been denied access to postsecondary institutions? Admittedly, simple solutions will not adequately address complex problems. In a report directed at the U.S. Congress, Harris (1997) acknowledged that not just any kind of educational program will work effectively for all individuals. Many welfare recipients have already been failed by a schooling system that, in denying them rewards based on students' and schools' lack of economic resources and students' lack of cultural capital, did not provide them with a degree or the means of attaining a high-paying job. As a result, such individuals may be leery of traditional postsecondary institutions and may not possess the basic skills or even the desire necessary to succeed in an associate's or baccalaureate program. Gueron and Hamilton (2002) found that approximately 60 percent of welfare recipients report having had poor educational experiences in the past and expressed a desire to receive specific skills training in lieu of a formal two-year or four-year postsecondary degree. Unfortunately, however, Gueron and Hamilton state that in the past, creators of skills-based educational programs tailored for welfare recipients have too often not considered local economies when designing curricula, and that GED test preparation and remedial classes have not successfully retained students.

Rather than examining the factors leading to the failure of such educational programs, policymakers have shifted their focus to short-term, work-first programs that easily produce favorable statistics in terms of caseload reductions but do little to relieve actual poverty. The ramifications of political decisions that effectively deny educational benefits for our nation's poorest citizens should be of paramount concern if past research examining the effect of education on welfare dependency, poverty, and health is any indicator of our nation's well-being. In reference to welfare dependency, Harris (1996) found that having a high school education reduced the chance that a woman would return to welfare by 39 percent and having some postsecondary schooling reduces those chances of return by 41 percent. Simply put, the more highly educated a recipient is, the less likely she is to become a repeat user of welfare. Furthermore, when compared to individuals who have not attained a high school diploma, individuals with at least a college degree are ten times less likely to have a family income under the poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau 1996) and are half as likely to have an infant who dies at birth (National Center for Health Statistics 1998). Clearly we could argue that poverty causes these health effects, but because education and poverty are so inextricably connected, we cannot ignore the potential beneficial effects of improving individuals' educational experiences, particularly if it means improving the life chances of presently poor parents and their children.

Until legislators address these problems in all their complexity, acknowledging the ways discrimination has shaped the historical production of public assistance programs and continues to exert influence over current social processes resulting in

poverty, effective solutions will not implemented. The researchers cited above have amply demonstrated that current trends in TANF policy emphasizing work over education are short-sighted and ahistorical, ignoring the socio-spatial reality of most U.S. neighborhoods; that is, the poorer a neighborhood, the fewer resources—educational, civic, social, *and* occupational—are likely to be near. We can therefore deduce that increasing work requirements and ignoring actual obstacles will not be wholly effective and only reinforces negative stereotypes regarding our nation's "undeserving poor."

In the pages that follow, I put such historical social analyses to the test. I describe the specific experiences of TANF participants pursuing a postsecondary education under current laws to determine the actual effects of these seemingly short-sighted and ahistorical solutions. Only after considering the words of those individuals who are most affected by such reforms will we be able to determine the true success of a TANF program emphasizing work over education.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES, METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

If legislators and policymakers are to design effective programs that consider the role of postsecondary education in the lives of welfare recipients, they must first listen to the voices of those individuals most directly affected by such decisions: welfare participants and social workers. The primary objective of this study is to provide a forum for those voices. We cannot expect to create meaningful solutions for all involved unless we, first, document the viewpoints of those individuals whose daily experiences are influenced by governmental policies and, second, situate those findings within larger public conversations regarding education and welfare reform.

Examining such issues at this time is particularly significant because the success of TANF has been widely disputed, and as recent debates in Congress regarding TANF's reauthorization have demonstrated, the direction of the program's future is unclear. Although between 1994 and 1999 welfare caseloads decreased nationwide by 48 percent, a statistic touted by welfare reform supporters as an indication of success, the percentage of poor female-headed households decreased by only 22 percent, despite a general national decrease in poverty levels at the end of the 1990's (Lichter and Jayakody 2002). Such statistics clearly reveal that the majority of individuals leaving welfare rolls have continued to live in poverty and with the economic recession marking the early part of this century, the likelihood that the occupational and economic prospects for these

individuals have been improving is diminished. Tommy G. Thompson, Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, stated in his testimony to Congress in March of 2003 that the number of welfare caseloads had continued to decline for the sixth consecutive year — since 1996, the number of families receiving cash assistance has dropped 59.2 percent. However, Thompson brushed over the fact that more recently poverty rates have been steadily increasing. Thompson failed to note that the number of people living in poverty increased by 1.3 million between 2001 and 2002, and the number of children living in poverty increased by 600,000 during the same time period (Parrott 2003). Furthermore, between 2000 and 2002, the unemployment rate of single mothers increased to 9 percent—the unemployment rate is twice as high, 18.1 percent, for those single mothers with low education levels (Fremstad 2003). While Thompson stood on the House floor lauding TANF's successes, the number of people living in poverty that year continued to increase to 35.9 million, 12.5 percent of the population (U.S. Census Bureau 2005). Watching welfare caseloads decrease and poverty and unemployment rates rise, we are left contemplating the fate of those families, particularly those families headed by parents with low education levels, who have disappeared from the rolls yet are undoubtedly still struggling.

Research that provides any level of insight into the experiences of individuals who have at some point taken advantage of past or existing educational opportunities can be used by social workers, legislators, and researchers as they analyze or revise current laws and policies. Because this study contains the words of those individuals directly involved in the day-to-day functioning of welfare policy, this research provides a much

needed perspective for policymakers and researchers otherwise removed from the daily workings of our nation's welfare offices.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

My decision to research the lives of parents receiving welfare benefits while trying to attain a postsecondary degree resulted not only from my personal experiences with students like Tammy, described above, but also from my new role as a mother. As I have struggled with the issues of child care — including the psychological burden evidenced in the guilt I sometimes felt when I dropped my daughter off at her center crying and the practical frustrations of finding alternative caregivers when she was ill and not able to attend her usual class — I have become increasingly attuned to the general dilemmas of mothers in a culture that simultaneously heralds June Cleaver and Sally Ride (be a good mother, but you can be an astronaut too!). By citing such personal influences I acknowledge the feminist dimension of this study and hope to clarify, at least in part, the ways these experiences serve to shape my standpoint as a researcher.

First and foremost, I consider this study to be action-oriented and feminist in its conception and execution. What this might mean exactly is dependent on the action-oriented and feminist researchers asked, many of whom may disagree regarding the who, what, when, how, and why questions under girding any type of research project. Certainly I see this project as embodying the general goals of action and empowerment research as defined by Stephen A. Small (1995) in his analysis of action-oriented research models and methods. Action research according to Julian Rappaport (1970) is a tradition

within action-oriented research in which the researcher's primary goal is to "contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to the goals of social science by joint collaboration within a mutually acceptable ethical framework" (cited in Small, p.942). It is expected that researchers employing such an approach will share their findings with the participants and/or with individuals who enact change. Empowerment research is primarily "concerned with the study of relationships within and between various levels of the environment including individuals, groups, settings, the community, culture, and social policies" as a means of highlighting the political processes that come to define the positions of stakeholders with varying levels of power (p. 946). Although action and empowerment research are similar in their emphasis on change as an end goal, they are different, argues Small, in that action research need not result in the creation of knowledge that might rectify oppression. Eliminating oppression is the explicit goal of empowerment research.

I also see this work as feminist in that it reflects a particular concern with the subordination of women.[8] In this case, I have consciously sought to design a project in line with Jayaratne and Stewart's (1991) determination of what might comprise a feminist perspective. Their chosen feminist strategies are presented below:

1. When selecting a research topic or problem, we should ask how that research has potential to help women's lives and what information is necessary to have such impact.

[8] Small (1995) identifies feminist research as representing yet another tradition of action-oriented research. I separate feminist research out here as a means of emphasizing its heightened influence on my research approach.

2. When designing the study, we should propose methods that are both appropriate for the kind of question asked and the information needed and which permit answers persuasive to a particular audience.
3. In every instance of use of either qualitative and quantitative methods or both, we should address the problems associated with each approach.
4. Whenever possible, we should use research designs which combine quantitative and qualitative methods.
5. Whether the research methods are quantitative or qualitative, it is critical that procedures be bias-free or sex-fair.
6. We should take the time and effort to do quality research.
7. When interpreting results, we should ask what different interpretations, always consistent with the findings, might imply for change in women's lives.
8. We should always attempt some political analysis of the findings.
9. Finally, as much as possible (given a realistic assessment of the frantic pace of academic life), we should actively participate in the dissemination of research results. (Pp.101-103)

Like Jayaratne and Stewart, I believe in the emancipatory potential of research dealing with women's issues, particularly as those issues affect the lives of women who have historically been and continue to be marginalized due to their class and/or racial/ethnic social positioning. I realize that fathering is likewise a challenging endeavor in a capitalist culture where the value of the dollar often wins out over paternity leave or equal participation in the raising of children. However, the subject of this study, welfare, is a state- and federally-funded program that is fundamentally gendered both in its application and its perception by the public. Interestingly, I found no welfare-related programs with the terms "mother" or "motherhood" explicitly listed in their titles, yet I found plenty of "fatherhood" programs. The assumption here, of course, is that welfare

is a program primarily geared towards women and mothers—men and fathers are supplementary. This is made clear not only in the pronouns used in the public media and in the written language of welfare legislation but also by a simple visit to any welfare office in this country. Women and children fill the waiting rooms and halls. When men are sighted, they are usually case managers, staff, or fathers coming into the office *with* their child's mother. Although single fathers with custody of their children do receive TANF—I interview two of them in this study—their numbers are small. In 2001, men represented a mere 10 percent of all adult TANF recipients (Children's Defense Fund 2004).

In addition to the fact that women are more likely than men to participate in public welfare programs, Karen Seccombe (1999) argues that welfare is a women's issue because so many middle and upper-middle class women "are simply one man away or one crisis away from welfare themselves" (p. 7). Women continue to earn significantly less than men, women are more likely to sacrifice career to take care of family members, and women are more likely to face sexual harassment or discrimination in the work place. All of these factors can potentially affect women's economic stability and place them at high-risk of someday needing welfare. Women are also more likely than men to be targets of domestic abuse and are therefore more likely to find their and their children's lives in economically precarious positions upon making the choice to leave their "breadwinning" husbands to protect their lives. For all of these reasons, I argue that welfare is not just a family issue, but a women's issue.

Given my research approaches, I chose to embrace methods that overtly address issues of power in the process of collecting data and that resist imposing meaning that does not emerge from the data itself. To that end, I have employed a consciously self-reflexive mode of analysis that is heavily influenced by grounded theory methods. First, I acknowledge my role as researcher in the processes of analysis. I see myself, to use Michelle Fine's (1994) words, as "working the hyphen," revealing the power dynamics influencing my relationships with participants and discussing the processes and implications of those dynamics *with* participants. Given my goal of generating findings from accurate representations of participants' experiences, I realize the importance of reflexively questioning the ways in which I, as a researcher, am shaping participants' interpretations and meanings (Fonow and Cook 1991, Collins 1991, Reinharz 1992). Subscribing to such a perspective requires that an emphasis be placed on the dynamic nature of knowledge and the processes resulting in its expression as it is shaped by subjects in the context of discussion. As we put words to our experiences, we make meaning for ourselves which is often further refined in discussion with others. To presume that more accurate renderings of personal experiences can be gleaned from interviews where the interviewer refrains from any meaning-making or explanatory dialogue is simply false, not to mention, impossible if we subscribe to theories of social interaction which locate the dynamics of meaning-making in our interactions (Blumer 1969). This is not to say that we cannot limit our influence within interviews—of course we can. However, the degree to which we should involve ourselves in such meaning-making is dependent on a study's objectives and the power differentials between those

involved. The challenge for researchers, particularly social researchers sensitive to the political nature of their subject matter is to determine when such involvement will produce greater understanding of the issues being examined with the ultimate intent of elucidating processes of oppression.

Secondly, because I am striving to derive meaning from the perspectives of participants, I chose to guide my analysis of data using grounded theory methods. Admittedly, my stated research objectives — which reveal a primary concern with recording participants' experiences and analyzing how those experiences are represented, misrepresented or even absent within present and proposed welfare policy — do not emphasize a concern with theory construction, the explicit goal of grounded theory methods. Although my research approach is overtly political and theory construction is not an intended outcome, I have chosen to guide my analysis using grounded theory methods because, at least as described by Strauss (1987), such an approach to qualitative analysis is particularly rigorous and creative in its intended execution.

According to Strauss, analysis relying on grounded theory methods takes place in three distinct phases: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Although the phases are distinct in regards to what they produce, they are not necessarily employed in a linear fashion, as well be further explained below. During the first phase of open coding, indicators in the data are identified, coded, and compared to other indicators as a means of identifying concepts. Indicators can be words, phrases, or sentences identified in the data. These indicators are assigned a name representing a concept (e.g. "value of an education" or "childcare problems") as a means of identifying how they might be

similar or different to other indicators under the same or different concept headings. Concepts become "theoretically saturated" when added indicators to a defined concept provide no new insights regarding that concept. In other words, when a concept is theoretically saturated, the meaning of the concept has been made clear to the researcher. As concepts become theoretically saturated, relationships between concepts will emerge resulting in the creation of categories that more abstractly connect two or more concepts. When categories are introduced into the analysis, the phase of axial coding begins. Axial coding consists of dimensionalizing categories via the asking of a variety of questions regarding concepts and categories. Specifically Strauss recommends that questions regarding consequences, strategies, interactions, and conditions that might pertain to created categories. As the researcher dimensionalizes categories, previously coded indicators, concepts and categories are constantly compared with each other as a means of ensuring their respective validity. The final stage of selective coding is not really final in that open and axial coding can take place up until the end of analysis and selective coding can take place early on in the process. However, all of the open and axial coding lead up to selective coding when a final core category emerges. According to Strauss (1987), "To code selectively, then, means that the analyst delimits coding to only those codes that relate to the core codes in sufficiently significant ways as to be used in a parsimonious theory" (p. 33). Just as the name implies, selective coding is a more focused type of coding that results in the creation of not only a single core category but also theory.

Throughout this process of transcribing, coding and constant comparison, researchers are expected to track their findings, questions, and hypotheses in dated memos, another key tool defined by Strauss, that serves as a resource for integrating emerging concepts and categories. In those memos, researchers jot down questions and notes regarding emerging patterns, emanating from descriptions of processes and relationships evidenced in the words of the text being examined. As stated previously, the goal of this recursive style of analysis — which involves processes of deduction and induction simultaneously — is to create dense concepts and abstractions that accurately depict and explain the processes evidenced in the data, thereby increasing the validity of findings.

In the sections below describing my interview and content analysis methods, I present a more detailed description of the grounded theory methods I chose to utilize for this particular project. I employed the practices of open coding, axial coding, memoing, and diagramming and forwent the final phases of selective coding and theory construction. This is not to say that selective coding and the creation of a core category are not important. Instead, I would argue that given the action-oriented objectives of this particular project, I chose to focus on the results produced during the initial open and axial phases of coding. The findings from these phases of analysis provided the necessary information to fulfill my research objectives. Further analysis of the data may indeed produce a core category that provides additional insight into our understanding of the experiences of student welfare participants. However, I would argue that the approach applied within this study is suitable for a project of this nature, which was

intended to provide information and identify relationships that have heretofore been ignored in most coverage of welfare reform.

RESEARCH DESIGN

To fulfill the research objectives outlined above, I employ two primary methods in this study, content analysis and in-depth interviews. I use content analysis to examine welfare legislation, including PRWORA and two TANF reauthorization bills that in 2005 were receiving the most attention in Congress: the House of Representative's bill H.R.240 and the Senate's bill S.667. Such an analysis of current legislation is relevant because it reveals the assumptions, many of which are unfounded, guiding public debate and the construction of social policy. I use the results from my content analysis to frame findings emerging from my in-depth interviews. Combining these two methods allows me to draw connections and identify disjunctures between the policies being formulated in Washington D.C. and the lived realities of individuals sitting in cubicles, walking the halls, and waiting in the lobbies of welfare offices. Below I describe in detail these two methods and their applications.

Content Analysis

Because one of the objectives of this study is to determine how the discourse of legislative policy is shaping the experiences of TANF participants, I relied upon a qualitative form of content analysis, critical discourse analysis, to analyze legislative documents. As defined by Fairclough (1995) critical discourse analysis is a

transdisciplinary approach to analyzing texts that attempts to collaboratively integrate sociolinguists' and social theorists' respective emphases on language and social elements. Fairclough describes the objectives of critical discourse analysis as employing a three-dimensional framework for analyzing discursive events that integrates the linguistic goal of analyzing written or spoken texts with the more socio-historical goals of analyzing social practices and the processes of text production, consumption, and distribution. Of particular interest to Fairclough, are the ways ideology and power are represented, produced, and reproduced within discursive events:

> A feature of my framework of analysis is that it tries to combine a theory of power based upon Gramsci's concept of *hegemony* with a theory of discourse practice based on a concept of intertextuality. . . . The connection between text and social practice is seen as being mediated by discourse practice: on the one hand, processes of text production and interpretation are shaped by (and help shape) the nature of the social practice, and on the other hand the production process shapes (and leaves "traces" in) the text, and the interpretative process operates upon "cues" in the text. (P. 133)

By grounding analyses more firmly in the text and carefully examining the relationships between words, syntax, and grammar (for example identifying agentless passive constructions and comparing their number with active constructions in reference to particular social actors), social scientists can enrich the depth of their analyses, argues Fairclough. Furthermore, critical discourse analysis acknowledges the absences in texts, an issue of great concern with many linguists but one that is not the focus of much content analysis by social scientists who tend to focus on that which is present.

My use of critical discourse analysis is guided by action-oriented and feminist perspectives. Given my feminist perspective, I am finely attuned to the workings of power and ideology within spoken or written texts, which are evidenced in not only presence but also in absence. As feminists and deconstructionists have made all too clear, an examination of that which is absent can tell us a great deal about the dynamics producing that which is present. Although not testing prior theory, I do not ignore its influences either, which is why throughout the various stages of analysis, I constantly and self-reflexively considered the effects of my role as researcher while systematically employing the practices of close textual examination, constant comparison, and memo writing.

I chose three texts to read closely for this project: the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity and Reconciliation Act of 1996; the Personal Responsibility and Individual Development for Everyone Act, S.667 of 2005; and the Personal Responsibility, Work, and Family Promotion Act, H.R.240 of 2005. I supplemented my reading of PRWORA and the two bills most recently considered in Congress, S.667 and H.R.240, with readings of Congressional reports related to each document, all of which were obtained from the Library of Congress's electronic on-line database THOMAS.

I began this phase of analysis by coding the chosen legislative texts, closely examining the words and their context, focusing on terms that were frequently repeated or that specifically related to the objectives of my research (e.g. "education" or "college"). I also used the software program Microsoft Word to determine the number of times keywords appeared and to contextualize the uses of words including "education,"

"dependency," "out-of-wedlock," and "abstinence." Early on, I noticed that several terms — for example "marriage," "non-marital," and "out-of-wedlock"— were frequently repeated, so they quickly emerged as indicators of concepts during the initial phase of open coding. During the second phase of axial coding, where relationships between concepts are more closely examined, I determined, for example, that such terms as "non-marital" and "out-of-wedlock" were often used as a means of reinforcing racialized and gendered stereotypes of welfare participants and that they also served to distract readers from noticing that terms such as "poverty" and "inequality" were absent. As a result, two distinct categories dealing with the reification of welfare stereotypes emerged; these two categories primarily differed in their emphasis on the presence or absence of chosen words. The results from these analyses were used to shape my critical evaluation of the use of language in legislative documents. Throughout this study, I frequently include direct quotes from the legislative documents examined as a means of limiting researcher bias and accurately depicting textual representations produced and approved by legislators.

Semi-Structured Interviews

As a means of fulfilling the primary objective of this study, which is to provide a voice for TANF participants and social workers, I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 30 individuals participating in or working with the TANF program. In the spring of 2004, I began interviewing women and men who had learned about my study in one of four ways: 1) From informal discussion with me; 2) From flyers

distributed at two local day care centers and around a state university campus, 3) From supervisors who requested their participation, and 4) From friends or relatives of other participants. To determine how current welfare policies focusing on occupations are affecting the experiences of welfare participants, I conducted interviews with 20 individuals who pursued a postsecondary education while receiving welfare benefits.[9] These individuals resided in an urban center in the state of Georgia, which in 2001 was cited as being one of 12 states in the U.S. that allowed TANF clients to use education to meet work requirements with virtually no restrictions or limitations (Center for Law and Social Policy and the Center for Budget Priorities 2002).[10] As will be revealed in subsequent analyses, however, local county or city policies on education may be more restrictive than federal or state policies, and furthermore often vary according to the case manager's discretion.

All 20 individuals were compensated 25 dollars for their time, which averaged approximately an hour and a half per interview. The 20 TANF program participants were asked to share information about their welfare-use history, their program of study, their short- and long-term educational and occupational goals, and their perceived successes and failures in the educational system. They were also asked to describe how current welfare policies and procedures have facilitated their successes or presented obstacles as they have pursued their goal of attaining a postsecondary degree. I also interviewed 10

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[9] As noted earlier, Edin and Lein (1997) likewise chose to use in-depth interviews as a means of examining how the reality of living on welfare benefits compared with popular conceptions, or as was proven, misconceptions.

[10] In 2001, the only state restriction for Georgia residents receiving TANF and pursuing a postsecondary degree was that they maintain a grade point average of "C" or above. Federal restrictions, however,

welfare case managers and program supervisors who are familiar with the policies and procedures of the TANF program, many of whom had experience working under the AFDC program in place before TANF. I paid only those individuals who were no longer working for the Division of Family and Children's Services (DFCS) and who met with me outside of their workplace. Those individuals currently employed by DFCS were not paid directly by me; however, DFCS supervisors allowed me to interview their employees during the paid work day. Interviews with case managers and program supervisors averaged approximately one hour. Welfare case managers and program supervisors were asked questions about their experiences dealing with TANF recipients who are presently fulfilling or who in the past fulfilled their TANF hourly work requirements by attending classes in postsecondary institutions. I asked these 10 participants to share their perceptions regarding the successes and obstacles that TANF recipients face when attempting to fulfill their educational obligations. Welfare case workers were also asked to comment on the ways they perceive federally-mandated TANF requirements have shaped local and state welfare requirements in terms of postsecondary educational opportunities and restrictions.

Specific questions covering the issues described above were included in two standardized interview schedules, one designed for case managers and supervisors and one for TANF program participants pursuing a postsecondary education (See Appendix A). Frequently additional probing questions were asked regarding specific issues pertaining to each individual's unique life histories or perspectives. For example, often

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regarding the percentage of TANF cases that may use education to fulfill work requirements were still

the TANF participants would introduce information regarding the fathers of their children which would lead me to ask questions about their personal relationships and fathers' family contributions. After interviewing two individuals, a former case manager and a TANF participant, I decided to alter my interview guide by including one additional permanent question to the standard interview schedule: Do you believe we live in a culture that values motherhood and parenting? This question logically emerged from the discussions I found myself holding with participants and subsequently revealed information regarding an issue that has since become central to understanding some of the patterns evidenced during the analysis phase of this project. I digitally recorded and transcribed all interviews, producing over 600 pages of material for analysis.

Sampling strategy. Given my research interest in identifying the experiences of individuals pursuing a postsecondary education, I used purposive chain sampling methods to identify and select participants. Figure 1 (See Appendix B) clarifies the sources of and relationships between all individuals comprising my final sample. To locate potential study participants, flyers were distributed at two local day care centers and in the Main Class Building and Student Center of Southern State University.[11] Six individuals responded to those flyers: Elizabeth, Lisa, Candy, Katherine, Nia, and Bryan. At the end of our interviews, I provided all participants with five small cards briefly describing the study and encouraged them to pass them on to others who might qualify

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limited to 30 percent (CLASP & CPBB 2002).

[11] The names of all institutions have been changed and participants chose aliases in order to ensure a level of confidentiality for all individuals involved. Although several participants stated they did not mind having their actual identities revealed, others expressed a desire to have their identities concealed out of a concern that others might interpret their words as a betrayal. As a result, I made the decision to use aliases

for participation. Katherine, a TANF program supervisor working at City Hospital, passed on the cards to two more individuals, Lydia and Chris. Lydia was a TANF participant who worked under Katherine at City Hospital. Lydia then referred me to a friend of hers, Tanya. The other individual referred by Katherine, Chris, served as a supervisor at the Bridges to Success Program, a non-profit organization contracted by Urban County's DFACS offices to aid TANF participants in attaining short-term educational credentials in order to qualify for entry-level jobs. Chris referred me to his program supervisor, Simone, who in turn referred me to three Bridges to Success Program participants—Nicole, Keisha, and Yvonne—who were at that time also receiving TANF benefits.

The other five individuals responding to my initial flyers were participants in the TANF program.[12] Only one of those five study participants, Lisa, referred me to another potential participant. I had known Lisa for two years prior to my interviewing her because she worked as a day care provider for my daughter; however, until she approached me about the study having read the flyer in the daycare center where she worked, I had known only a little about her educational history and none of her TANF history. After our interview, she referred me to her mother, Anne who was at that time

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for all participants, even those individuals who stated they did not mind using their own names, to protect those individuals expressing concern at being identified.

[12] At least at the time of our initial eligibility conversations and during the first part of our interviews, they all believed that they qualified. During the course of our conversation, however, I determined that one individual, Bryan, did not qualify because he did not have any children—he was participating in the Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWD) program not TANF. I have decided, nonetheless, to retain him in my final sample and include some of his commentary in my final analysis because having grown up on welfare, he provided some nuanced insight into the complex issues shaping welfare policy, racial constructions, and public perception.

living in Eleanor's Apartments, a federally subsidized transitional housing complex serving adults diagnosed with mental illnesses or HIV/AIDS. Anne referred me to Roland, Ike, Anna, Star, and Cookie, all of whom resided in one-room studios located in Eleanor's Apartments. When interviewing Roland, Teia was present for part of the time and expressed interest in participating as well. Star referred me to Black, who had previously lived in Eleanor's Apartments, but who had three months prior moved out of the complex to his own apartment in order to care for his four-year old son.

In addition to distributing flyers, I publicly shared my research agenda with acquaintances and friends and through such personal conversations was able to recruit two participants: Katerina and Divine. After a brief hallway conversation with Katerina, a former student of mine from National Technical Institute, I determined that she would be eligible for my study and upon hearing my research objectives, she agreed to participate. Additionally, a former classmate of mine at Southern State University, who was aware of my research interests, referred me to her mother, Divine, who had been an AFDC and TANF case manager in the 1980's and 1990's and who was currently working for a community organization that frequently contracted out their services to local TANF programs (See Tables 9 and 10 in Appendix C for a summary description of students' demographics, family structure, and educational histories).

In order to gain access to TANF case managers in Eastern Urban County's and Western Urban County's DFCS offices, I contacted the office supervisors or directors via formal written communications, seeking permission to speak with case managers. I was ultimately denied permission to speak with case managers at Western Urban County's

offices, no reason was provided, but was granted permission and provided with the names and phone numbers of two program directors at Eastern Urban County's DFCS office. After multiple failed attempts to connect via phone and email, the two program directors, Ariana and Taylor, contacted me and we determined three days during the following month when I would be allowed access to several case managers. These case managers, Nicky, Tree, James, and Carl also introduced me to a TANF recipient, Marie, currently working within the DFCS office.

Marie, one of the last individuals I interviewed for this project, asked at the end of our interview about my sampling strategy and we discussed some of the pros and cons of my using a purposive chain sample. One — and this was in issue presented to me by several outsiders as I embarked on this project — by targeting TANF participants who are pursuing a postsecondary education, aren't I selecting individuals who are likely to succeed anyway? Why focus on those individuals with more resources and ignore those who most need a voice—teens or those who lack a high school diploma? Yes, many of the TANF recipients I interviewed are more likely than most to leave the TANF rolls, but many of them are not for reasons that I will describe in subsequent chapters. Specifically, I chose to target these individuals because ironically, they are the ones most often ignored when policy is being created and debated. Focus in the media and in legislative debate most often centers on the experiences of the hardest to help, those individuals lacking basic job and life skills or diagnosed with physical or mental illnesses. Many of these individuals selected for my study will move off the welfare rolls, but the problems that got them there in the first place are not likely to fully

disappear, and they may always be too close to the poverty line for comfort. This is not to say that the experiences of the hardest to serve recipients are not important; however, research on welfare must cover the diversity in TANF participant population, and current policies do not recognize nor address that diversity.

Secondly, Marie questioned my use of chain sampling strategies. Specifically, she wanted to know if my sample of TANF participants were primarily referred by the case managers and supervisors I interviewed. Five of the twenty TANF participants interviewed were referred by case managers and supervisors. The obvious possible implication of using such referrals is that the individuals referred might represent the "best and the brightest" according to case managers and supervisors' standards. At least in Marie's case, it was clear that several case managers at Eastern Urban County's DFCS office held her in high regard and labeled her as an atypical TANF participant. Another TANF participant, Lydia, was also a stellar TANF program participant according to Katherine who served as her supervisor and informal mentor at City Hospital. The remaining three referrals — Nicole, Keisha, and Yvonne — who were recommended by Simone, their supervisor, were clearly considered capable and hard working, hence their employment in Simone's office. However, unlike Marie and Lydia, they did not reveal in their interviews nor in their office interactions a relationship with Simone indicating that they were unusually successful participants in her program.

Although it is possible that these five women's involvement in this study might result in masking some of the very real problems many lesser qualified TANF participants face, their involvement in no way undermines the general validity of this

study. For one, they represent only 25 percent of this study's sample of TANF participants. Secondly, as I stated above, even if I were to limit my examination to a study of individuals with relatively more social and personal resources, I am still revealing the experiences of a very important segment of the welfare population, who by many standard measures should be faring better than they are. If these individual represent a "best case scenario," then a study such as this serves to emphasize the depth of the difficulties facing TANF participants with fewer resources.

Another subject deserving attention is the racial composition of my final sample. Very quickly, I began to realize that my sample was going to reflect local demographics and a history unique to this specific geographical region of the United States. For one, every participant described his or her racial/ethnic background as being at least in part African American or black. I soon realized after spending several weeks traversing the halls of Eastern Urban County's DFCS main office that the majority of staff, supervisors, and clients would at least in part be identified by others as African American or black. During the two days I spent interviewing case managers and supervisors in Eastern Urban Count's DFCS office, I encountered only one white female staff member and saw only two white females, out of hundreds of applicants and their children. Indeed, as is revealed in Table 1, the percentage of applicants who identify themselves as black is disproportionately high in this particular county at 94.9 percent; whereas only 3.2 percent of all applicants identify themselves as white, 1 percent as Hispanic, 1 percent as Asian,

and less than 1 percent as Native American, or other.[13] As a result, all findings and conclusions can be applied only to this sample.

Table 1. Cross Comparison of Racial/Ethnic Composition of TANF Participants (Adults & Children) 2002

Racial/Ethnic Category	Urban County	Georgia	U.S. Totals
White	3.2%*	19.9%	31.6%
Black	94.9%	78.2%	38.3%
Hispanic**	1.0%	1.5%	24.9%
Asian	1.0%	.2%	2.2%
Native American	***	***	1.4%
Other	.1%	.2%	.9%

(Sources: Georgia Department of Human Resources, Division of Family and Children's Services Data, June 2004. Available: http://dfcsdata.state.ga.us/menusearch04.asp; U.S. Department of Health and HumanServices. 2004. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program: Sixth Annual Report to Congress. Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office).

* = Totals may not equal a hundred percent due to rounding.
** = May be of any race
*** = Less than a hundredth percent

However, because this study was created with the goal of inquiry and not validation as a primary objective, the revealed findings may be used as a grounding for further research and to spark much needed discussion regarding these issues.

I must acknowledge the real danger of using these results to perpetuate general stereotypes regarding the racial and ethnic composition of this nation's welfare rolls. As described in the general introduction, public perception has been marred by fundamentally racist journalistic practices, whether overtly or covertly intentional, which have resulted in the portrayal of welfare recipients as being overwhelmingly black (Gilens 1999, Quadagno 1994). As national statistics over the past ten years reveal,

[13] Census category labels are used to identify racial groupings.

however, non-Hispanic whites were the largest racial group of adults to receive welfare benefits until 1997 (See Table 2).

Table 2. Percent of AFDC/TANF Adults Who Are Non-white, 1995-2001

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Georgia	74.3	72.8	77.5	81.3	83.0	81.2	81.4
U.S. Totals	60.6	60.3	62.5	64.2	67.4	67.2	67.8

(Source: U.S. House Committee of Ways and Means. 2004. Green Book. Table 7-31, p.7-91. Available: http://waysandmeans.house.gov/Documents.asp?section=813.)

Despite this reality, the face of welfare has in the public consciousness persisted as being black. To be sure, although whites comprised the largest racial/ethnic group of adults to receive welfare benefits during most of the 1990's, disproportionate numbers of black and Hispanic parents turned to TANF during those same years, in part the result of the historical social and political processes described in the previous chapter. Such facts and figures reveal the complex role of race in any discussion of welfare.

By relying on a sample wholly comprised of self-identified blacks and African Americans, I run the risk of unintentionally reinforcing stereotypes and limiting the generalizability of any findings. However, as many recent qualitative studies regarding the lives of welfare recipients have revealed (see Edin and Lein 1997, Hays 2003, Seecombe 1999), many of the differing attitudes and behaviors described in the literature are not solely or even primarily a result of racial or ethnic variations but are the result of a richly complex interplay of social and psychological differences — including one's race,

ethnicity, gender, class — that make up the unique identities of each individual. Despite these individual differences, however, these researchers have detected patterns that cross race and ethnic lines, revealing the very real effects of social structures on the lives of the poor in this country. By comparing this study's findings to those presented by other qualitative researchers, I can determine which patterns are deeply shaped by one's race or ethnicity and which patterns cross those lines of division affecting all welfare participants. Although in my final analysis, I attempt to make explicit racial dynamics given their influence on the day-to-day, moment-by-moment functioning of all individuals, I hope to present a convincing argument that demonstrates the experiences of my participants may not in whole be unique to this particular sample, but may represent patterns that exist in the larger population thereby calling for further research in this area.

The interview process: Negotiating my social identity. Because I am a white, upper-middle class female, my findings will in some way be shaped by these identifying factors, which was made clear to me early on this study. My first interview with Divine was held in a predominantly black, working-class suburban neighborhood, and as I sat on her front steps waiting for her to arrive home, I was intensely conscious of my race as black neighbors whizzed by and "checked me out." Whether I was being scrutinized because of my race or because I was insanely sitting outside in the sun on a blistering hot, humid day can never fully be known, but that *I* was conscious of being in a neighborhood visited by very few whites was clear. Often my initial contact with participants was via phone and upon actually meeting me, several participants stated their outright surprise in learning I was white. Roland confided as I introduced myself, "You're Fiona? You

didn't sound white on the phone!" Such comments bespeak the infinite ways race shapes our social interactions, even those virtual interactions, such as a phone call, in which skin color is seemingly absent.

In her book *Not Our Kind of Girl*, Elaine Bell Kaplan (1997) discusses explicitly they way one's race, gender and personal experiences can shape the proceedings of interviews or focus group sessions. Attempting to unravel the myths surrounding the life experiences of young black teenagers navigating educational and welfare systems, Kaplan describes how she used her identity as an African American mother to connect with her study participants. Kaplan had the additional shared experience of having been a teenager mother. Within her analysis, Kaplan describes how some study participants presented themselves and their life stories differently, sometimes dramatically differently, depending on the race of the audience present. For example, she found that study participants were more likely to share their frustrations and concerns with black counselors or black teachers than with a community group of white mothers or white teachers. Instead of focusing on obstacles or problems, the young black teenage mothers would present themselves more positively when whites constituted the majority of their audience. Kaplan stops short of attempting to explain such findings along racial lines, simply reporting back counselors' hypotheses — for example, that the girls are ashamed of their problems or are hesitant to share private business — or citing more general possible causes such as teens' general resistance to adult authority. To fully make sense of the dynamics shaping these interactions, the context and nature of the exchange of information need to be examined. For example, all of the interactions Kaplan describes

involve *groups* of white women and *groups* of black girls not individual encounters, and clearly the perceived motives of the differing groups—community groups, teachers, counselors—may shape how the teens' responded. Nonetheless, what is made clear, despite the missing pieces, is that race matters.

During our interviews, two participants, Marie and Bryan, asked questions directly relating the racial composition of my sample. Although both individuals sought TANF services from different offices—Marie used Eastern Urban County's DFCS office while Bryan used Western Urban County's office—they nonetheless noted that the clientele at both locations were predominantly black and were curious to know how my race affected my collection of data and analysis. As I told them and as I state clearly here, because I chose to interview individuals in a DFCS office servicing and serviced by primarily black individuals, and given the racialized and gendered history of welfare programs in this country, I as a white woman will have to remain attuned to the myriad ways my social identity might shape my findings. I cannot know exactly how my findings might have been different had my social identity been different, but in the tradition of qualitative research, I should not allow such an identity to dissuade me from pursuing my research agenda (See for example, Duneier 1992,1999; Liebow 1967; MacLeod 1987; Stack 1974).

In order to mediate any such effects resulting from my social identity and to promote the feminist orientation of my methodology, I went out of my way to conduct interviews in settings where participants might feel comfortable. Often we met in their homes or their offices. I never asked to meet in a person's home or office, always

offering up more neutral locations such as public libraries, schools, or apartment complex common rooms. However, when potential participants offered up their personal spaces as a meeting place, a common request, I explicitly communicated that I preferred only what was most convenient for them, after all, by agreeing to participate, they were doing me a favor. I was also very conscious of the ways my presentation of self might create invisible boundaries. Rather than choosing seats directly across from participants or behind desks, I tried when possible to seat myself at their side, unless of course I was in their office or home, when I would simply sit where they suggested. Additionally, at the beginning of each interview, I invited participants to involve themselves in the meaning-making process. Although I told them they were in no way required to read any of the transcripts or drafts of the project, I would very much like to invite them to review such documents to ensure that I was accurately documenting and analyzing their experiences. As stated above, I recognize the potential dangers in terms of validity when participants are allowed to influence the final analysis; however, given the exploratory objectives of this study and given the contextual defining factors shaping my interactions with participants, I do not believe that my involvement in their attempts to make meaning of their experiences and beliefs compromised the integrity of the interviews. For example, if participants didn't understand what I meant when I asked if they considered themselves to be a feminist—several participants expressed confusion and two thought I was asking if they were sexist—I would then spend a few minutes explaining several contemporary definitions of feminism. Teia, in particular, thanked me for explaining the concept to her. She then shared a brief story of being interviewed by two women from another local

university who were researching diabetes. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this exchange is Teia's revelation of the unintended consequences when researchers strive for objectivity:

Fiona: Well, from what you were describing, I would think that would be your definition feminism and it sounds very much in key with a lot of other definitions of feminism. It's the empowerment of women. It's the power to set your future and your direction.

Teia: And that was why I was like, well, what do you think?! To make sure that I was saying something right.

Fiona: Well, there is no really right or wrong answer. It has more to do with cultural perception. How have you learned, you know, when you hear that word, what do you think of? And how people made you think about that word and how do you define that word. And a lot of people don't consciously think about it. So I'm just curious what you get through just television or read in the papers, how people talk about it. So when I ask you specifically, [I'm asking] what have you gotten from culture regarding that.

Teia: I just wanted to get a feel from you to see-cause it was like, I have diabetes, so there was this lady that came to my house a long time ago when I was staying with my mom and wanted to do a study on diabetes. Actually, there was two women, um, they came and, um, then they really didn't-they was asking questions that they had to ask, and it was just like they was doing it to make money. But they had gave me, I think I made like 30 dollars from that and then, um, they really didn't ask me nothing, and I was like, you know I want feedback, what did you think? How do you feel? You know. It was like, they was just getting paid for it-cause I asked them, are you getting paid for this? But it's just, you know, people like that, they just wanted to do something for themselves and not trying to really get into what they want to do. But I see when I ask you a question, you came back with, how you—you know, so I'm glad.

Clearly, Teia is concerned about providing the "right" answer, an obstacle researchers are bound to face in any type of study involving human subjects. Orne (1962) describes the behaviors and effects that result from the artificiality of a variety of research situations, including interviews and experiments, as "demand characteristics." Asking scripted questions, taping interviews, and presenting consent forms are all "cues" that collectively constitute demand characteristics. In Teia's case, the demand characteristics are shaping her responses to my and other researchers' questions in sometimes unpredictable ways. As a result we might question the validity of her response to my question regarding her opinions on feminism—does her response represent her deep-rooted feelings or does it merely represent what she thinks I want to hear? We may never know the answer to such a question, but what is clear from her sharing of the anecdote regarding her previous interview experience is that when interviewers do not provide any feedback to her questions during the interview process or any debriefing afterwards, she feels disregarded and exploited. "*They just wanted to do something for themselves*" (emphasis mine). The diabetes study researchers undoubtedly were instructed not to become explicitly involved in meaning-making given the goals of their study. However, their striving for a semblance of objectivity "not trying to really get into what they want to do" resulted in producing a research experience that immediately alienated Teia. Because so much research in the field of social inequality focuses on disadvantaged and disfranchised individuals and because it is so easy to "use" individuals within that population, even when they are compensated monetarily — Teia, for example, was paid 30 dollars by the diabetes researchers for her time — social researchers interviewing members of

oppressed populations must constantly question how their methods might unintentionally violate participants' trust and sense of self worth, and whenever logical and possible involve those participants via collaborative meaning-making or subsequent debriefing.[14]

Data Management and Coding

I transcribed all interviews using Microsoft Word before importing them into the data management software NVIVO 2. In NVIVO 2, I created two files, known within the software program as "projects," one for social workers and one for TANF participants. I coded both projects separately, carefully reading the transcripts and created 85 open codes, or "nodes" in the social worker project and 89 nodes in the TANF participant project. Codes that emerged were sometimes merely explanatory (e.g. "Why I moved to Georgia) and some were more abstract (e.g. "Value of Motherhood). During this process of open coding, I began to draw connections between concepts; and categories began to emerge, a sign that I was beginning to move into the second phase of coding, identified in grounded theory methods as axial coding. At this point, different types of obstructions to one's educational goals were defined; as a result I created categories such as "Individual-level Obstructions," "TANF-related Obstructions," and "Familial Obligations." Within these categories were dimensions of each type of obstruction represented by concepts and their indicators. For example, under "Familial Obligations" were the dimensions

[14] Clearly not all "oppressed" populations are equally disenfranchised. Members of the Ku Klux Klan could be argued to be oppressed on some level because of their counter-cultural ideologies; however, few would argue that their oppression is in any way similar to the oppression facing mothers receiving TANF. The socio-political histories of both groups differently shape their access to power in a culture permeated with racism and sexism. Each researching situation must be evaluated in the context of such larger social and historical forces and the value of meaning-making and/or debriefing must then be determined.

"children," "siblings," "parents," and "husbands/partners." Under these subsections were the concepts "economic needs," "medical needs," and "educational needs."

During this latter stage of coding, I began to construct diagrams to piece together and develop various dimensions of emerging codes and categories. As recommended by Strauss (1987), I asked questions regarding the conditions, strategies, interactions, and consequences of particular categories. For example, in asking questions regarding the conditions of "sibling obligations," I began to see how the separate concepts "economic needs," "medical needs," and "educational needs" pertained specifically to the issue of "sibling obligations." As a result, I recoded existing concepts to reflect these various dimensions that were distinguished by this process of questioning. Upon creating such diagrams, I would then return to the transcribed interviews and review the codes created to verify their accuracy and to amend their content or titles when appropriate, thereby occasionally creating new codes. Throughout this process, I simultaneously wrote notes to myself or memos, in which I tracked impressions, drew connections, and listed topics requiring further research. These memos were maintained in a single file and each entry was dated. Throughout the researching and writing process, I would review these notes as a means of holistically examining the processes defining this project.

CHAPTER 3

THE REIGN OF THE "WELFARE QUEEN": DEALING WITH STIGMA AND STEREOTYPES

It is impossible to conduct any study of the experiences of welfare participants and not consider welfare stereotypes and issues of stigmatization. Researchers of social policy and poverty have extensively examined the social and political processes resulting in the stigmatization of social welfare programs primarily servicing the poor (see for example Abramovitz 2000; Katz 1986, 1989; Mink 1995; Piven and Cloward 1993 [1971]). In particular, many of those researchers have highlighted the gendered and racialized nature of such attacks that produced and then later relied on the stereotype of the "welfare queen" as a symbolic representation of the many failures of U.S. welfare programs (Gilens 1999; Quadagno 1994; Roberts 1997; Schram, Soss and Fording 2003; Sidel 2000).

The introductory "Findings" section of PRWORA, which outlines the social issues that prompted the replacement of AFDC with TANF in 1996, depicts problems with welfare as stemming not from welfare program weaknesses or poverty related issues but from the moral depravity exhibited by irresponsible women and "predatory" men who apparently didn't value the benefits of marriage. The first three of ten "findings" determined by Congress that served to justify welfare reform are presented as follows:

(1) Marriage is the foundation of a successful society.

(2) Marriage is an essential institution of a successful society which promotes the interests of children.

> (3) Promotion of responsible fatherhood and motherhood is integral to successful child rearing and the well-being of children. (U.S. Congress 1996:Sec.101)

Items four through nine comprising this list of "findings" subsequently describe the rise in single parent families since the 1960's with occasional statistical projections inserted for dramatic effect: "if the current trend continues, 50 percent of all births by the year 2015 will be out-of-wedlock." The causes of this increase are in part attributed to the "predatory sexual practices by men who are significantly older," and the net effect of this increase is described as placing a burden on our social welfare system. Due to these assorted "facts" and figures, the tenth and final finding concludes: "Therefore, in light of this demonstration of the crisis in our Nation, it is the sense of Congress that prevention of out-of-wedlock pregnancy and reduction in out-of-wedlock birth are very important Government interests" (U.S. Congress 1996:Sec.101). These are the conclusions that were ultimately accepted by Congress and then-President William Jefferson Clinton in June of 1996 when PRWORA was signed into law.

Nowhere in this opening section of PRWORA outlining the rationalization for welfare reform are the needs of poor families addressed. Lack of transportation, lack of childcare, lack of jobs are all factors defining the reality of many economically-poor families in the United States, yet these factors are notably absent in this summary description of the problem of poverty. Instead, blame for this "crisis in our Nation" is placed squarely on the shoulders of the poor themselves. Shifting the nation's attention from the social causes of poverty to a couple's very personal decision to marry was all too easy because "welfare queens" and "predatory men" were unlikable from the start. In the first chapter, I provided an historical overview of the processes identified by many

scholars of poverty that have resulted in the creation of this stigma of welfare stereotypes. Current legislation has clearly built upon these stereotypes, relying on them to advance ideological and political agendas via the promotion of neoliberal policies espousing "family values." Because such a framing taps into the fundamental belief systems and values of many legislators' constituents, it is often unquestioningly accepted and the welfare stereotype gains renewed life.

In this chapter I begin by examining how many of the TANF participants I interviewed defied the stereotype that permeates public discourse surrounding welfare. I then analyze the social construction of the "welfare queen" as presented by TANF participants and social workers and attempt to explain why this stereotype stubbornly resists deconstruction even by those individuals who are most negatively affected by her very existence. I end this chapter by examining how the social processes that result in the construction of welfare stereotypes and that ultimately shape public policy serve to strip TANF participants of their unique identities, denying them the assistance necessary to improve their and their childrens' lives.

DEFYING THE STEREOTYPE WITH "VISIONS" OF THE FUTURE

Visit the life management section of any bookstore and you will find tens if not hundreds of books dispensing wisdom regarding the means of attaining financial and personal success. Fundamentally what many of these books share in content are differing strategies of managing one's time and setting personal and professional goals. Many of the TANF participants I interviewed for this study are not immune to these philosophies

of success and many claim that what sets them apart from others, particularly those individuals with a "*project mentality*" [15] described in the next section, is their "*vision*" and their ability to plan for the future. Nia, a 25 year old mother pursuing a bachelor's of science degree in social work, perhaps best described what many other participants and several case managers similarly referred to as having a vision:

> I always worked customer service jobs. I always worked in the call center, and although the jobs were o.k. I just always felt like if I tried to better my education, I could always find something else. Just some, something better. And I never wanted to be scratching and digging to work for 11 and 12 dollars an hour when I have a child to provide for and I'm getting older. So I just tried to . . . look for the future, instead of concentrating on what can I do to get by today. I would try to look for, o.k. well, when I'm 30, will I be able to buy a home? You know, will I be able to start a college fund? Will I have a 401K? I have to start looking at the bigger picture.

A vision is a collective description of abstract goals, which results in self-sufficiency and the general well-being of one's self and one's family. Like millions of parents, Nia's vision entails buying a house, creating a savings for her daughter, and establishing a retirement account, all markers of self-sufficiency and of having attained the "American dream." In order to bring this vision to life, Nia was attending Southern State University and expected to receive her bachelor's of science degree in the field of social work in the spring of 2004, a week after our scheduled interview. Upon receiving her degree, she was to commence working with a temporary hiring agency for social work graduates before going on to graduate school to become a licensed clinical social worker. Her

[15] Italicized terms cited in quotation marks are theoretical concepts or codes derived from language used by participants. Strauss (1987) labels such codes as "in-vivo" because they are in fact created by the participants and provide both analytic usefulness and imagery for the reader. The terms are noted by italics and quotation marks only the first time they are referenced.

educational goals were concrete and realistic given her abilities and resources evidenced in her being able to attain her present accomplishments.

Keisha, a 25 year old mother pursuing a medical assistant degree, presents as her vision improving her life and the lives of her three children and imprinting on her children the value of having an education:

> I just want something in life. I really do. I want to be able to retire and have, to travel. And have money! I want my kids to grow up and say, "Your going to go to school is good. Get your education!" I want them to grow up and know that they can own businesses, not just work there. You can own it! That could be yours! That's what I want my kids to believe. I don't want them to think, oh when I get out of high school, I'm going to get me a job. I don't want them to think like that. I want my kids to continue to go to school, stay at home. I don't want them to just see nothing else than working a job, a job that probably won't be here in a couple more years. I want them to think long term. I want them to have long term goals not just short term.

A key component of this vision is a "*plan*," a set of concrete short- and long-term goals that serve to clarify one's aspirations. Said Keisha, "Some people just go in and just want to apply for [TANF], but they don't have a plan. . . . I had my paperwork all ready. I had my plan laid out." This was Keisha's second time applying for TANF. She first applied for AFDC in the mid-1990's after the birth of her first child when she was in the 11th grade and was, at that time, denied public benefits. After being denied assistance, she dropped out of school and entered the work force, holding jobs in the fields of customer service, child care, and housekeeping, none of which offered upward mobility for an individual who had not yet received her high school degree. Her most lucrative job was as a manager of a convenience store in a gas station, where she earned 10 dollars an hour,

before she was abruptly laid off when the station's ownership changed hands. Losing her job caused Keisha to reconceptualize her vision and formulate a new plan.

Keisha's vision described above is now being made a reality by her setting and achieving short- and long-term goals and presenting those goals and achievements as a plan to her TANF case manager. In late 2003 Keisha earned her GED and in early 2004 enrolled in a medical assistant program. Her long-term goals include attending school to become a registered nurse and investing in real estate:

> Keisha: I want to own a couple of properties for my kids, something that we have, that we own, something that they could say, we could just pass it from generation to generation. Everyone can make money off of this from what I start. My kids, their kids, their kids!
>
> Fiona: You're thinking very long term! [Both laugh]
>
> Keisha: We can do that and that's my vision, what I want to do and want to have.

While working to fulfill this vision by pursuing her education, Keisha has been participating in her college's work study program, a federally-subsidized work program for students demonstrating financial need. When she applied for public benefits in 2004, Keisha's youngest child was under a year old therefore qualifying her for exemption of her work requirements, but she chose nevertheless to do work-study: "They were saying that I could be exempt if I want to sit at home and I, I didn't want to take [the exemption] because eventually I would have to [work]." Like most program participants I met, a strong work ethic is not what Keisha lacks, and like Nia, Keisha's goals are concrete and generally realistic, although she has further to go educationally than Nia and more children demanding her time and energy.

Lydia, a 40-year old mother of four, likewise has a vision of the future and a very specific plan. Lydia was separated from her husband at the time that I met her. She had left him three years prior as a result of his escalating violent physical abuse. In addition to leaving her husband, she left a very full life behind her, including many close friends and two hair salons, businesses she had spent over 10 years developing and managing. Fearful that her husband might also hurt their four children, her youngest still a newborn, she gathered her children and moved away from the Northeast to Georgia where she had family members. She distinctly remembers leaving in April stating, “I didn't want to take the kids out of school, but it was one of those things, I just didn't have the choice.” Fearful for the future as it was then unfolding, she fled.

After taking a few months to recuperate and focus on her children, she began to revise her career goals admitting, “As I've gotten older and after the last baby, it became more strenuous to pull that off every day. Running back and forth to the shops, managing them, working in them. It just got to be a lot. Again, I'm not 20 anymore!” Wanting a job that would provide her with flexibility and a level of independence — having been a business owner, she wasn’t eager to relinquish the autonomy her prior position had afforded her — she ultimately decided on pharmacy as a career goal. She then met with several pharmacists and after researching their salaries enrolled in a two-year community college.

At the time of our interview, Lydia had transferred to a four-year university with the intention of completing her degree. However, her career and educational goals had changed. Upon attending some of the TANF programs offered to participants seeking to

professionalize their image, she determined that her skills as a cosmetologist could be put to use in such seminars as an image consultant. Although she was still considering pharmacy as a career, she feared that working as a pharmacist might not provide her with the daily satisfaction that comes with a job such as image consultant. As an image consultant, Lydia believes she can help other to feel good about themselves by improving their self-presentation. Additionally, such a job would allow her autonomy, yet would not be as burdensome physically and emotionally as owning and managing her own salon (which is often open seven days a week for up to 12 hours a day). Interestingly, Lydia used our interview as a means of researching her goals, asking what I knew of the TANF programs developed to provide such professional image training and querying me on the topic of grants and other federally available tangible resources. She was already in the process of copyrighting the name of her image consultant company and had successfully facilitated a professional image workshop for employees at a local hospital.

During the past three years, Lydia's vision never faltered and remained in line with her general definition of success:

> I define success as working your hardest to accomplish your goals and being happy for yourself because you're not always going to miss, make the mark, you know. If you're a couple of points below, fine. Everything else in my life at least lines up pretty well. My children are doing fine. They're all healthy. I wish I had a little bit more time at home with them, you know. Commuting life, that is a little taxing — but other than that, they're happy, so I'm happy. So success is, you know, heading toward a goal, that's a big part of it, heading toward a goal and then [being] happy doing something.

Although her vision remained intact, unanticipated life events required that she dramatically reconstruct her plan. Experiencing domestic abuse, becoming a single mother of four children, leaving a successful business, and starting a life in a new community, all in some way forced her to reevaluate and revise her short- and long-term goals, yet she always had a reasoned plan and the necessary goals to make it happen.

Not all plans, however, are so well-reasoned, as is evidenced in Candy's case. Unlike, Nia, Keisha, and Lydia, all of whom exhibited high levels of self-knowledge and confidence, Candy, a 20-year old mother attending community college, was self-assured but had been identified via testing as lacking some of the necessary skills that might ensure her success in terms of attaining her long-term career goals. At the time of our interview, Candy expressed a desire to teach high school English, but admitted that others had deemed her writing skills as being below par and her admittance to community college hinged on her passing a remedial English class, an issue that had very much frustrated her at the time.

Candy: Actually, I, I always wanted to be a teacher, and I kept saying, I'm going to be a teacher, but . . . I didn't score well on the SAT and ACT, so I had to take an entrance exam, which, I'm good in English, but they placed me in remedial English and in college math, so I went in with a strong mind, but I was just like . . . "O.k. I'm here [said very quietly]." And I did what I had to do, but I was just — didn't really care 'cause I was mad 'cause I was in remedial English. Other than that, school was fine.

Fiona: Why? What made you so angry?

Candy: 'Cause I knew I was smart. I was like, "I'm too smart to be in here." And my teacher's always saying "Oh, you're so smart." I know. So, I really — the teachers didn't really give me a hard time, but I was just upset that I was in there.

Fiona: Right. And so did you feel you just didn't try as hard as you could have because you were angry?

Candy: I mean, I still gave my best, but I was like "Why am I in here?"

Candy stated that she had ultimately made an "A" in the class, so now "it was fine" and she had moved on.

Clearly Candy's goals are, on one level, unrealistic given her relatively weak academic abilities. Furthermore, Candy was less poised and less professional in her self-presentation than many of the other students I interviewed. Although I was not convinced that she was going to become a high school teacher any time soon, I had to admire her determination. She was a go-getter even though she didn't yet project an image of someone likely to succeed. Despite being angered by administrators' decision to place her in remedial English, she enrolled in the class, completed it successfully, and was in the process of fulfilling her general education requirements before transferring to a four-year college or university. Would getting a degree help her to mature and improve her skills? Is she likely to keep on with her current educational goals? Answers to such questions are unknowable, but that she has a vision and that she has a plan that she has put into action is certain. Candy is an example of someone requiring a great deal of polish and there are no guarantees that she will continue on and succeed as a student. However, without an education and an opportunity to hone her academic, communication, and interpersonal skills, she is likely doomed for low-wage workforce.

Admittedly not every individual has as focused a plan as some of the aforementioned women. Lisa, a 29-year old mother who began her postsecondary

schooling studying computing, is still not sure in which field she might ultimately like to receive her degree:

> I'm thinking about the medical field. I'm also very interested in biology, so I was thinking maybe that I could get a biology degree, and work in a lab somewhere. What else? I thought about nursing also because it'll pay, DFACS will pay something for loans for some nurses and RN's. You know, and stuff like that, but . . . nursing will probably gross me out, but it's like I could be an RN in two years if I go to DeKalb Tech now. So, I mean I'm thinking about that. I'm thinking about I — I love English and I was thinking about going back, but I really don't want to be — I don't want to teach high school or elementary school or middle school. So, I would have, I would be in school for awhile, if I were to teach anything other than that in English, so I'm, right now, I'm doing a lot of research and seeing what I like.

Although Lisa appears scattered in her presentation of potential educational goals, it is important that I draw attention to several contextual factors that may be shaping her response. The first issue deals specifically with methodology and interviewer bias. Lisa is one of the few people I interviewed for this project with whom I had previously engaged in sustained conversations. She worked at my daughter's daycare center, and for several months, our children were in the same class. From prior conversations with me, Lisa knew that I had taught composition and literature at a university she had attended in the past and we had sometimes talked about her returning to school. Soon after our interview, she shared some of her personal poetry asking that I provide some feedback on her writing. I cannot help but wonder if by acknowledging her interest in English, she was in her own way presenting to me her multidimensionality and on some level attempting to reveal to me that her own interests in some ways paralleled mine. Additionally, knowing my educational background, she may have been willing to use our

interview to explore her dreams of researching literature, yet she simultaneously realized that such a program of study might be impractical for her given her current life situation and her goal to complete a full program of study within two years. Lisa had recently been accepted by the state's flagship university and she was in the process of determining whether or not she could afford to take up the offer and, if so, which program of study she might choose. Although she had completed several years of postsecondary schooling, reaching junior level standing, she felt that gaining acceptance to this university opened up possibilities for her regarding her educational and occupational goals.

Finally, it is clear that the primary reason nursing came up as potential program of study is because DFCS will support such a choice. Under PRWORA, states are encouraged to work with religious, charitable, and other private organizations to deliver welfare services to clients (U.S. House of Representatives 1996:20). Jobs in the medical field are highly touted by many case managers and administrators working for organizations having contracts with DFCS, a fact that was evidenced in the number of times I heard references to the kinds of assistance the welfare office and associated organizations would provide for nursing programs in terms of supplying uniforms and equipment and even going so far as to pay tuition fees. Of the 20 TANF participants I interviewed for this project, seven were pursuing degrees or certifications in the medical field that would result in entry-level medical technology jobs or nursing. I can only speculate as to whether or not Lisa would have even considered nursing if it weren't emphasized so much as an acceptable choice by case managers and TANF participants

themselves, who frequently talk with each other swapping stories and strategies in the DFCS offices' waiting rooms and lobbies. And, we should perhaps question the long-term effects of such an emphasis on medical jobs that serves in part to replicate the gendered and racialized hierarchy of medical careers in many of our nation's hospitals (Barbee 1993, Glenn 1992).

Although Lisa is not as focused in terms of her career goals as are many of the students I interviewed, she successfully applied and was accepted to a highly regarded, local postsecondary institution. We cannot know whether or not her degree at that or any other institution will pay off, but like every person I interviewed for this study, Lisa had a current plan and a vision in harmony with mainstream values and aspirations. Even Anne, Lisa's 47-year old mother who has been battling alcohol and drug addictions all of her adult life and whose male partner cracked her head open with an ax three years prior leaving her with permanent brain damage that is affecting her ability to learn, is going to school with the hopes of attaining certification in sign language.

Of course, as social researchers have long noted, the chasm between attitudes and behaviors disrupts the making of easy correlations, and good intentions promise nothing in terms of actualized results. Not all of the goals cited here are realistic. If fulfilled, not all will guarantee a life of economic stability and happiness. Whether or not all of these individuals will succeed in keeping much less *attaining* their goals is unknowable. However, that they *have* concrete educational goals is clear, a fact belied by existing stereotypes of lazy, uninspired welfare recipients sitting at home, plotting out means of defrauding the government to increase the amount of their welfare checks. Some of them

may have questionable skills and abilities, but they know what they want; and what they want and how they want to get it is in line with mainstream values and beliefs.

So why does this stereotype persist? Examining such a question is important because the policies promoted in PRWORA and in the many bills put forth by the House of Representatives and the Senate since 2002 to reauthorize TANF are grounded in assumptions that poor parents requiring welfare assistance need time limits and work requirements to spur them into action. Such stereotypes permeate the thinking of not only politicians and policymakers but also the general public they serve, including many welfare participants themselves (see also Seccombe 1999, Jennings 2004). In the previous chapter, I presented a brief history of the evolution of welfare stereotypes. To more fully understand why those stereotypes *persist*, particularly among welfare recipients who are in fact most hurt by their perpetuation, I first examine *what* such a stereotype means to those individuals on the front lines of welfare: TANF participants and their case managers.

DECONSTRUCTING THE "WELFARE QUEEN" & HER "PROJECT MENTALITY"

In interview after interview, I encountered the "welfare queen" in one guise or another. Most often she appeared cloaked in discussions about a way of life resulting in dependency and poverty. She was lazy and unmotivated, living day-to-day and having no vision of the future. She was comfortable with her current meager income and often selfishly spent her money on her hair and nails instead of buying clothes for her children.

She got a check just like her friends and was jealous of anyone she knew who strove to get ahead. Very basically, she had a "*project mentality*."

To more fully understand why this stereotype persists, particularly amongst welfare recipients who are in fact most hurt by its perpetuation, I first examine what such a stereotype means to those individuals on the front lines of welfare. In the eyes of the women I interviewed what made them different from all those welfare queens? According to Anne, who participated in both the AFDC and TANF programs on and off throughout the 1980's and 90's, the divide that separates her from "them" is rooted in both her psyche and a geographical place:

> I don't know — I'm not a project person. I didn't want to live in any projects, you know. I don't have a project mentality. . . . I'm not used to that surrounding. It's kind of late for me to start. I'm going to stick out like a sore thumb for real over there!

When Anne left her husband and was left to raise two young children on her own, she stated that she sought to maintain her prior standard of living by choosing apartments across town as far away from the projects as possible. However, Anne's daughter Lisa clarified in her interview that although she and her mother did not live in the city's housing projects, their home environment was in many ways just as bad:

> I didn't want to live there because the environment is just bad, and I, I would never bring my child to my house. I mean I would go visit, but I wouldn't raise him in that environment. . . .It's just ugly, where, where she lived and I, the, the entire environment.

For Lisa, the bad environment was augmented by her mother's alcohol and drug addictions and the spousal abuse her mother endured from her then husband. Nevertheless, from Anne's standpoint, there *was* a difference between living inside or

outside the projects, and she was not alone in her attributing the emergence of such a project mentality to a very specific geographic location.

Katerina, a 35-year old mother studying aerospace engineering and business, similarly equates a project mentality with a specific place as she explains the importance of attaining a college degree:

> You're trying to get a job with 30 some thousand or 50 some thousand a year, so you, so one, you never go back on TANF and two, you can support your family being a single parent, at least you can have some semblance of support and three you can find housing outside the projects. And then you change your whole demographic and whole mindset and everything else, which [post]secondary education helps you do.

Katerina further noted that this geographical location in turn shapes the network of people with whom one will interact, a theme repeated by many participants. For example, in describing her support network of friends, Lisa stated, “I try to surround myself with . . . people who have the same goals and integrity that I do. So, it — I let them influence me.” Lisa contrasts her network of responsible close friends to a former roommate’s mother, whose apparent satisfaction with the life she was able to maintain with her meager TANF benefits reflects her project mentality:

> Because so many, so many people are on TANF and they are comfortable. They don't care about going to school or working anywhere. My roommate's mother has always been on TANF, forever, you know. The only reason she had, the only reason she got a job lately was because she had to because they were going to kick her off. It was her first time ever working in like twenty-something years.

When I asked Lisa if TANF’s policies were effective for someone like her former roommate’s mother, Lisa answered, “For someone like her, yes, because it will push her

to go out there and find a job." Lisa was sensitive, however, to the complexities of such stereotypes and program requirements made evident in her immediately reflective analysis of her answer: "Maybe that's a double standard. I don't know." Yet Lisa ended this section of our interview, restating that her roommate's mother needed pushing and that the strict TANF guidelines were good for "people like her."

Case managers likewise drew explicit connections between geographic locations, social networks, and cycles of poverty. Ariana, an employee of Eastern Urban County's DFCS office for six years — the last three years of which she served in a supervisory role — explains why she feels some people lack encouragement to improve their life situation:

> You're living in a Section 8 apartment and your mom is here and your grandma and your aunt is here, you've reached your goal in life. You're in a Section 8 apartment. I mean, you know! And a lot of times too, our clients fail because 'I still have to go back into that environment. Now that I'm trying to better myself, everybody around me is not' . . . . When you go back it's like throwbacks. You can't go back to where you did drugs. You're going to do drugs again. . . . And a lot of them are pulled back in. 'How much you making? Well, you could stay home and pull that! Cause now, now you gotta pay rent. You could have stayed home doing nothing. You was watching the stories, now you gotta go to work!' You know just little things like that, and people are like, 'Well, this is all I have — this network of people. I can't let them be mad at me.' So it, it's just a lot of other issues, I think.

In this section of our interview, Ariana homes in on the social complexities of living in a specific community defined by its poverty. Because that physical environment is an integral component defining one's network of social contacts, most often friends and family, simply removing oneself is not an easy, nor often, a desirable option. For many

individuals, leaving such an environment means leaving not only the physical structures one inhabits but the network of social relationships one has developed, some of which are positive in terms of the feelings of social integration they generate.

Chris, a supervisor for a fatherhood program contracted out by Eastern Urban County's DFCS office connects a project mentality to a geographic place even more directly: "When you grow up in these types of environments, you have a totally different mindset." Chris then clarified his statement by citing a specific example that he has shared with local political decision-makers as a means of engendering support and developing a more fully-informed understanding of the structurally-based obstacles facing TANF participants:

> One of the examples that . . . I share with some of our legislators, like you've got the Capitol, that sits right there, at the base of [Main Street] which starts like money markets of Georgia and less than a half a mile from there is one of the poorest regions of the state, [Urban] Homes. So you've got that right there in the shadow of the capitol. And if someone grew up there, in [Urban] Homes as opposed to someone who grew up just six blocks up at [Southern State University], you know, uh, living in the dorm right over there, they would have two totally different views of what [this city] was like simply because of that environment, what they have to deal with everyday, their association with the government. . . . When [the police] drive into [Urban] Homes, they automatically assume the worst of everybody over there. They come from an environment where—while some of us come from an environment, if you ever get lost, you are told, if you ever get lost, find a policeman, tell him who you are and if you have your address, he will bring you home . But then you've got those that grew up in that environment. If they see a policeman, they run like a big brother who sees policemen and runs. That's the thing. [The police] are the one that's usually taking away their family members, not helping them to get back to their family

> members, so all of those kinds of things, they deal with them as obstacles and hindrances because they see that as an arm of the government.

In sharing this example, Chris is attempting to explain how such a project mentality develops and how its emergence is tied specifically to a geographic place marked primarily by its access to or evident lack of institutional resources. The relationships of individuals to the larger community are in very fundamental ways shaped by external cues including race, gender and, as a means of indicating one's class and status, the block one lives on.

In their connection of a certain mentality to a geographic location and a network of individuals, Katherine, Anne, Lisa, Ariana, and Chris are describing an aspect of concentrated poverty highlighted by William Julius Wilson (1996, 1987) in his oft-referenced analyses of impoverished urban neighborhoods in the United States. As described in the first chapter, Wilson attributes the geographic and social isolation of a disproportionate number of African Americans living in poor, inner-city neighborhoods to larger-scale structural issues, including the loss of localized jobs and sources of neighborhood investment. Nonetheless, the popular view that such isolation both serves as a marker of and emerges from a "culture of poverty" created and perpetuated by a population of pathological individuals persistently prevails in the public's consciousness.

Well known to researchers of social inequality, the "culture of poverty" perspective became defined as such in the late 1950's. Coinage of the phrase is commonly attributed to anthropologist Oscar Lewis (1959, 1966) who devoted much of his professional life to focused examinations of the social dynamics shaping the lives of the poor in the U.S. and Latin America. Fundamentally the "culture of poverty"

perspective has evolved into a means of explaining poverty as resulting from the deterioration of individuals' values and morals which produces aberrant behaviors due to those individuals' immersion in a pathological culture. That is, when a person's parents, friends, and neighbors sell or use drugs, abuse their kids, and avoid work, that person is believed to be more likely to normalize and rationalize such behaviors and eventually take on those behaviors herself, thereby creating a vicious cycle of self-perpetuating poverty. According to such a viewpoint, the "projects" and other markers of an economically disinvested community — boarded-up store fronts, crumbling sidewalks, barricaded schools — are all perversely attributed to the negligence of that neighborhood's undeserving inhabitants.

Such a perspective that locates the causes of poverty in the lives of the poor themselves, was propelled to the forefront of poverty scholarship beginning in the 1960's with Daniel Patrick Moynihan's 1965 report *The Negro Family*, and in the subsequent conservative writings of Edward Banfield (1970), Charles Murray (1984), Lawrence Mead (1986), and George Gilder (1981), all of which dramatically influenced perceptions of welfare and welfare policy throughout the 1980's and 1990's.[16] Whether or not Lewis himself subscribed to contemporary notions of what has popularly come to be understood as the "culture of poverty" perspective is up for debate (see Harvey 1996), but that the perspective has gained influence in the eyes of most policy makers is evident in their actions, represented most clearly in the moral dimensions of current national welfare

[16] For an expanded summary description of the ways some of these scholars caricatured the poor whilst relying on a faulty logic with no verifiable basis in the reality of welfare, see Hays' (2003) insightful text *Flat Broke With Children: Women in the Age of Welfare Reform* (pp. 124-128).

policy that in its language focuses less on the structural causes of poverty identified by Wilson and myriad other historical and contemporary sociologists (see for example Bowles and Gintis 1976, Jencks 1992, Katz 1986, Marx 1887 [1976], Mills 1956) than on the marital and occupational statuses of program participants.

Reflections of a political discourse that emphasizes issues of morality in discussions of poverty are clearly evidenced in the responses of many of the welfare participants and social workers I interviewed. Yet, as presented in the interview excerpts above, so many participants also highlighted in one way or another the role played by one's physical environment. This point is important, for such references to an outside environment acknowledge the role of structural forces in shaping those environments. Importantly, as both Katerina and Ariana communicated, the project mentality or "mindset" is a *product* of an environment; that is, such a mindset is a result of living in poverty and is not necessarily inherent to the individual. Once one leaves the environment, one leaves behind the mindset.

Despite this acknowledgment of the role of one's environment on one's mindset or mentality, most individuals I interviewed ultimately focused not on the macro-level forces shaping poverty, which are admittedly more abstract and sometimes more difficult to identify, but on the individual choices of people living in such an environment. It slowly became clear that many of these participants also adhered to traditional "culture of poverty" explanations in trying to make sense of the influence of those environments. They claimed to know too many people who had given up and had resorted to "working the system" to obtain what they needed to "get by" until the next check arrived. Any

structural-level analysis of the social forces resulting in the production of the projects and of poverty was obscured by these tales of a friend who was just “too comfortable” and unwilling to work.

What I found, however, upon encouraging some TANF participants to describe more fully the experiences of friends or family members who were perceived to be lacking in motivation to improve their economic situation and leave the TANF program was a picture that gained definition as more information was shared. For example, Keisha lamented the fact that her best friend who worked at a local fast-food restaurant has refused to pursue a degree with the goal of improving her life and creating opportunities for her children. However, later in our interview, Keisha revealed that her friend had been diagnosed with a fatal medical condition and that as a result wanted to “do everything quick.” When I asked whether or not Keisha felt her friend was prevented from making long term goals because of the realities of her health, Keisha said, “That’s what she’s saying. ‘I don’t have much time.’” But then Keisha was unrelenting in her criticism, saying that her friend just doesn’t have a positive attitude and that is why she wouldn’t think beyond the short term.

Undoubtedly a conflux of forces are shaping the semblance of reality being constructed by Keisha. Although Keisha acknowledges the potentially negative effect of her friend’s medical condition on her desire to improve her economic status in life, she nonetheless blames her friend for giving in and “being too comfortable” on her meager income. Keisha is not unusual in her making such a judgment. Many of the TANF participants I interviewed sought to differentiate themselves from individuals like

Keisha's friend. In the following section, I examine in more depth possible explanations for the individual-level processes that result in TANF participants blaming other TANF participants for not appropriately using or even abusing the TANF program.

THE ENDURING POWER OF THE "QUEEN'S" REIGN

So many of the TANF participants with whom I spoke explicitly expressed their support for many of TANF's most stringent and punitive policies, including the time limits which effectively eliminated entitlement. Nia responded to a question regarding the perceived positive and negative effects of welfare reform by stating,

> I kind of agree with the Personal Responsibility Act because I see that, although I've found myself in rough situations, I also know that I was able to get up and go get a job in between if I really just needed to. And, I feel like, you know, they gave their, the four years or however long they give you to receive your, to receive the benefits, I do feel that's long enough for you to get a college education. So I feel that the four years that they allow you to receive TANF, I think that that's, that's enough time for a person to come up with some type of life goal or some type of four year plan to get yourself into some type of transitional period where you won't need this anymore.

Nia's comments were in line with the responses of others I interviewed for this study, many of whom expressed concern over welfare fraud and abuse.

A great deal of research has sought to address the question, why are popularized "culture of poverty" discourses so appealing to people of all classes and backgrounds, even when a person's own experiences upon close examination seemingly contradict such facile explanations? Furthermore, why do so many welfare participants themselves willingly accept and subscribe to stereotypes of welfare usage? As one might expect,

findings within research purporting to provide answers to such questions are complex and varied.

Upon interviewing 47 female welfare recipients, 29 of whom were African American and 18 of whom were white, Seccombe, James, and Battle-Walters (1998) similarly found that recipients themselves often subscribe to negative welfare stereotypes, believing that most welfare use can be attributed to "laziness, personal shortcomings, or other inadequacies" (p. 861). Although all of the women interviewed by Seccombe, James and Battle-Walters were likely to blame structural factors for their own reliance on welfare cash assistance, they resisted allowing the same kinds of explanations for other welfare recipients. The researchers conclude that "the hegemony of the individualist perspective is one of the most stubborn barriers to dealing constructively with poverty and welfare use" (p. 863). This perspective is deeply inscribed in U.S. American culture reflected in texts as varied as the U.S. Constitution and Horatio Alger-like personal success stories advertised daily on the covers of popular magazines papering check-out stands at grocery stores across the country. It is clearly much easier to assign blame to a visible, economically-poor parent rather than to the abstract and highly complex social forces that have served to create and maintain the various social inequalities shaping that parent's opportunities.

Welfare participants are not immune to these "blame the victim," individualistic ideologies and, ironically, may have something to gain from subscribing to and perpetuating welfare queen stereotypes. First, individualistic ideologies that promote the belief that the U.S. is a meritocratic society where hard work is not only positively

recognized but highly rewarded provide individuals, particularly economically disenfranchised individuals, with a sense that through work they can improve their future life chances. Furthermore, as Herbert Gans (1972, 1995) has consistently revealed in his functional analyses of the "uses of undeservingness," in contemporary U.S. society, such ideologies also provide the means of conveniently creating a deviant sub-group against which a dominant group's morals and values can be legitimized. Such normative functions in turn fuel economic and political functions which rely on an undeserving *other* such as the welfare queen to absolve failed social institutions of responsibility for maintaining inequalities and further justify the cutting of funds for such institutions given their perceived lack of success. Such a logic informed the arguments of social conservatives Charles Murray (1984) and Lawrence Mead (1986) who sought to rationalize the elimination of social welfare programs because they were perceived as perpetuating poverty by promoting reliance on federal or state funds.

Gans (1995) also cites two microsocial functions of undeservingness: risk reduction and the supplying of objects of revenge and repulsion. By believing in an undeserving stereotype such as the welfare queen, individuals, particularly economically-poor individuals, have at their disposal someone who is worse off than they are and with whom they can positively contrast themselves as a means of preserving their own understanding of self. The ironic result, however, is that those individuals who might benefit most from the deconstruction of such a stereotype run the risk of losing their perceived present status as better than "them."

To more comprehensively understand the motivational processes that result in an individual relying on such stereotypes in defense of the self, it is helpful to consider social psychological theories of motivation and self concept. Frustrated with the focus in much socialization theory on the influence of social structures and institutions, Viktor Gecas (1986) introduced a theory of motivation to explain how aspects of one's self-concept fundamentally shape individual motivation and agency. Relying on Rosenberg's (1979) definition of self-concept as being "the totality of an individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object" (cited in Gecas 1986: 133), Gecas argued that three aspects of ones' self-concept—self esteem, self efficacy, and authenticity—serve as motivators in the process of socialization. That is, he writes, "by virtue of having a self-concept the individual is motivated to maintain and enhance it [self esteem], to conceive of it as efficacious and consequential [self-efficacy], and to experience it as meaningful or real [authenticity]" (138). Very clearly, a reliance on stereotypes based on a belief in undeservingness can directly fulfill the simultaneous functions of increasing one's self esteem, as Gans argues, and verifying the authenticity of one's sense of self, both of which are necessary sources of motivation. Furthermore, because these three aspects of self concept are interrelated in influence and effect, an increase in self esteem and authenticity will indirectly shape an individual's sense of self-efficacy, the third source of motivation in maintaining one's self-concept. Gecas's theory of motivation serves to highlight the complex relationship between individuals and social structures that may result in individuals' reliance on negative stereotypes as a means of self preservation and motivation.

Once motivated, the TANF participants I interviewed employed a variety of impression management strategies often resulting in what Erving Goffman (1959) described as “idealized performances” to actively manage the stigma associated with participating in TANF programs and to preserve a self concept that was authentic and socially acceptable. Additionally, and importantly, in preserving such a self-concept and in seeking social acceptance via these idealized performances, Goffman argued that individuals are simultaneously reflecting, celebrating, and legitimizing a society’s dominant values and morals (p. 35). Note that this process of legitimation, is similar to that cited by Gans, although in the process of labeling a population as undeserving, values and morals are clarified and legitimized not through their presence but via their perceived absence. It only makes sense that I, as an interviewer, will primarily view idealized performances during my interviews. Although many of the TANF participants whom I interviewed acknowledged their personal weaknesses and admitted to having made “bad” choices, every individual attempted to distance her or himself in some way from the generalized stereotypes surrounding welfare, thereby legitimizing — albeit sometimes unintentionally — constructions of welfare queen stereotypes..

For example, no one I interviewed admitted to living in the projects, although I observed that several individuals lived in substandard apartments in run-down complexes primarily catering to poor or working-class tenants. Living outside of the projects, or at least not bringing it up during our interview, may have been one way for participants to differentiate themselves from negative stereotypes. Anne’s statement: “I’m not a project person . . . I’m going to stick out like a sore thumb for real over there,” reveals, in very

explicit terms, her belief that individuals with a project mentality exist, and in making such a statement Anne reinforces stigmatized stereotypes and a belief in the culture of poverty. By distancing themselves from the projects either in reality or in conversation, the TANF participants I interviewed strove to define themselves in opposition to all "those welfare mothers" with project mentalities.

In addition to situating themselves outside of the projects, many TANF participants identified ways in which their behaviors, values, and beliefs differed from those of the stereotypical welfare mother with a project mentality. As Tanya, a 47-year old mother with five children who was preparing to pursue her doctorate in business finance, stressed in her interview:

> I think I need to make this clear, when people hear that you have five kids, they automatically assume they're by different men. And, um, not only aren't they by different men, they're by my husband. So there's just all this stigma that goes on with people who are in impoverished situations.

Although here on one hand Tanya is confronting welfare stereotypes, she is also clarifying that she is not like those women whose life experiences may substantiate this particular facet of the stereotype. She felt it was important for me and others to know that not only were her five children fathered by the same man, but she was married to that man. Although she never stated that she felt she was superior to those TANF participants who were not married when their children were born or who had children by different men, by stating that she is not like such participants she relied on the construction of welfare stereotypes to project her own experiences in a favorable light. The unintended

consequence of such a reliance perpetuates the good/bad, deserving/undeserving dichotomy that results in the stigmatization of many welfare participants.

Frequently participants presented their valuation of education as evidence that they did not subscribe to a project mentality. When I asked individuals how their families responded to their applying for welfare, many of those interviewed emphasized the temporariness of their current financial dilemmas and as best they could differentiated themselves from the image of welfare queens wholly dependent on "the system." Nia stated,

> [My family] never, like the negative stereotypes, they never associated that with me because, I guess you know when it's your family, they know you. They know your thoughts, or you expressed it in the things that you're trying to do in life, so like I said they always knew that this was just a stepping point and that I was in the process of trying to make a transition in my life.

Importantly, Nia revealed in this statement that not only does she believe she is different from the stereotype, but that those people to whom she is most close also see her as different from the stereotype. She believes that her life goals, particularly her goal of attaining a degree and pursuing a professional career demonstrate that she does not exhibit a project mentality.

Marie, a 23-year old mother studying sociology, similarly used going to school as a way to demonstrate to others, including her family, that she did not expect to end up embodying the stereotype of a welfare-dependent, young mother:

> I knew that if I got a higher education and made something of myself, then I could prove to everybody that a person doesn't always end up where they expect. And, and my parents expect a

> lot out of me. And I, I felt like I disappointed them in the first place, having the kids early. So this is just some way to make them proud.

By taking university classes, Marie felt she was defying expectations based on welfare stereotypes that she might end up living in the projects and dependent on "the system." Furthermore, she believed that her involvement in an educational activity demonstrated the value she placed on education in general, a value she wanted to communicate and transmit to her children. Jennings (2004) who likewise interviewed students participating in TANF programs, determined that for many women receiving welfare benefits involving themselves in education was a way to "transcend controlling images of welfare mothers" and attain a level of social respect (p. 123-24). In attempting to attain social respect, however, these student TANF participants relied, intentionally or not, on ideologically wrought dichotomous categorizations of welfare participants.

Here, it is important to acknowledge a fundamental difference in the way that the concept welfare queen was used by many TANF participants and social workers. Some individuals, like Lisa, Anne, Keisha, Chris, and Ariana explicitly stated that they knew people who embodied the stereotype, representing it in concrete physical form. Others like Nia, Tanya, and Marie discussed the stereotype in the abstract, never applying it to someone they knew and never revealing whether or not they believed *anyone* receiving welfare benefits fit the stereotype. However, although individuals may be differently motivated to define welfare stereotypes in concrete or abstract terms, the net effect too often is the continuing legitimization of the welfare queen stereotype. That is, while debunking the stereotype as it might pertain to their own lives, these individuals often

relied on the welfare queen to represent that which they were not—in trying to destroy her, they paradoxically kept her alive.

Not only did some women attempt to differentiate themselves from others whom they perceived to have such a mentality, they would confess to me that at one time in the past they too had exhibited such a project mentality. Throughout our interview, Keisha, who as described above chided her friend for being "too comfortable" and for not trying to better herself, attributed the welfare office's refusal to assist her eight years ago to a variety of possible factors, including that she had applied under a different program—AFDC not TANF—and in a different county—Urban City not Eastern County. However, in her attempts to explain the differences between then and now, she mostly emphasized personal factors, including her former tendency towards exhibiting resignation contrasted with her present assertiveness:

> There's a lot of benefits a lot of people don't know about. And they don't try to find out. They just want to do what their friend's doing. Get a check every month. They just want to sit at home and get that check every month. They don't understand that the benefit's a stepping stone. It's helping you reach certain goals in life. . . . [I didn't think] I could be trying to do something else. I was getting more comfortable. I was getting too comfortable. And that's what a lot of people do. That's what my friends are doing. They're just comfortable.

Once Keisha was jolted out of her comfort zone as a result of being laid off, she stated that she then formed a plan and, having learned how to properly "present herself," went down to the DFCS office to apply for benefits. From her perspective, having a vision, learning how to present herself, and seeing welfare as a "stepping stone" differentiated her from her peers and from her former self. Throughout her interview, Keisha lamented

the attitudes and behaviors exhibited by so many of her friends. She used them and visions of her former self as a contrast against which to evaluate her present situation.

All of these participants relied on abstract or concrete representations of the welfare queen stereotype to enhance their self-esteem, validate their sense of authenticity, and boost their feelings of self-efficacy. Although nearly every person I interviewed shared at least one story regarding their being made to feel embarrassed or stigmatized for their participation in welfare programs, everyone, ironically, benefited from the welfare mother stereotype. At least "she" was worse than they were, even when "she" was a past incarnation of themselves.

DEALING WITH KERNELS OF TRUTH IN THE STEREOTYPES

In the first part of this chapter, I presented summary descriptions of some of the visions and plans voiced by several of the TANF participants whom I interviewed. I argued that the expression of these long and short term goals demonstrated, in a fundamental way, how these individuals defied the stereotypes surrounding welfare usage. However, in examining stigma and the usage of stereotypes of stigmatized populations within society, it would be disingenuous to ignore the diversity evidenced *within* stigmatized populations. That is, although all welfare participants are stigmatized, not all participants are stigmatized equally.

Within welfare literature, it is common to separate out the "hard-to-serve" cases from the majority of welfare recipients. Those individuals deemed as "hardest-to-serve" by researchers, social workers and legislators may have been identified as such for a

variety of reasons. They may have borne five or more children, they may be addicted to drugs or alcohol, they may suffer from severe psychological or physical ailments, or they may prefer staying at home with their kids rather than going to work as is demanded by current welfare requirements. In her 2003 book *Flat Broke With Children*, Hays (2003) has been credited for acknowledging the complexities defining the lives of "hard-to-serve" cases and for identifying patterns of behaviors that most individuals would agree upon as being deviant.

In her analysis, Hays identifies four "syndromes" that these hardest-to-serve cases might exhibit to varying degrees: the "Burger Barn Syndrome," the "Candy-Store Syndrome," the "System-Screwed-Me Syndrome," and the "Lorena-Bobbit Syndrome." On one level, Hays argues, individuals suffering from these syndromes appear to be engaging in countercultural and/or often destructive behaviors that result in their perpetual poverty. For example, in her description of the "Candy-Store Syndrome," Hays describes Joy, a 25-year old welfare participant whose "history of sexual relationships, her drug abuse, and . . . theft sound like the story of a kid of a candy shop, just consuming everything because it looks tasty on the surface" (p. 197). Although on one level we may justifiably define Joy's behavior as deviant, Hays argues, when viewed more broadly outside the spectrum of welfare and poverty, Joy's pattern of behaviors "mimics much more widespread patterns in American culture" (p. 199). Joy is no more sexually active than some college students her age and her valuation of high-priced Nikes and extensive video entertainment systems reveals that her desires are actually in synch with millions of other viewers of commercials and consumers of such products. She may

not, argues Hays, "represent the portrait of frugality and careful budgeting that is true of most welfare mothers, and is also what the American public wants to see among the poor," (p. 199) but she is not as definitively deviant in her behaviors and values as one might initially conclude.[17]

Fundamentally, Hays determines that even those welfare participants marked as deviant, a well-publicized group that is in reality a minority of the total welfare population, nonetheless subscribe to a logic consisting of mainstream values. Yet, such a connection often becomes obscured either by individuals' behaviors resulting from a lack of resources or because the context of their impoverished situation produces a schemata of acceptable values and behaviors that differs from those of more positively perceived social groups such as college students or middle-class married mothers. Gwendolyn Mink (1998) explicitly addresses the incongruities presented in politically conservative discourse surrounding family values by asking, "Why should poor single mothers have to work outside the home?" (p. 103). A middle-class married mother choosing to stay at home with her children is deemed as acceptable, even *desirable*, and her prioritizing family over job is applauded and perceived as evidence of her family values; whereas poor mothers are expected to participate in the workforce to boost her self-esteem and to demonstrate to her children the value of working. Staying at home is seen as a luxury for only those who can afford it. For poor mothers staying at home is a mark of laziness; for

[17] According to Hays (2003), the "Burger-Barn Syndrome" refers to cultural patterns of action by women who claim that they value staying at home with their children rather than taking dead-end, low-wage jobs. The "System-Screwed Me Syndrome" refers to actions by women who see the government and big business as exploitative institutions that are deserving of a form of counter exploitation via welfare fraud or abuse. Finally, the "Lorena Bobbit Syndrome" refers to patterns of action employed by women who claim to not value the contributions of men, evidenced in the ways they come to define family (p.181).

wealthier mothers, staying at home demonstrates a commitment to family. As stated above, however, such incongruities and nuanced complexities are often overlooked in public discourse because the individual is a much more visible object of critique than the social structures and processes that shape stratification in general.

At this point, I should note that unlike Hays, I was not, for the most part, interviewing the "hard-to-serve" cases that often constitute the "kernel of truth" at the basis of any stereotype regarding welfare usage. Most of the individuals I interviewed were not drug addicts and did not suffer from debilitating physical or mental ailments that prevented them from attaining and retaining regular employment. The majority of individuals I interviewed had long ago chosen to further their educations as a means of increasing their life chances of success, and most saw themselves as more capable and more resourceful than many of the welfare applicants and participants populating DFCS's waiting rooms. In other words, they were TANF's "most likely to succeed."

But not everyone I interviewed convinced me that their reliance on public assistance would be transitory and not every participant would evoke sympathy from the general taxpaying public regarding their current needs. Although I was interviewing "the most likely to succeed," I was troubled by how even these individuals could be reduced to cardboard stereotypes that might work to preserve the myth of the welfare queen.

I now reintroduce you to Tanya, the 44-year old mother of five children, who stressed she differed from the welfare stereotype because all of her children had the same father and that father was her husband. Tanya, while receiving welfare benefits during

the early 90's attained both bachelor's and master's degrees in business administration. Her cocaine-addicted husband recently left her and at the time of our interview she was seeking to pursue her doctorate degree in business while participating in the TANF program. As you can imagine, case managers at the local DFCS office did not respond positively to her requests. Why did she have so many kids? Why did she continue to have kids even after she learned her husband was addicted to alcohol and cocaine? Why can't she get a decent-paying job with those degrees? Why should the government support her family while she goes on to get her *doctorate*? Why is she still dependent on the system? Underlying all of these questions is the assumption that Tanya did something very wrong and that she should no longer need public assistance. She is simply a career student looking for handouts from the "system."

Here is more of Tanya's story. Her degrees took her nearly 17 years to complete. Having begun her postsecondary education at age 18, Tanya attended four different schools, including a highly selective women's college in the Northeast, and ultimately received her terminal degrees, a B.A. and an M.B.A., in 1995. Degrees in hand, she was able to locate a well-paying job as an accountant and then a financial systems administrator for several large-scale companies in the Southeast. Attaining this level of success wasn't easy, nor, as she soon discovered, was it enough. Tanya admitted "I think I'm kind of over on the strange side because I do have a master's, and my salary immediately from graduation doubled." She then confided that her husband was addicted to crack cocaine before he abandoned her and the children. He began using the drug two or three years after they met, yet she stayed with him, hoping he could overcome his

increasingly destructive addiction. Eventually, she began to realize his condition was worsening rather than improving, but she had grown dependent on his help, albeit limited, around the house in order to reach her goals:

> Then [I was] trying to figure how to untwine myself from him basically because I was dependent on him basically for certain things like watching the kids when I needed to go to class and things, and, then, so I basically deferred doing anything drastic until after I got my degree because I was in [the Northeast]. I hated it. I didn't have any family or friends up there. So basically I was very dependent on him and I only — I had three children. I had two and while I was in school, I had three more, and so I was very drained. I worked, I went to school, and one more thing on my plate — it wasn't going to happen. Something was going to have to give, and I was not willing to forgo getting my degree.

Tanya was clearly focused on her educational goals, later evidenced by her attaining her degree, but she did not explain why she continued having children with her husband even after having learned of his debilitating condition. Although she presents her experience as one in which she struggled and survived, I cannot help but be perplexed by some of her choices. Yes, she may have had little control over her husband's addictions and her decision to stay with him was likely motivated by a variety of complex reasons. Family researchers have long acknowledged the multiplicity of reasons resulting in such a potentially self-destructive decision and have stressed the difficulties in untangling the numerous emotional, economic, and structural issues that may result in women and men remaining in mentally or physically dysfunctional relationships (Ferraro and Johnson 1983; Baker 1997). But why did Tanya continue to have more children — who, as any parent knows, demand a great deal of time and attention — while living in this already dysfunctional environment?

Although I cannot sufficiently explain away her seemingly poor decision to bear more children, I do know that she is educationally capable — having already received her bachelor's and master's degrees — and has proven herself as capable of succeeding in the workplace. Yet the job she attained as a result of eventually attaining her educational goals took her away from her home, and she has presently determined that her children need her presence more than ever before: "I needed to be more available for the kids. There was no one there. They were — they had lost their minds! So, I backed out to start a business to try to work from home and I could more control over my house in that way." Because the business she intends to start is requiring a great deal of research, she reasoned that she might as well go back to school again for her doctorate in business thereby attaining a degree for work she was already doing on her own. She began to explain her situation stating, "If my family size wasn't so big and if I had my father here, I probably still would have been working." But the fact is, she didn't have anyone around whom she trusted and who was willing to watch her five children — her husband, whose ability to help was marred by his addictions, and her father were now gone. Her job would only offer her limited flexibility, so she was now out on her own, juggling the needs of her children and her educational goals.

Although Tanya didn't mention it during our interview, Lydia, a friend of Tanya's who, as described above, was similarly restructuring her career and educational goals, shared some more information regarding Tanya's life. "She's going through the system because she has a couple children that are just sickly. . . . Even though she does have a degree, she can't just jump up and go. One of them actually gets some kind of palsy and

his eyes actually bulge out!" Lydia admired the way Tanya was working creatively to address the needs of her children and viewed Tanya's educational goals of worthy of support.

Tanya had recently attended a two-day conference in Chicago, as a participant in the Ph.D. Project, a non-profit organization dedicated to providing information and mentoring for underrepresented minorities interested in pursuing doctorates in business. She was one of 200 individuals from a pool of 300 selected to attend the fully-funded conference to gain information regarding graduate schools. At the time of our interview, Tanya was in the process of applying for graduate school at Southern State University.

Admittedly, Tanya has made some questionable decisions—particularly in regards to her choice to have more children when her family situation was already so laden with problems. However, if Tanya were not poor, her decisions would likely be evaluated differently. That she is black, that she has five children, that she has a crack-addicted husband, and that she is reluctant to work makes her a near perfect poster representation of the welfare stereotype. But her personal story is much more complex. Change the drug to cocaine, change her race to white, keep the five children, and make her middle-class and her decision to return to school so she could further her career while spending more time at home with her children would seem not only rational but, by even the most conservative of standards, desirable. Under current governmental guidelines, this "other-Tanya" would not receive any more public assistance than the actual-Tanya, but she would certainly garner more sympathy and given her middle-class status would

likely have more social resources, specifically other middle-class friends and family, to facilitate her attaining her goals.

I cannot be sure that Tanya will make it. Under current policies, Tanya is going to have to participate in a work activity for 30 hours a week — 20 hours of which must be in a "primary" activity," which does not include educational pursuits — in exchange for her cash benefits. Going to class and working 30 hours a week will take her out of her home and away from her children, which was the primary obstacle to her working in the first place. At the time of this writing, I have not been able to contact Tanya and do not know whether or not she started Southern State's doctorate program in business as planned.

Tanya, however, was admittedly not the "typical" participant. Most participants in welfare programs across the country do not have master's degrees. Yet, examining her abridged and expanded profile is instructive. The welfare queen is largely a construct. How one paints the picture, how one tells the story dramatically influences her form. If we focus solely on a bad decision or two, we miss the rest of the story—we miss what's going on outside of the frame. Such a conclusion is hardly new to researchers of welfare and poverty, but what Tanya's story reveals is how even "the most likely to succeed" can all too easily be reduced to stereotypes when their entire stories are not considered.

Undoubtedly, there are some welfare participants who evoke more sympathy than others. Ariana describes a conversation with one of her case managers regarding a client who epitomized the bad welfare mother stereotype:

> You know, I just was talking to one of the case managers and he said a lady was in his office, said that she had her kids taken, and he said "Oh, well, you know, she said she had a felony," and he said "What did you do?" And she said "Oh, I tortured my kids." Yeah! And this is what she said, "Ah I was convicted of — you know, I tortured my kids. I beat 'em systematically and burned them." And she's just saying it like, "Oh I ran a stop light." You know?! "Hit a car."

There is no doubt that what this particular welfare client did to her children was horrific and worthy of punishment. However, Ariana followed her anecdote with an acknowledgment of the complexities facing this and all of DFCS's clients:

> So you know, but maybe her parents did that to her. It's just deeper than what we see, what we've seen on the surfaces. Most people that come in here are mad. They're not mad at us. They're mad because they're lights are off. They can't find jobs. Now you're coming in here, telling me to do something that I know you can do, but we can't do it because policy makes us do it this way. I just, I'm at the end of my rope.

Bad choices are made, but some groups of people are more liable to make bad choices than other groups. As Ariana highlights in her explanation acknowledging structural and cultural influences, "It's just deeper than what we see."

The students whom I interviewed may be caught up in a system of sorts, which is evidenced in part from some of the descriptive personal histories presented above, but for these students, such entrapment is not for lack of a vision or a plan. So if lacking a vision or a plan is not the problem, what gets in the way of TANF participants attaining their goals? Even James, a 31-year old case manager, admits, "A lot of [TANF participants] say the right things, but the actions show something else." Why do their actions "show something else"? In the following chapters, I attempt to address some of these questions.

CHAPTER 4

NEGOTIATING REALITY:

EXPLORING PROCESSES OF STRUCTURE & AGENCY

As I interviewed TANF participants about their educational experiences, repeatedly heard stories about others: mothers, fathers, children, partners, sisters, brothers, friends, social workers, doctors, teachers, and counselors. Listening to these narratives and hearing over and over about the importance of a mother who would regularly baby-sit or a caseworker who would quietly waive a requirement, I began to interlock these otherwise often disparate pieces of information. With each story, I became more and more convinced that attaining real success was never a solitary endeavor and rarely happenstance. I admit that such a revelation is hardly new or original—social researchers have been examining the effects of familial and social networks, a concept most commonly associated with the work of Carol Stack (1974) and more recently with William Julius Wilson (1996), Katherine Newman (1998), and Mario Small (2004) for decades. However, the more I talked with participants, the more I became persuaded of the intensely powerful influence of these social networks and relationships. Success was attained with the support, both psychological and tangible, of a group of individuals and was the result of others' often deliberate, engineered actions. When obstacles did emerge, as they invariably did, the likelihood that welfare participants would overcome those barriers depended in large part on the level of support exhibited in their immediate relationships, both personal and professional, balanced with the level of obligations they faced within those relationships.

Although participants would sometimes credit or blame themselves for their failed educational or occupational outcomes, I was consistently struck by the number and intensity of external forces shaping the most personal of individual issues. This is not to say that the individuals whom I interviewed always made wise decisions in regards to their personal lives. Most identified some past action—not using birth control, not taking a job, not staying in school—that they later regretted and for which most of them took full personal responsibility. But often, when some of those circumstances were examined more closely after further discussion, I questioned how I might have fared in the same situation. The reality was always more complex and more murky than simplistic "I should have done" or "She should have done" statements seem to imply. Lisa's story provides a prime example.

When I first met Lisa, she was employed at my daughter's daycare as a teacher's assistant in the baby room. Lisa, I learned, had taken classes at a local university where I had been teaching for the past seven years. Lisa's son had also been in my daughter's toddler class, so in addition to talking about her schooling and my teaching, we also talked at length about our children. After seeing one of my recruitment flyers posted in the daycare center, Lisa approached me about participating. Two weeks later, we met in a conference room on my campus.

During our interview, I learned a great deal about Lisa's life that had never in any way before been revealed during our previous encounters. I felt at the beginning of the interview that I already knew Lisa, but quickly learned I had known very little at all. A little over four years ago, Lisa and the father of her only child, Robert, had become

engaged after learning that she was pregnant. Up until that point in their seven-year long relationship, she had insisted that they postpone marriage, not because they weren't committed but for financial reasons. Lisa confided, "We were going to get married, but I wanted to wait until after I got my degree because I didn't want his income to interfere with my financial aid, which sounds crazy now, but I—you know, he couldn't afford to pay for my education." She didn't want Robert to feel he was financially responsible for her education and because he was a teacher, she knew their combined income would make her ineligible for many forms of financial aid that she was currently receiving. In addition, for Lisa, it was important that she remain independent and self-sufficient: "He always told me that he never worked when he was in college. He always told me that I shouldn't do that either, but I was so stubborn because I didn't want to have to depend on him for everything." However, after learning that she was pregnant, they both decided that they wanted to formally legitimize their relationship and became engaged. Soon after their engagement, misfortune hit. Four months before their son Carl was born, Robert died unexpectedly of a brain aneurysm. The aneurysm resulted, doctors theorized, from a blood clot — a nasty reminder of a severe car accident he had survived — that had traveled from his leg to his brain.

After Robert's death, Lisa experienced a deep depression. Psychologically, she "just dropped off the face of the earth," but physically, due to the sheer number of impending bills flooding her mailbox, she was required to move on. After taking off a week to attend to the details of Robert's funeral, she returned to her job. Robert's parents helped her out financially when they could, but they lived over a thousand miles away in

a northern state and because Lisa had always worked things out on her own in the past, she often didn't feel comfortable asking them for assistance. Lisa's mom came down from another northern state to help, but as became more clear the longer we talked, Lisa's mom, Anne, was dealing with problems of her own and couldn't always be depended upon for support. Anne had been dealing with addictions to various drugs and alcohol since she was a teen and throughout her life she has had a tendency of involving herself with violent men. When Lisa was in the 11th grade, she actually ran away from her mom's house, taking her brother with her. Lisa feared that in addressing the domestic abuse issues at her home, the local police would discover her mother's addictions therefore warranting a call to social service agencies, which Lisa knew would result in her and her brother being placed in foster care. So, she ran away to a friend's house, hoping her mom would rid herself of her violent boyfriend thereby bringing a semblance of stability to their household. At that time in her life, Lisa preferred to live with the unpredictability of her mom, no matter how dysfunctional the household as a result of her addictions, rather than to face the unpredictability of foster care, where life could possibly be worse.

After Robert's death, Anne helped Lisa out by babysitting Carl while Lisa went to work and school, but because Anne had not gained full control over her drug and alcohol habits, Lisa couldn't always rely on her to be there when needed:

> Even while I was in class, I'm still worrying and thinking about what's going to happen and go on when I got out of class and had to go back home. I had to worry about was my mother going to come home? What is she doing in front of my child? You know, can I trust her? But I don't have anyone else. It's . . .that was the hardest thing for me.

On more than one occasion, Anne would disappear for days at a time. Lisa did not convey to me any information regarding her mom's recent "accident," which as Anne described in a subsequent interview involved "running into an ax . . . three times." This most recent bout of physical abuse incurred against Anne has left her with permanent brain damage, and her ability to help Lisa with Carl has further diminished.

As I sat there listening to Lisa, I thought to myself, "What more could happen to her?" This is not to say that Lisa's life represents a worst case scenario in any way. She has a roof over her head, and, unlike her mother, she is not being physically abused and is not living at the mercy of that next "fix." She is book smart, life smart, and likable. She knows how to present herself assertively in professional and social situations. Furthermore, unlike so many other individuals I interviewed, it's not as if she didn't have supportive networks. She did. She described how her girlfriends took her in after Robert's death and provided her with a place to sleep and a willingness to listen. She described her mother's sister, who maintained a stable middle-class life style and who helped Lisa and her brother out, briefly taking them in upon learning how badly off Anne was in terms of her addictions and relationships. But Lisa's independence, a trait otherwise valued in a U.S. "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" culture, prevented her from staying too long at any of these places or relying too much on anyone else for support. Explaining why she chose not to contact her aunt for support, Lisa stated, "I guess I would feel like a failure if I went back and was like, 'Hey, take me in,' because, I, because I've never done that before." And, of course, there is the fact that she fully realized that even her supportive networks had limited resources themselves, a point

recounted endlessly in the literature on the role of social networks in impoverished communities (Anderson 1990; Newman 1999; Small 2004; Wilson 1986, 1997).

I highlight Lisa's story because it exemplifies the influence of outside forces, unanticipated and uncontrollable, that may shape an individual's life path. Yes, Lisa had agency. She chose not to marry. She chose to accept her mother's help, even though she realized her mother was generally not a dependable source of assistance. But Lisa did not choose her mother. She did not choose the neighborhood in which she was raised. She did not choose a potential husband and father of her child who would die unexpectedly when she was six months pregnant. The issue of choice is crucial because it was so frequently brought up in my interviews with social workers and TANF recipients.

Taylor, who had worked as a case manager for 13 years and for the last year and a half had served as a case manager supervisor, emphasized this issue of "*choice*" throughout her interview. In answer to a question regarding the benefits or drawbacks of welfare's shift in focus from education to work, Taylor acknowledged the challenges facing TANF participants, particularly those individuals enrolled in school, but stressed the aspect of individual choice at the root of such a problem:

> Everybody makes their own choices in life. I feel that you chose to have your family before you got your education, and I feel that if you made that choice, then you should not ask anyone to give you or not ask you to do anything thing else but go to school, when that was a choice. Because when I went to college, even though I didn't have any kids, I worked. I worked! From the time I went to college, I worked. And most people in the real world, you do! . . . So, it can be done, if you choose to. It might be harder on you, but that's a choice that you made. It's going to be hard, and I mean I sympathize with you. It's going to be hard, but if that's something that you really

> want, you can do it. That's, like I said, individual choice. I admire you for wanting to go back to school and make something of yourself, but it's not going to be easy. It's not going to be easy. And you know, you're going to have to, you're going to have to really work for this. If you really want it, you can do it!

Taylor genuinely believed that once individuals make that choice to turn their lives around, they could. Although unrelenting in her harsh evaluations of clients, she felt that in the long term her display of tough love was in their best interests. She, more than any other case manager I interviewed was unwilling to acknowledge that historical and contemporary contextual forces shaped the family and economic situations of her clients. To do so was to relegate her clients to a life of lowered expectations and failure. Instead, she focused on the present and on raised expectations for the future.

So how would Taylor make sense of Tanya, the single mother with five children introduced in the prior chapter, who chose to trade in her $60,000 plus paying job as an accountant for a welfare check and benefits? On one hand, Taylor might argue that Tanya's decision was irrational if not irresponsible — why give up such an income for the meager offerings of the county's welfare program? Tanya, she might argue, needs to go back to her job and find a way to pay someone to watch over her kids after school and on those days when she needs to stay late at the office. However, a segment of the general population might consider Tanya's decision to forgo extra income so she could spend more time at home and better care for her five children to be fully rational, if not admirable. Despite one's evaluation of Tanya's final decision, ostensibly she had a "choice" in the matter, although admittedly her field of options was limited given her familial reality: five children in need of supervision and no readily available family

members to help her out on a regular basis. But then, as Taylor would argue, Tanya *chose* to have five children in the first place before she had achieved her educational goals?

Ultimately, the practical question for legislators and social workers that emerges from this type of inquiry comes down to the crass, but very important, issue of eligibility: Should Tanya be allowed to pursue her postsecondary education in lieu of working while participating in the TANF program? Going to school will allow her more flexibility in terms of her schedule, allowing her to complete much of her school work at home where she can keep an eye on her children. However, Tanya already has enough education under her belt to obtain a stable and well-paying job. Ostensibly, this is a question regarding the purpose of the TANF program itself, but this is also a question regarding social perceptions of choice and the issue of deservingness predicated on social valuations of caretaking and housework.

In the previous chapter, I examined how welfare stereotypes and the concept of undeservingness were often used by TANF participants to validate the counter concept of deservingness. Both concepts, in this context, intrinsically prioritize individualistic notions of micro-level agency, assuming that deservingness or undeservingness result primarily from the kinds of choices one makes. Social scientists have long and vigorously debated the roles of structure and agency in the development and maintenance of individuals' conscious beings and collective social realities. Historically, most examinations of structure and agency have tended to dichotomize the two concepts pitting them against each other or prioritizing analysis of one side over the other. Peter L.

Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966) were arguably two of the first sociologists to comprehensively theorize the dialectical relationship between social structures and individuals. In their groundbreaking work, Berger and Luckmann theorize the processes by which individuals create a reality that simultaneously shapes their understanding of self. This reality is created through the processes of *externalization*, in which individuals create cultural products (e.g. linguistic practices, material objects, ideological representations) outside of themselves through social interaction; *objectivation*, in which individuals act on their understanding of these cultural products as a result legitimating and reifying those objects' existence and influence; and *internalization*, in which individuals integrate this understanding of reality via the processes of socialization into an understanding of self. What is most important in Berger and Luckmann's explication of the processes resulting in constructions of reality is their emphasis on the dialectical nature of creative processes that link individuals with social structures.

More recent theoretical approaches — informed by post-structural framings emphasizing the practices of deconstruction and anti-essentialist analyses — have similarly refocused attention on the connections and processes serving to shape their relationship with each other. Throughout his career, French anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu sought to examine the dialectical processes producing structure and agency. Bourdieu explicitly cited as part of his project the reintegration of agency into a body of theory that, with the exception of Jean Paul Sartre and scant handfuls of American micro-level theorists including George H. Mead and his student, Herbert Blumer, was dominated up until the 1960's by structural explanations at both the micro-and macro-

level of analysis. More importantly, Bourdieu sought to theorize the *relations* between actors and social structures, providing a means of understanding social action and consequences. Responding to what he described as the "objectivist" determinism of Claude Levi Strauss and Emile Durkheim and the "subjectivist" indeterminancy found in the works of Alfred Schutz and Harold Garfinkel, Pierre Bourdieu (1977) introduced his own "theory of practice," a theory of processes and the relations between the "opus operatum" (work accomplished) and the "modus operandi" (mode of operating).

Arguably, at the heart of Bourdieu's theoretical outline, rests his concept of "habitus," defined as a system of dispositions unique to a time, place, and setting that is nonetheless reflective of history and social structures.[18] It is the habitus that negotiates relations between agency and structure. Although individuals and social structures produce habitus through uniquely specific acts, individuals sharing certain geographically or historically circumscribed experiences might share aspects of a habitus reflecting their commonalities. As a result of the habitus, argues Bourdieu, "'interpersonal' relations are never, except in appearance, individual-to-individual relationships" and "the truth of the interaction is never entirely contained in the interaction" (81). For Bourdieu, it is the habitus and its structured and structuring capabilities that facilitates social reproduction of class inequality:

> Though it is impossible for *all* members of the same class (or even two of them) to have had the same experiences, in the same order, it is certain that each member of the same class is more

[18] See King (2000) for a critique of Bourdieu's use of "habitus" particularly as evidenced in his later writings. King argues that as Bourdieu deepened his theoretical exploration of habitus, he undermined his early attempts to create a "practical theory" that was intended to overcome the impasse of objectivism and

> likely than any member of another class to have been confronted with the situations most frequent for the members of that class. The objective structures which science apprehends in the form of statistical regularities (e.g. employment rates, income curves, probabilities of access to secondary education, frequency of holidays, etc.) inculcate, through the direct or indirect but always convergent experiences which give a social environment its physiognomy, with its "closed doors," "dead ends," and limited "prospects," that "art of assessing likelihoods," as Leibniz put it, of anticipating the objective future, in short, the sense of reality or realities which is perhaps the best-concealed principle of their efficacy. (P. 85-86)

Because habitus relies on individual action, the potential for its own transformation is ever present; yet its effects, evidenced most concretely in statistical regularities, render in plain view its structural dimension. In focusing on the processes of negotiation, Bourdieu relieves theorists of their allegiances to the poles of structure and agency debates. Instead of structurally deterministic paralysis *or* randomly chaotic action, Bourdieu's attention to the structuring processes of present interactions embedded in complex social worlds with rich social histories demonstrates how agency can simultaneously produce radical social transformation or, more often, stubborn social reproduction. The generalized tendency towards reproduction over transformation is a logical result of the forceful momentum of existing structures and the status quo; nevertheless, for Bourdieu, the potential for change resides in every micro- or macro-level action.

Noting the sites of reproduction and transformation and evaluating the effects of those processes shaping structure and agency are both ultimately complicated procedures. An important issue for researchers to consider within any discussion of the processes

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subjectivism. However, habitus, argues King, is fundamentally objectivist and is therefore incompatible with Bourdieu's "practical theory" project.

defining agency and structure are the essentialist assumptions that all too often wend their way into analyses involving any dualistic concept. That is, researchers cannot assume that agency primarily enables transformative action and that structures solely reproduce and constrain. As Bourdieu's theory of practice demonstrates, agency can be transformative *or* reproductive, and such transformations or reproductions can be either enabling *or* constraining. In her comprehensive analysis of these issues, Sharon Hays (1994) provides a fruitful and cogent summary description that encapsulates the intrinsic connectedness of both structure and agency and the enabling and constraining potentialities of each:

> Social structures are both the medium and the outcome of human social action: although they regularly operate above the heads of individual human actors, they would not exist without the willing or unwilling participation of those same actors. Social structures are simultaneously constraining and enabling: although structural constraints absolutely preclude the possibility of making certain choices, they also provide the basis of human thought and action, and therefore the very possibility of human choice. A sociological understanding of agency, then, does not confuse it with individualism, subjectivity, randomness, absolute freedom, or action in general, but recognizes it as embracing social choices that occur within structurally defined limits among structurally provided alternatives. (P. 65)

Essentialist trappings that reduce the effects of structures as purely constraining deny the potential enabling power, for example, of familial networks in supporting the educational decisions made by TANF participants.[19] Although some individuals certainly benefit more from their familial networks than others—the sons of Yale law professors will

[19] In this section, I treat culture as a social structure in line with Hays' (1996) call for a more rigorously analytical understanding of culture that recognizes the structured dimensions of culture.

certainly face choices far different from the choices presented to the daughters of welfare mothers—to nonetheless deny the simultaneous enabling and constraining power of such networks is to ignore the complexities shaping our lived realities. Lisa's case clearly demonstrates how such cultural networks simultaneously work to enable and constrain as is evidenced in the contradictory relationship she has with her concerned and eager-to-help yet drug-addicted mother. Anne both helps Lisa to go to school, offering to care for young Carl as Lisa attends classes, yet she serves as an impediment to Lisa's educational success because of her unanticipated drug-related disappearances. Without Ann's help, Lisa feels she wouldn't be able to attend classes and pursue her degree at all, but because Ann is unreliable as a caretaker, Lisa has had to miss classes, which has affected her success as a student in school. Lisa's situation reveals how one's choices and the potentially enabling or constraining outcomes of those choices are in fundamental ways influenced by external factors shaping one's social circumstances.

Additionally, we must consider the cumulative effects over time of such perceived choices. Each time Lisa chooses to rely on her mother for assistance and each time her mother successfully comes to her aid, thereby allowing Lisa to attain her short term goals of attending class and completing her class assignments on time, Lisa is likely to perceive her own actions as enabling. The more often Lisa encounters perceived enabling experiences as a result of her choices, she reinforces her sense of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and authenticity, all of which are key aspects of her self concept affecting her motivation.[20] However, the opposite can occur as well. Each time Lisa's mother fails

[20] Here I am again referring to Gecas's (1986) theory of motivation introduced in the Chapter 3.

her, Lisa's goals are thwarted. Lisa's decision to rely upon her mother's assistance may then be constraining in its generalized effect over time. The more often that her experienced outcomes prevent her from attaining her goals, the more negatively will such actions affect Lisa's self concept and, ultimately, her motivation. Noting the cumulative effects of these social process over time is vitally important to make sense of their relationship to outcomes.

In the sections that follow, I look more closely at the specific ways TANF participants' motivation is affected by the complex dynamics of processes shaping structure and agency. Specifically, I examine how participants' choices themselves are influenced by external forces, including habitus, thereby affecting the potential outcomes for individuals making those choices. When information is available, I also examine how the enabling or constraining effects of such outcomes may be mediated by the cumulative effects of those external forces over time. Using the words of welfare participants, I attempt to make sense of these theoretical expositions bringing to life discussions of structure and agency.

FAMILY TIES – ACCEPTING ASSISTANCE

Familial social structures provide the starting points of our lives, but we have absolutely no control over where we start out. This is not to say we have no agency and that family members are the primary influence throughout our life course; although parents may choose to have children, as every parent and child readily knows, parents have only a limited amount of control over the decisions made by their children.

Nonetheless, this ascribed status of daughter or son has longstanding implications in regards to individuals' social class and exposure to the multiple facets of culture. Social scientists have extensively recorded the myriad ways families serve as socializing agents and provide or constrain access to upward social mobility within socially stratified systems where not just individuals but entire groups of people are differentially rewarded based on ascribed traits passed on from one's family.

So where do TANF participants locate support as they make daily decisions regarding their visions of the future? Upon being asked this specific question, most participants described varying contributions of their immediate family members. How did this support take form? Most often, tangible goods or services were mentioned: Grandparents offered to take care of their grandchildren or pick them up from daycare when mothers could not; children's fathers paid for school clothes or food when money was particularly tight; or sisters offered money or even housed a mother's children while she worked to get on her feet again. Emotional support was just as important even if not as immediately urgent or apparent. Parents encouraged mothers to pursue their education and attain postsecondary degrees. Children expressed pride in their mother's educational ambitions. The types of support offered by immediate family members were varied and widespread, reflecting diverse realities nevertheless linked by a reliance on family.

Familial Rescue Nets – Child Care, Housing, and Other Tangible Support

Nia, who as described above was about to receive her B.S. in social work in the spring of 2004, received a great deal of tangible and emotional support from her family

and her daughter's father's family. Not only was her daughter's father very much involved in his daughter's life, providing money for necessities and picking her up from day care, but both her mother and her ex-partner's mother helped out with child care on a regular basis. Candy also relied on her mother for financial assistance and on her aunt for childcare assistance. Of her mom Candy said, "Anything I needed as far as my child is concerned, I could go and ask her for it, if I didn't have it." Lydia likewise received a great deal of tangible support from her family, in particular from her sisters, one of whom she lived with upon moving to Georgia, when she left her abusive husband.

Not only would family members help with childcare or the provision of temporary housing, they would also frequently take participants' children into their homes, raising them as their own while parents sought after their educational goals elsewhere. Elizabeth, a 23-year old mother who was pursuing a medical assistant degree, explains why she chose to send her son to Texas to live with his grandmother:

> I wish he was up here but I know, like I was telling Joe [her boyfriend and her son's father], I can't make it right now. You know as far as, I can't afford daycare and then to pay rent and all this, I just-I, I can't do it right now, so the best thing for him to do is stay in Texas right now. . . . Yeah, and so, Christopher's with his grandmom, so, which . . . helps me out a lot because I don't have to worry about finding him a daycare, cause I told Joe, if you move up here, you'll have to look for a job, and who's going to watch Christopher? You know, we don't have money to put him in daycare and that was like a hundred and something dollars a week!

Ike, a 47-year old father of three who was currently studying to become an auto mechanic, similarly relied on his mother to care for his daughters when he was previously studying at a technical school in a neighboring state:

> And a lot of times my mother would like to, you know, she spent a lot of time with 'em. Like if I'm gone schooling, then I might stay gone through the week and come home on the weekends. . . . So, basically, I had a lot of help and assistance from the family as I went to school.

Of the 19 parents interviewed for this study, five were not living with their children. In all five cases, children were described as living with either their aunts or grandmothers. This familial network of women, consisting primarily of sisters and mothers, took over TANF participants' parenting duties while they went to school and work, striving to get their lives in order.

The expectation that kin will aid in the caring of one's family is not new, particularly within economically poor African American communities (Stack 1974; Lee, Peek and Coward 1998); and in southern U.S. states where the history of slavery is argued to distinctively resonate, those kin networks are believed to have been more tightly connected than in other regions of the country (Degler 1980). However, as many researchers have determined, the ability of kin to provide aid is frequently mediated by their economic position and physical condition (Jaykody, Chatters and Taylor 1993; Newman 1999; Wilson 1996). Cookie, a 33-year medical assistant student, had relied on her mother to care for her son, Ron. Because Cookie was living in a transitional living facility where children were not allowed, 12-year old Ron had been living with Cookie's mother. But Cookie's mother's health was failing due to a recurring heart ailment, and she had recently informed Cookie that she could no longer raise Ron. Because Cookie lacked any extensive kin network—her mother was the only family member with whom she was in contact—at the time of our interview, foster care appeared to be the only solution for Cookie's and Ron's living situation.

Clearly the levels of financial resources and child care assistance available for TANF participants from their families varied from situation to situation; however, despite these variations, distinct patterns emerged as well. Those individuals, like Lydia, Ike and Elizabeth, who had larger familial networks with whom they maintained frequent and positive contact, were in more stable positions from which they could make decisions regarding their educational futures. Not only were family members able and willing to take mothers and their children into their homes, but there were often choices available in regard to the type and source of familial aid. These extensive kin networks provided not only options but also back-up opportunities. Lydia had three sisters in the area with whom she maintained a close relationship and whom she could call upon when in need; and Elizabeth had "all her family," including her boyfriend's mother and sister, who were willing to help out in caring for her son.

Because these particular participants sought to maintain positive relationships with helpful family members, they strove to demonstrate their ability to be self-sufficient whenever feasible. For example, Lydia sought to limit her reliance on her sister's offering of housing in an attempt to retain her independence:

> But I'm very, very, very independent. So you know, I don't want to stay with anybody. I don't want to borrow anything. You know, my sister, I'm sure they would just—cause I stayed with my sister when I first came. But, as soon as I was able to move out, I moved out. . . . And my oldest sister did help me with the security deposit on my place and stuff like that. But as far as maneuvering with the kids and whatnot, I've kind of handled that by myself.

Lydia was willing to seek and accept assistance from family members, but had determined a self-imposed limit for what she would ask of them. When asked about

seeking support from family members, she stated, “I don't want to—well, I can't anyway. I can't tax family, friends or whatever because they're all working too, so, you know.” As it was with Lisa, cited above, Lydia is motivated to create limits on her requests for aid both to preserve her perception of herself as independent and because she recognizes her sisters’ limitation of resources. Both Lisa and Lydia were wary of expecting too much in terms of assistance from family members and perceived any long-term reliance as a mark of failure on their part.

Although Elizabeth, Ike and Lydia all had varying professional skills, training, and experience, I came to believe that all of them had a greater chance than most TANF participants of potentially experiencing upward mobility in part because of their familial resources. As long as their current kin networks remained intact and economically and emotionally able, someone would always be available to step in and assist when needs arose. On the other end of the spectrum, however, were individuals like Cookie, who described only her mother as able to assist, and her mother’s ability to help was gradually dwindling as her health deteriorated. Lisa’s familial network was similarly limited. The only stable immediate family members Lisa felt able to call upon were members of her mother’s sister’s family. Lisa’s mother helped out when she could, but she was hardly a dependable resource. Lisa’s father had never been a part of Lisa’s life. Lisa had never met him and had only talked with him once, when at age 14 she had fostered a hope that they might establish some sort of relationship. During their one and only phone conversation, he told her that he was unwilling to consider her a part of his currently-defined family, but that he would be willing to meet her in some intermediate location, so

they could establish a relationship on their own terms. Lisa stated that part of the reason he had immediately rejected both her and her mother was because of their race and his reluctance to commit himself in a relationship with a black woman—he was native Hawaiian. Ultimately Lisa rejected this half-way offer that she interpreted as reflecting his continuing preoccupation with race and his denial of her personal worth. The only other family member Lisa mentioned from whom she might solicit assistance was her younger half brother; but because he was nine years younger than she was, she didn't actually view him as a resource, instead perceiving him as one more individual in her life who required care.

Lisa's skill level was relatively high; she had completed almost two years of computer classes, and her professional demeanor was impressive. Upon first meeting her, I was convinced of her capability to attain her professional goals. But because her kin network is weak, she is vulnerable at every turn. When things go wrong, the only historically-proven stable relative she can contact is her aunt, but she resists making such contact because she doesn't want to be perceived as a failure. However, Lisa also senses that her aunt's sense of obligation to Lisa and her younger brother has always been limited. After explaining why she wouldn't call on her aunt's family to help her now, she stated, "Now when I was younger, they really should have came and intervened and said 'Hey, we're taking you down with us.' But no one did that, so . . ." [she trails off]. Clearly, Lisa perceives that she is and has always been on her own, and that it is up to her to make the best of her current situation without relying on others to bail her out when the going gets rough. Yes, Lisa has chosen to not seek help from her aunt, but this choice is

made in the context of a family history of limited involvement and of a larger culture that emphasizes the virtues of self-reliance. Lisa's choices may not always be good for her and her son, but they are generally viewed as the "right" choices from outside.

The Power of Belief: Emotional and Psychological Support for Education

"I've got a great support system," said Marie. In making reference to her "support system," Marie here was not referring to any specific kind of tangible support but to the psychological support she received from her children and her parents. Marie was not unusual in acknowledging the importance of having emotionally and psychologically supportive family members as she pursued her educational and occupational goals. Even her six-year old son provided immeasurable, psychological support:

> My son's very helpful. And it's amazing to me how innocent they are and how much they know. He's only six and . . . I just feel like I have to be strong for them no matter what. And I can't let them see that mommy's upset because something is wrong or didn't go right, and, but I guess when I think I'm hiding it, he'll pat me on the back or say "It's o.k" or if we're in the store and I say "Mommy can't get it this time," he'll say "O.k." and--that's amazing to me! But I mean, they're awesome, and of course they're trying and everything like that [laughs]. But, he is very--he's very helpful with his little sister. I couldn't ask for a better son.

Marie also admitted that she felt she had "disappointed" her parents by having her two children while she was still so young. She made it her goal to obtain her college degree to defy welfare and young, single-mother stereotypes and "prove to everybody that a person doesn't always end up where they expect." Pushed on by the desire to prove her

worth in the eyes of her parents and children and encouraged by them to accomplish her educational goals, Marie prioritized her schooling and was preparing to graduate with her bachelor's degree within the year. This is not to say that this emotional support came unconditionally from her family—clearly Marie felt she had something to prove, a stereotype to buck. Nonetheless, throughout our discussion, Marie acknowledged that her families' encouragement and belief in her abilities was an integral part of her success.

Anna, a 41-year old mother studying to be a medical assistant, likewise described how her two children, now aged 13 and 18, emotionally supported her throughout the years as she tried out different training opportunities:

> I know my kids, I think they liked it when I was in nursing. They really wanted me to be in nursing. And they was really helpful with the chef thing too. . . . They used to like when I was interning down at the Hilton because I would bring different pastries home that I had made, and they came down and saw the pastry shops, and they liked both of those, nursing and, uh, chef. And plus, both of those are kind of careers that when you put on your uniform, you're kind of respected in. And that's what I kind of liked. And they liked that too. That's a kind of, that's a sense too . . . that when you put on something, you're respected.

Like Marie, Anna pursued her goals in part as a means of soliciting respect from her children which in turn served to increase her sense of self-worth. Although such emotional support was frequently cited as being positively influential, it's just as important to remember that by itself emotional support is not enough to keep one motivated and on track. When transportation obstacles emerged, no level of emotional support was enough to counter the frustration Anna felt when her car broke down or she missed her bus. Her commute to culinary school required that she travel a mile from her

home to the nearest bus stop, take the bus to the train, take the train to her school and then reverse the process in the evening. Although trains tended to run regularly every 10-15 minutes, the buses were frequently on 30-40 minute cycles, meaning a missed bus could turn an hour and a half commute into a two and a half hour commute. After taking on this commute each day, Anna would return home to two children in need of care and a pile of homework to complete before the next day. Anna's children were generally supportive of her educational ambitions, but even she admitted that there were times when they felt she went to "school too much" and that she should just get a job instead.

When asked if her family supported her educational goals, Lydia responded, "Yeah, they do," and then went on to explain why she felt they exhibited such support:

> Because I come from a family of college graduates, so yeah. I went to cosmetology school, and I did of course finish that right away, but—and they respected that as a real career (because a lot of people don't)—but they also respect my choice to go back because, again, at 40, I'm not really prepared to spend so many hours in the salon and spend so many hours away from home and the kids and have to be gone every weekend because that's when you're busy. That's the busiest times, on the weekends, and I don't want to take my, eat all of my kids' free time and give it to some customers. And I don't want to do that. So they do support my choice to go back, yeah.

Notable in this excerpt is her believing that 1) her family respects her decision to place her family first, and 2) her family members' experiences with college reflect a valuation of not just education but postsecondary education. According to many participants, this psychological support for individuals' postsecondary educational goals was integral to their success.

Nia also described how family members expressed support for her educational pursuits. Despite the burden of raising five children on her own, Nia's mother had actively involved herself in all of her children's schooling and continued to emotionally support Nia as she completed her bachelor's degree. Nia shared stories of her mother visiting her algebra classes in the middle of the school day just to see what they were learning: "She was really big on education. She was really big on homework. She was really big on knowing what was going on with the school." This support extended into the present and was evidenced in the fact that all four of Nia's siblings have graduated from college. With the help of her child's father and both of her daughter's grandmothers, Nia too would soon receive her college degree.

However, not all participants referenced this support in quite the same way. That is, I noted a difference in the depth of description of familial support, finding that those individuals, like Nia and Lydia, who came from "a family of college graduates" devoted more time during our interview to describing how such a background shaped their and their family's valuing of educational goals. For example, Katerina, who was studying business after having attained a degree in aerospace engineering, provided a detailed outline of her families' educational credentials. Her mother had a master's degree in nursing and her father's degree was in chemistry. Very early in our discussion, she stated:

> I'm lucky—I come from a highly educated family. I'm like fourth generation college educated, which is rare. So whatever your goals are is basically what they strive for you to do. If you want to be a veterinarian, they'll start you off young. Um, I always wanted science, so I've always—at first, I wanted to be a neurosurgeon. Then my mom took me to a classroom where you can see the

> surgeon, and I was like, 'No, I don't want to do this.' And then, I told her I wanted to be an engineer, so I spent some time with my cousin at North Carolina Central while he was working on his master's. And I got into the engineering part, so I've had a bunch of opportunities as far as support.

Katerina, like Lydia and Nia, saw herself as different from many other TANF participants in terms of her family members' valuation of and support for her educational goals. They felt they had more opportunities for educational success by virtue of their coming from a familial environment permeated with college graduates. But just how different were these individuals from those TANF participants whose parents or siblings did not attend college? And if differences existed between these groups of individuals, did they translate into real success?

Admittedly, everyone with whom I spoke, including students who were the first in their families to pursue any type of postsecondary degree, explicitly expressed their valuation of education as an abstract concept. After all, the dominant culture in the U.S. is driven by meritocratic ideals that place value on the role of education and hard work, and African American parents in particular have been shown in much research to more highly value education than do white parents, even when social class is considered (Hill and Sprague 1999; Hochschild 1995; Cheng and Starks 2002). In part, these racial differences are attributed to the legacy of slavery and ensuing Jim Crow laws that together effectively prevented many black U.S. citizens from attending many of this country's educational institutions. Having been denied entrance into so many educational institutions for so long, many black parents and their children may be more likely to value educational opportunities that were denied to relatives who experienced racial

discrimination due in part to de facto and de jure segregation (Macleod 1995). Hill and Sprague (1999) further argue that black parents, unlike white parents, anticipate their children encountering discrimination, and therefore see the obtaining of an education as an important tool to rectify inequities resulting from racialized privileges afforded white children in a fundamentally racist culture. Because white parents, they argue, need not concern themselves with such racialized obstacles, white parents might then instead focus on broader issues, for example their children's well-being or happiness, taking for granted that education will be a part of their children's life plan.

Even though every participant whom I interviewed professed to value education in an abstract sense, as the responses above make clear, those individuals who came from families with college-educated siblings or parents nonetheless saw themselves as uniquely benefiting from their family members' educational successes. As both Katerina and Nia imply, family members served as either knowledgeable role models or mentors, helping them to navigate the world of school and college. With her mother's tangible and psychological support, Katerina was able to complete her degree in aerospace engineering and is in the process of applying for graduate schools so she can complete her doctorate with the intention of eventually teaching at the postsecondary level. Nia likewise plans to attend graduate school to pursue a master's in social work before going on to pursue a license in clinical social work. Lydia, having made a career as a salon owner, is now changing tracks, pursuing a bachelor's degree in business so she can attain the credentials necessary to launch her image consulting company. All of these women credit their families with providing not only tangible assistance in the way of child care

or housing but also a capacity to empathize with them emotionally and provide mentoring as a result of their own postsecondary educational experiences.

Furthermore, according to Bourdieu's (1984) conceptualizations of habitus and cultural capital, Katerina, Nia, and Lydia, being in an environment of college graduates, are all part of a privileged class of educated individuals who share an understanding of the cultural dispositions preferred and rewarded in a formal schooling environment. That is, these students are by mere association provided with an entrée into the world of college because they are surrounded by family members who are familiar with that culture, a culture in which members of the dominant social class define and value certain linguistic and artistic dispositions. Furthermore, their possession of cultural capital increases their likelihood of easily adapting to and succeeding in an educational environment.

So how does cultural capital in this context come to be defined as such? In other words, why might Katerina, Nia, and Lydia have more cultural capital than Cookie or Ike? In accordance with Bourdieu's theories, one's social class and one's level of education collectively determine one's likelihood of possessing cultural capital. Although those individuals in higher economic classes are more likely to possess more cultural capital than individuals in lower economic classes, they —ironically — need cultural capital least given their already powerful position in the economic hierarchy. Teachers, argues Bourdieu, actually benefit most from their possession of cultural capital, for success in their jobs within the educational system often depends on their being familiar with a knowledge of high culture. Given the social prestige that they gain from

possessing such knowledge and its relevance within their occupation, teachers either consciously or unwittingly systematically reward students for likewise exhibiting the dispositions and knowledge of the dominant culture. Teachers, then, serve a primary function in the reification of cultural capital and in the processes of cultural reproduction.

An important defining feature of cultural capital for Bourdieu is that the cultural knowledge that is valued by teachers and, hence, the educational system as a whole, is for the most part not learned in schools but acquired from one's families. Katerine, Nia, and Lydia possess more cultural capital than Cookie or Ike because their college-educated family members provided them with that knowledge. Their families have provided for them a home environment in which "the diffuse and implicit continuous educational action" (Bourdieu 1977:81) comprising the transmission of cultural capital can take place.

This concept of cultural capital is important, because it helps in part to explain why some individuals may see themselves as more likely to succeed in school and who may then pursue higher levels of educational attainment. Their successes validate what Bourdieu has grandly theorized in over three decades of work, in which he demonstrates how the educational system has served to perpetuate fundamental social inequalities:

> By doing away with giving explicitly to everyone what it implicitly demands of everyone, the educational system demands of everyone alike that they have what it does not give. This consists mainly of linguistic and cultural competence and that relationship of familiarity with culture which can only be produced by family upbringing when it transmits the dominant culture. (1977:80)

It is true that when I met with these women, they presented themselves as confident and accomplished students. Although everyone I interviewed obviously valued education, the

participants coming from families with a high number of college graduates had higher educational aspirations—in terms of their anticipated level of schooling achieved—than those individuals coming from families with fewer college graduates. Participants coming from highly educated families were looking to obtain not only bachelor's degrees but often post-graduate degrees as well.

However, even though these individuals did possess higher levels of cultural capital than participants who did not have college-educated familial networks, having such knowledge did not exempt them from being at risk economically. They are, after all, current or recent welfare participants. They struggled every day to pay their bills. Their situation demonstrates that the possession of cultural capital may serve to mediate or slightly counter the effects of poverty, providing them with opportunities for educational or occupational success that otherwise might not have been accorded to them. But possessing cultural capital, along with a "good" attitude, did not guarantee success. As will be described in more detail in subsequent sections, this possession of cultural capital may have opened doors for Katerina — whose academic potential was recognized by one of her teachers who went out of his way to mentor her during college —or for Lydia — whose career potential was recognized by Katherine, a social services worker directing a career development program, who has been assisting Lydia in developing a business plan for her image consulting company — but cultural capital did not pay their bills. It did not prevent other obstacles from arising and blocking their path. They still found themselves needing public assistance.

What Katerina's, Nia's, and Lydia's experiences reveal are the limitations of responses of theoretical approaches to poverty that primarily focus on cultural issues. Even if we accept the generally conservative culture of poverty explanations described in the previous chapter, we must acknowledge that they only partially explain why many individuals end up turning to TANF for assistance. This is not to say that kin networks and cultural capital do not matter—as with a college education, the possession of cultural capital and access to a strong kin network can increase one's life chances of social mobility. However, neither are enough, particularly in many historically impoverished African American communities where the accrual of wealth is minimal or nonexistent and where the risk of falling back into poverty can often be merely a paycheck or two away (Oliver and Shapiro 1995, Conley 1999). And even for individuals like Lisa, who has access to solidly middle-class and upper-middle class relatives who might provide tangible assistance during her times of need, a history of severed or tenuous familial ties and a desire to preserve one's personal self esteem may prevent them from seeking aid from kin, who are themselves often striving to preserve their economic status and social prestige.

In sum, the tangible resources—in terms of money, housing or child-care assistance—emotional support, and possession of cultural capital that various family members are able and willing to provide clearly influence an individual's likelihood of educationally and occupationally succeeding. But the overall effect of such support depends on a variety of factors including the nature of its source and the number of sources available. The profile of the family members providing tangible support,

emotional support, or cultural capital often determines the quality, amount and frequency of that support. Furthermore, the enabling effects of family members providing support must be weighed against any of their contrary actions that serve to constrain the experiences of TANF participants. Family members, after all, can simultaneously be a hindrance or produce obstacles as well. Mothers and children of TANF participants may provide emotional support, but they also often require medical and emotional attention. How might family members constrain TANF participants' actions? I explore this subject next.

FAMILY TIES - MANAGING OBLIGATIONS

Family members may provide invaluable support, but can also require an immense amount of care or assistance in return. Some kin relationships involve more taking, some more giving, and some are near equally reciprocal in effect. The most salient of parental obligations is located in their responsibility to their children. TANF participants who are also attending school are extensively challenged by their need to juggle various roles and duties. Nia makes this clear as she describes the difficulties of adequately addressing her often competing roles of employee, student, and mother:

> Going to school is very hard to work because jobs don't really want to work around the times that you are in school. And then I have a four year old that I have to be at home with in the evenings. So I always had scheduling conflicts. Or I might stop working a job. I could actually like a job, but it was just too much for my day to day routine, and I just couldn't continue to do that to myself because I would either have no time for studies, no quality time for my child, no sleep. I would always be sacrificing something in the process, and sometimes I would just have to let one of the

> jobs go. And I can't let go of the job of motherhood. And I didn't want to let go of the job of being a student.

Nearly every recipient I interviewed shared similar frustrations, detailing the near impossibility of achieving balance in their complicated lives. Undoubtedly dealing with these everyday demands was difficult enough, and social researchers have long established the very real emotional and economic toll that mothers, particularly, face when striving to balance their personal and professional lives (Coltrane 1996, Crittenden 2001, Douglas and Michaels 2004, Hays 1996, Hochschild 1989). Adding poverty to the mix made an already difficult situation even more frustrating, but the stress of living in poverty was often exacerbated when the health of a parent, child, or relative unexpectedly turned for the worse or when a relationship went "bad." These kinds of life events fundamentally affected families in unprecedented ways and shaped the life courses of the individuals I interviewed.

Children, Poverty, and Health

When discussing TANF in the abstract, far removed from the welfare offices where assistance is disbursed, it is too easy to forget that children make up almost 75 percent of the national TANF caseload (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2004). Step inside a county welfare office, however, and it is impossible not to notice the many children wandering the halls and roaming amongst the maze of cubicles. These boys and girls of all ages and races live in communities across the United States, yet they all share the experience of living in poverty.

The obstacle of child poverty is no small hurdle. Attendant to poverty are a number of realities including decreased access to preventative medical care, increased infant mortality rates, and increased exposure to unhealthy environments (National Center for Health Statistics 1998). Parenting is a difficult enough endeavor when parents have access to the best medical treatment and resources to ensure that their children have the most healthy and enriching home environments possible. But so many of the children of the economically-poor parents I interviewed had special needs or medical conditions requiring *additional* attention that prevented many single parents, who were already struggling, from attending to any student or occupational role that might result in upward social mobility.

Katrina was no exception. When I asked Katerina what obstacles she faced as she pursued her bachelor's degree, she quickly focused her response on issues of time, or more specifically, her lack of time. Interestingly, even though medical issues and illnesses were frequently a primary cause of her experienced limitations on time, Katerina mentioned her son's asthma condition only in passing:

> Time, time was the biggest obstacle. Now that my kids are bigger, time is not as much of an obstacle as it was when they were smaller because my daughter helps my son and I help her, and we basically—and then my mother helps us, so it's basically working out better because he's five now and he was one, two, three years old, and he had a couple of asthma attacks so that kinda—threw him into the school, kids getting sick, and you understand kids will get sick at the oddest time. So, basically time was my biggest obstacle.

Because her mother and friends stepped in on a regular basis to help her, Katerina did not feel that her obligations to her children were any more or less burdensome than

those of any parent juggling as many activities as she did, but she certainly experienced pressure, particularly when her children became ill. These offhand references to illness—illnesses of children, parents or siblings—frequently appeared in many of my interviews, and medical obligations emerged as a common obstacle for these TANF participants pursuing their goals.

Tanya, who left her job as an accountant to care for her children, stated that she felt that she couldn't balance all of the medical and educational obligations of her five children as a single working parent. Now that she's participating in welfare and expected to work in exchange for those benefits, it's even more difficult:

> On, on social services, you are required to participate in the education, administrative, get to school, the appointments, teacher parent, whatever. You're required to keep them, the shots and . . . appointments, check ups, and things like that. All of that happens during the work day. And you have to pay for transportation and child care out of a nominal salary, right? It falls apart! And I've watched it fall apart over and over and over and over again. If I had my father here, I probably still would have been working. because I would have somebody else to kind of pick up the doctor's appointments and things.

In addition, Tanya's oldest son suffers from chronic rhino sinusitis. His sinusitis eventually produced polyps in his nasal cavity that eventually began to push against his eye thereby requiring immediate surgery. His post-surgical treatment required constant medical attention, with Tanya administering intravenous shots every four hours. Having few family members or friends available to assist on a regular basis, Tanya decided that she and her family ultimately would fare better if she left her job. Her employers at a

regional energy company could not allow her the full flexibility she required to deal adequately with her children's' health needs, so she turned to public assistance.

Cookie's situation hasn't been much easier. Cookie herself has only recently been diagnosed with clinical depression, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and schizophrenia. She was actually released from the welfare rolls a year ago for reaching the state's 48-month limit, but recently received a notice that due to her medical diagnoses, she would be eligible for a limited amount of disability benefits. In addition to caring for herself, she has regularly cared for her mother and her 12-year old son. Because her own documented illness has not interfered with her ability to work — Cookie serves up food and product samples at a local warehouse retailer on the weekends — she has not been provided with any cash assistance, but she does receive limited Medicaid benefits. Although Cookie's career goals are relatively realistic — she has expressed an interest in the field of diagnostics for many years now and the short-term program at a local technical institution will provide her with the entry-level skills necessary to obtain a job in a local hospital — I am not convinced that her health issues and the health issues of her 12-year old son are going to remain stable enough to allow her to maintain a career in any field. Her mother is the only family member who has consistently provided her with any level of support and lately her mother's health has been failing.

When I met Cookie, she was living in Eleanor's Apartments, a subsidized apartment complex serving individuals who had been or were on the verge of being homeless and who were officially diagnosed with mental illnesses or HIV/AIDS. The

apartments were small studios with just enough room for a bed and a love seat or table. Tenants were not allowed to room with others and their children were prohibited from staying with them for more than three consecutive nights. Cookie was currently relying on friends to care for her son because he had recently threatened his grandmother, and as a result his grandmother refused to care for him any longer. Cookie's son's father lived in Washington D.C. and he had offered to care for their son over the summer, but Cookie stated that her son didn't want to go. She claimed that she understood her son's resistance given the fact that the last time his father saw him, he was five years old. Cookie was in a tough position. Although throughout our conversation, it became clear to me that she loved her son very much and emotionally relied on his need of her, she was nonetheless in no position to provide him with the economic and psychological stability necessary to assist him in dealing with his own psychological needs, much less provide a roof over his head and regular meals in his stomach. Although I could already predict the dire fate of Cookie's son, a fate represented in so much lore regarding the "culture of poverty," the root of these problems, as I saw it, evolved not from pathological personalities described in such literature, but from individuals lacking adequate medical and counseling resources.

Cookie was admittedly woozy throughout our interview as a result of the drugs she had been taking for her schizophrenia and often apologized, believing that her responses were often incoherent. As she described her relationship with her mother, it became clear that she had relied on her mother much more than her mother had relied on her throughout her adult life. Although Cookie stepped in and aided her mother during

her brief spells of illness, it was her mother who had devoted a great deal of time and energy raising Ronnie, Cookie's son; however, as revealed above, she was no longer able and willing to care for Ronnie and it was near certain that he would soon be placed in foster care.

In addition to their own children, participants were often responsible for caring for other family members, including their parents or siblings. Like Cookie, Marie found herself not only relying on her mother's support but increasingly caring for her mother as well. Marie's mother was also a single parent, so being the oldest child still living at home, Marie found herself in the position of being her mother's primary caregiver. Additionally, Marie had been aiding one of her younger sisters, who at age 18 was beginning to navigate college herself, choosing a major, locating financial aid, and registering for classes. For Marie, all of these familial responsibilities were sometimes overwhelming, particularly when they piled up all at once:

> I've got a younger sister that I'm helping right now. She's 18, so I guess legally she's grown but I know she's not. So, I mean I've had to, just like last week, I wasn't here [at DFCS working] last week because I'm trying to get her registered for school, and so I'm looking after her because my mom got sick again. So I mean, things still happen outside of my kids and stuff, which is—you know having two small ones is enough in itself.

Marie acknowledges the tangible and emotional support that she receives from her family, but she realistically balances that against the obligations those family relationships require: "I have a lot of support in terms of my family pushing me, friends are pushing me so it'll be o.k. . . . But I mean, then like I said, my mom needs help and

then my baby sister needs help. . . . so I have to help out." For these TANF participants, at least, familial assistance rarely came free of a tangle of strings.

Husbands and Fathers

Those strings can be particularly knotted when they involve a spouse or equivalent romantic relationship. Tanya felt that she couldn't have gone to school in the first place without her husband, Tim, there to watch their children. But as the years went by and Tim's addiction to crack cocaine intensified, Tanya slowly began to acknowledge that she could no longer depend on him with any regularity. Because Tim's condition worsened so gradually and because Tanya felt she needed his presence so desperately, for a long time she was willing to believe he could overcome his addictions:

> It happened after we met, and . . . hoping in the beginning that he would overcome it, realizing after awhile that it wasn't going to happen any time soon and it wasn't a life that I wanted, then trying to figure how to untwine myself from him basically because I was dependent on him basically for certain things like watching the kids when I needed to go to class, and things. . . So I basically deferred doing anything drastic until after I got my degree because—I was in [a Northeastern city]. I hated it. I didn't have any family or friends up there. So basically I was very dependent on him.

Despite her realization that things were getting worse after the birth of their third child, they had two more children, and Tanya never did leave him. Tim eventually abandoned her in 1995. As I have already highlighted, Tanya's case is perhaps the most complicated of those presented in this study. Although she has made some poor decisions, they are not wholly irrational. In fact, as I noted earlier, her behaviors are in line with those

displayed by many women who are aware of the destructive aspects of their personal relationships yet choose to remain in those relationships seeing them as their best option at the time (Baker 1997, Strube and Barbour 1983). Tanya sincerely hoped and believed that her husband could overcome his addictions. She didn't want to believe that their relationship was over and that their life together was being destroyed by crack cocaine. Once she came to acknowledge the depth of Tim's addiction, she turned her focus to her long term educational and occupational goals. While he remained present in their lives, contributing financially and providing child care, Tanya was willing to overlook Tim's destructive behaviors, and take whatever he could offer in the way of money or care giving.

Tim finally left Tanya and their five children around the time that Tanya graduated with her combined bachelor's and master's degrees in accounting. She succeeded in attaining her immediate educational goals, but lost her husband in the process. Once Tim was gone, Tanya made the decision to move her family to a warmer climate and headed directly to Georgia, where after working as a temporary employee for a month, she landed an entry-level accounting job at a well-known energy company. Even with her degrees, however, she was not able to manage the needs of her household on her own. Her husband's absence was keenly felt. Although she was able to work up the ranks at her accounting job, Tanya found that the money she earned was not enough to replace Tim's income. Attempting to explain how her household had been disrupted by the absence of her husband, Tanya stated,

> My house was falling apart, literally. I had very young children in a house. They were often in the house illegally. I had to get one of the kids to pick up the babies from daycare that required that you walk down a very busy street. Of course, kids are kids, period, so there were often situations in the house where there was conflict. The older kids couldn't gain the proper control over the younger ones after day care. They would forgo homework and the things that were right, and by the time I got home, I was too tired. I mean, I barely knew what my name was a lot of times.

Tanya's father eventually moved down to help her out, but he had to return up north after a year and a half, leaving Tanya once again on her own. No one in Tanya's life has been able to close the gap left by her husband's addiction and abandonment. What Tanya needs right now is not marriage counseling or a new marriage. What she needs now is assistance in raising her family.

Marriage is also not the answer for Lydia. Lydia had never before participated in any welfare program before her husband attacked her, nor had she envisioned that she might ever have to leave her current community and begin a new life:

> It's very easy to feel "Oh, I'll never have to go to it." You never really know. All of a sudden—whatever! Something happens, you know. Your husband became irate, and hit you upside the head with a glass vase, knocked you out or whatever, and you thought, when you did come to, you thought "Oh my God, I'm about to die! I've got to get out of here." You, you never know what you will do. You know, and that's just it. You'll leave a business, you'll leave a life, you'll leave a career and try to start anew somewhere else. And that could be an easy task, but it's not when you have babies to take with you. If it was just me runnin' [snaps her fingers], I would have never needed any assistance. But it's not that simple when you have little ones saying "Mommy I'm hungry."

Lydia quickly left her husband after he physically attacked her for the first time in their nearly ten years of marriage. Like Tanya, she packed up her four children, ages 3 to 15, and moved from the Northeast to Southern City in Georgia. She spent her first year in Southern City adjusting to her new environment and mentally recuperating. After conducting some research on the internet, Lydia found that she was eligible for a year-long waiver under TANF as a result of her experience with domestic violence, so she took advantage of that opportunity to stay at home with her youngest child who was then a year old. Also like Tanya, what Lydia needed was not another marriage, she simply needed assistance so she could raise her children on her own. She also realized that now being a single mother, she could no longer have the kind of job that she had previously before leaving her husband. Without another parent at home, she could not expect to work long hours on weekends or during the evening as the owner of a hair salon. She had to choose a career that would be flexible enough to accommodate her obligations as a single parent.

Now not all husbands or fathers were absent. I interviewed two single fathers for this study and at least five other fathers were described by participants as being regularly involved in the lives of their children. Black, a 42-year old welfare recipient who was studying cosmetology with the intent of opening his own barber shop with his brother and father, had recently taken custody of his 4-year old son. Black's apartment was located in a brick, poorly maintained building near a major city highway. His apartment was tidy and well kept and contained all major furnishings, a couch, a chair and a small dining set, but they were clearly someone else's leftovers, with rips and stains covered by carefully

draped towels and small blankets. His front patio was covered with potted plants, a hobby, he said as he provided the names and origins of several flowering varieties. During our entire interview, his son, Michael, napped on a mattress behind a curtain that separated the only bedroom from the kitchen area.

In the early 1980's, Black attended a well-known historically black all-male university in the south where he was studying pre-law and dance. He dropped out after his sophomore year due to his depression over his grandfather's death, and then joined the air force. After leaving the air force in the late 1980's, Black studied basic electronics and engineering at a variety of technical schools while balancing entry level jobs in the service sector, waiting tables in hotels and restaurants, and working in retail establishments as a customer service representative. In 2000, at the age of 38, Black's son was born. During our interview, Black chose to share very little information about his son's mother, except to say that she was "out there" and could no longer care for their son. He had begun caring for his son full-time a few months earlier.

Black admitted that as a single father, he received positive attention from friends, social workers, and even strangers in public who felt it important to reward him with compliments for being an involved father: "Even when they thought I was taking care of him and I wasn't, you know. People like to see that." Unlike single mothers, who are too often perceived in accordance with stereotypes as a social burden, having caused their own familial situation due to careless sexual behavior, the two single fathers I interviewed were well aware of their perceived unusual status as "men who did good."

However, these fathers still faced obstacles. Juggling work and child care as a single parent was rarely easy, admitted Ike, a father of three girls who was in technical school at the time he received welfare:

> By me doing the right things, going to the PTA meetings, going to all these different meetings at the school, it's a lot of work, but I was there. I had to change my whole life. I had no time for my life. My life was their life, you see. I had to give up my life and dedicate it to my children. So I didn't have any dating and doing this—I couldn't afford it. I couldn't do that. All my time was full with my kids, you know.

Unlike Black and Tanya, however, Ike had a great deal of community support. Members from his church and extended family frequently stepped in when he most needed assistance, and as described above, his three girls lived with his sister and mother for a limited period of time while he worked on his technical degree in a neighboring state.

It is impossible to draw any definitive conclusions regarding this sample of two single fathers, but it is clear that these men did not feel that they faced the same stereotypes that most single mothers face, particularly those mothers who are young and black. These men perceived that social workers and community members looked upon them favorably—after all, they negated the racialized stereotype of the absentee, black father. Furthermore, although they were not striving to attain high level postsecondary degrees that might increase their chances of acquiring upward social mobility—both were enrolled in short-term, certificate programs—they nonetheless had strong kin networks available to assist them in meeting their parenting obligations. Ike’s children actually lived with other family members for a period of time, and Black’s father, with whom he speaks every Sunday evening, is trying to convince Black to move back home where

family members can help Black to raise his son. Said Ike of his support network, “It's based and built upon family. You know everybody know everybody, and everybody assist everybody, helping everybody, so [raising my children] wasn't a problem.” Both men have been able to pursue their educational and occupational goals because family members have been willing to step in and assist them in the raising of their children.

The family involvement of other fathers in mother-headed households varied considerably. As cited above, five fathers were described by participants as being very involved in their children’s lives, but for the majority of participants, fathers were not present for one reason or another. Fathers who were present contributed to the family unit in a variety of ways. Some had informal partial custody, taking in their children for a weekend or for the summer. Some paid full child support and others contributed when they said they could, providing food or clothing, and most mothers professed to be relatively happy with such limited involvement. When asked whether or not her son’s father helped her financially, Candy stated, “Yeah . . . Or if I'm just in a bind, I just don't have it—he might. But other than that. We try and make it. . . . I'm trying to do without putting him on child support.” This limited involvement with children’s fathers made it easier on those mothers who did not maintain positive relationships with their former partners. Their status as primary caregiver was preserved by keeping these men at a distance, and they were spared the “drama” of seeing daddies who were not perceived to be positive influences in the lives of their children.

Furthermore, their reluctance to formally pursue child support payments, like Candy cited above, may be spurred by financial realities. Nia, for example, found that

her already meager monthly TANF allowance of $235 was reduced to $109 when she revealed that her daughter's father assisted her financially. As Edin and Lein (1997) so acutely document in their study of nearly 400 welfare recipients, "The federal welfare rules present welfare-reliant mothers with a stark choice: follow the rules—which disallow supplemental income—and subject their families to severe hardship, or break the rules" (p. 218). They found, as I did here, that mothers were more willing to preserve the welfare of their families via the acceptance of under-the-table cash or assistance from fathers, than play by the rules.

These issues are all too familiar in the volumes of welfare literature documenting the lives of participants, struggling to make ends meet. I present this brief overview of external shaping forces as a means of revealing the similarities faced by many of these individuals I interviewed to those who have been surveyed and described so pervasively in current welfare literature previously. In the next section, I examine another obstacle well documented in the literature describing the experiences of post-welfare reform parents: work.

LOW-WAGE WORKING MOMS: THE EFFECTS OF BIRTHS AND LAY-OFFS

In 1998, spurred on by the passing of welfare reform two years earlier, Barbara Ehrenreich launched her investigative journey into the world of low-wage work, an experience that she translated into a best-selling book, *Nickel and Dimed* (2001). Ehrenreich was expecting to find, as she did, that it is near impossible to survive in the U.S. on the income of a single low-wage job. After living in three different geographical

regions, she determined that in order to pay her bills and not go into debt, she had to work at least two jobs. Even then, she was barely able to stay afloat, and the thought of establishing a savings was a mere dream. Ehrenreich readily admits that her experience was far from usual in that being a white, highly educated native speaker, she could expect to benefit from her race and possession of cultural capital.[21] Furthermore, and this is important, during the period of time that she was employed as a food server, a maid, a nursing home assistant, and a Wal-Mart employee, she always knew that she would eventually return to her prior life as a handsomely rewarded journalist and social critic. Any loss of income or self-esteem that she might face during her "experiment" was only temporary. She also had full control over when to end her stints, never staying around long enough to be laid off. And of course, unlike many of the individuals currently receiving TANF, she had no young children to care for and no immediate, overwhelming health problems.

What Ehrenreich provides in conducting her study of the realities of the low-wage workplace is a best-case scenario, and she knows it. As a result, her conclusion is that much more powerful. If she can barely make ends meet, what is happening to the millions of U.S. workers with children and/or health problems who don't have an

[21] Ehrenreich forbade herself from placing her educational credentials, a Ph.D. in biology, on her job applications, but she believed that her professional and educational experience might set her apart in terms of her cultural dispositions and her possession of linguistic capabilities, what Bourdieu has defined as "cultural capital." Although clearly such an experience may have served to make her a more attractive employee initially (she is well-spoken and psychologically aware of the expectations of each potential employer with whom she met), she found that none of the individuals with whom she worked ever suspected that she might be different from them. That is, they simply viewed her as another worker, another cog in the machine, and her admission of having a certain level of educational and occupational credentials was generally met with impartial detachment.

economically lucrative career as a successful journalist to return to at the end of the week?

Because work is now an integral component of welfare reform, and because work, or rather the lack of sufficient work, is in part what led the individuals I interviewed to apply for welfare in the first place, it would be impossible to omit an analysis of the ways past work experiences have shaped the lives of TANF participants. When asked what events or life experiences led participants to apply for TANF, most of them presented either one of two reasons: my child was born or I was laid off. Both life events resulted in a lack of income.

Implied in the first reason, although never mentioned explicitly by any participant, is the reality that most employers, particularly low-wage employers, do not provide paid maternity leave for new mothers. As of 2004, Australia and the U.S. were the only two industrialized nations that have not implemented paid maternity leave policies—163 countries do provide some form of paid maternity leave. Australia and the U.S. have unpaid leave policies for new mothers, but compared to Australia the U.S. is more miserly in its offerings. The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), passed only as recently as 1993, requires employers in the U.S. to provide mothers with only 12 weeks of leave; whereas the Australian government requires that employees provide mothers with up to a year of unpaid leave (Heyman et al. 2004). Although the offering of unpaid leave is required, not all employees can afford to take advantage of such leave, particularly when the mother in question is providing the sole or primary household income. Some socially progressive low-wage employers do offer some form of paid

maternity leave, but their numbers are few. In 1996, less than 35 percent of full-time employees in the U.S. working in the service sector were provided with paid maternity leave (Guthrie and Roth 1999). Of course many service sector jobs are not full-time, so even this figure dramatically over-represents the percentage of mothers receiving paid leave in our nation's restaurants, hospitals, and child care facilities. Because familial support programs are so extraordinarily insufficient, particularly in the low-wage service sector, new mothers either work through their pregnancies and birth, taking off only a few days to recover from labor or they leave their jobs altogether and turn to governmental assistance. Such was the reality revealed in my interviews with welfare participants.

Lisa, whose fiancée died when she was five months pregnant needed to work through her pregnancy, for that was the only way she felt she could pay her bills. After her son was born, she continued to work at a local grocery store, taking off only a few weeks for his birth, but found it difficult to balance her full-time work schedule with caring for an infant. After being laid off from the grocery store after having worked there for four years, she briefly received unemployment assistance before finding a job in a daycare facility, figuring that as a new mother, she at least had the skills necessary to succeed as an infant room assistant. The job was additionally appealing because, although the salary was low, she could receive discounted child care for her son and could then see him regularly throughout the day. After a year and a half of employment as an assistant in the baby room, Lisa was again laid off, only this time because she was technically only a part-time employee, she was not eligible for unemployment assistance.

Feeling that she had exhausted her familial resources and had already asked too much of her friends, she finally resorted to TANF. However, after receiving benefits for three months, she discovered that she couldn't pay her rent — even with a roommate — much less her bills with her $125 monthly cash assistance: "The cash—it wasn't, the amount was so small that I would have to like, live in a shelter." So she left TANF and went back into the workforce. At the time of our interview, she was once again working at the daycare where she had been laid off formerly.

Elizabeth, another employee working at the same daycare as Lisa, revealed very similar experiences. Like Lisa, Elizabeth worked right until the birth of her son. Elizabeth's work history reflects that she was capable of working up the low-wage hierarchy, but that hierarchy was leading her upwards only so far. She had previously worked as a customer service representative for a major telephone company, a manager for a pizza restaurant, and an administrative assistant in the human resources office of a national department store. Although Elizabeth liked working in the professional environment of the human resources office, she was eventually laid off by the company when their earnings ran flat. She eventually turned to daycare work for some of the same reasons as Lisa—being a mother, she felt she was therefore skilled for such a job. Unfortunately, her job as a toddler teacher was short-lived, and after having only worked there a few months, she left because her employer was unable to accommodate her school schedule in the fall. In between all of these jobs, Elizabeth cycled on and off TANF, relying on the program when jobs fell through. Moving in and out of jobs and on and off of welfare, Elizabeth eventually determined that she needed to prioritize her education:

"We were just in a downhill spiral, and I was like, 'O.k., I've got to get back into school. I have to.'" She realized that without a postsecondary degree, she would always be hitting those ceilings or being yet another victim of a company layoff.

Marie is another example of someone who after cycling in out of low-wage jobs realized she was going to need an education in order to locate a job that might provide some stability and flexibility. She turned to welfare after giving birth to her second child. Having two young children to care for—she already had a three year-old son—she decided to leave her daycare job, which did not provide paid maternity leave benefits, to take advantage of the year-long exemption from work available under TANF. Since then, she has been cycling on and off of welfare because she has been unable to get the training that she needs to succeed:

> Marie: There's going to be people that companies or employers can pay less. There's always going to be that work force that they can pay less. So then, you lose your job that you were barely making it with anyway. Like my job at the time—I was laid off my job at the daycare center because everyone else had, well, not everyone else, but where I was, the classrooms that I taught, where I worked, the other teachers had either degrees or more years of experience, so if I don't go to school and get the education or the training I'm going to continue to be . . .[trails off]
>
> Fiona: Laid off?
>
> Marie: Yeah!

Marie, a sociology major, is well aware of the economic instability that a lack of education can produce in the lives of individuals who are eminently dispensable due to the workings of a capitalistic system that relies in part on an ever ready pool of surplus labor.

In interview after interview, I heard stories about companies merging and the lay offs that inevitably ensued. Keisha, who had been working as a manager at a local convenience store described her incredulous response when she learned she was going to be laid off: “They're making money. They're busy all the time. They're not going to sell the company. And when they gave us all letters . . . reality kicked in. Cause I'm not—I don't jump from job to job. So I wasn't ready to go out and experience another job.” But that was just what she was forced to do because the new owners were not keeping any of the previous employees. Nia who had been commuting to the north part of town for her job as a customer service representative also acknowledged the instability that has come to define current market and employment processes:

> This was around the time [a well-known telecommunications company] combined with somebody or something and it was during a merger time, so they were losing a lot of money and they were getting ready to start laying off and I knew I was going to be next, so I just went ahead and left. Because you know, the customer service peon, you're the first to go.

Like Marie, Nia, a social work student, was well aware of business-as-usual practices that resulted in the sacrifice of low-level employees when companies sought to meet their own bureaucratic or profit-making goals.

Economists have long been recording labor market trends that are resulting in more instability for U.S. workers at all levels of the economic spectrum. With the advent of neoliberal market principles resulting in the deregulation of international trade and the movement of thousands of manufacturing and technology service jobs to remote locations in the U.S. or overseas, employers can no longer guarantee their employees the type of longevity in a job that might have been experienced in the early and middle parts

of the 20th century. Furthermore, employees can no longer expect the level of health and retirement benefits that were offered in the middle of the last century. Increasingly, the burden of paying for benefits are being shouldered by employees themselves under the guise of increasing freedom of choice. However, for employees of low-wage service sector jobs—which are the kinds of jobs that most welfare participants tend to obtain—the government is increasingly covering the costs of health benefits, as has been revealed in recent charges against Wal-Mart, the international, low-priced retailer. In 2004, Abelson determined that over 10,000 children of Wal-Mart employees in the state of Georgia were receiving Medicaid benefits. Wal-Mart is hardly alone in being an employer in the service sector offering meager benefit packages and a lack of substantive family-friendly policies, but the company has been targeted by progressive groups primarily because of its size, power, and increasingly international influence in the global marketplace.

Just as important to acknowledge in any critique of current market and employment trends on job stability and compensation are the gendered dynamics that underlie free-market practices that disproportionately disadvantage women. In a free-market system where competition is keen and the number of potential employees is consistently greater than the number of decently paid jobs available (See Rank 2004), there are bound to be losers; and as persistent wage gaps along gender lines have shown, those losers tend to be women. Since 2001, the median annual earnings of women working full time have hovered around 76 percent of those earned by men. Because women are more likely than men to work part-time as a result of their tendency to serve

as the primary caregiver in families, this ratio of comparative earnings would likely be even lower if all workers were considered (Institute for Women's Policy Research 2005).

Furthermore, women who are mothers lose out the most. Budig and England (2001) determined in their analysis of U.S. mothers that in all wage-level categories, mothers' wages decline by approximately seven percent with each child that they bear. Although they determined that African American and Hispanic mothers fared better than white women in terms of these wage losses, researchers have amply documented wage disparities between white, African American and Hispanic women. African American women working full-time earn only 62.5 percent of what white men earn and Hispanic women earn only 52.5 percent (Institute for Women's Policy Research 2005). These differences in earnings are caused by a variety of factors, including racial and gender discrimination in hiring and promotion, occupational segregation by race and gender, and institutionalized educational inequities based on race and gender.

So many of the women I interviewed had chosen occupational positions in the fields of care giving, including those in medicine and childcare. These positions pay less than other occupations and because women are more likely to hold jobs in care work, women disproportionately bear the brunt of care work wage penalties (England, Budig, and Folbre 2002). Furthermore, racialized hierarchies often exist within care work where women of color disproportionately hold low-level positions that are also some of the most poorly paid positions within the service sector (Glenn 1992). As scholars examining these gendered and racialized trends have noted, disproportionate numbers of minority women are therefore unduly penalized with the costs of providing necessary

care-work that allows many men and racially or economically privileged women to work in the first place. In 2004, child care workers earned on average $7.74 an hour with an average mean wage of $16,090, and although many daycare centers provided reduced childcare fees for their employees with children, most centers offered few or no additional benefits (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2004).

As so many of the women I interviewed made clear, they believed they were going to have to earn educational credentials in order to attain any measurable economic success in their lives. The kinds of jobs they had chosen in the past may have been desirable on one front; for example, the benefits of reduced child care as an employee within a child care facility were unmatched in any other occupation or the flexible hours of retail positions often allowed mothers to rely on family members or friends to aid with child care during their "off" hours. Yet, such jobs were too often miserly when it came to pay or opportunities for advancement. Furthermore, so many of the jobs these individuals had were subject to the whims of the market, disappearing at the announcement of a merger or a downturn in the profits of a company. Rather than challenging the structure of a labor market and economy that prioritizes profit over allegiance to its lowest level workers—a lot to ask of parents who are busy enough trying to feed their children and make ends meet—these individuals chose instead to pursue their educational degrees. Accepting the idea that education can bring freedom and opportunity, these individuals dove into their studies, meeting with the ups and downs of student life.

GOING TO SCHOOL: INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTS

Where can you go without an education?

Candy, 20-year old student and mother of one studying secondary education

Going back to school is much more important than just getting a job.

Keisha, 25-year old student and mother of three studying medical technology

Tired of being laid off and tired of cycling in and out of one low-wage job into another, the 19 welfare participants I interviewed had committed themselves to their schooling with the hopes of improving their occupational opportunities. Some had initiated the decision to return to school on their own, researching careers and enrolling in schools before ever turning to welfare. Others chose to enroll in programs upon the recommendation of their case managers as a means of maintaining their TANF benefits. The former group tended to have higher aspirations, choosing to pursue at the minimum a bachelor's degree and were more likely to describe their long-term goals as including master's or even doctorate degrees. The latter group tended to enroll in two-year programs, hoping to gain entry into fields with either relatively stable incomes or opportunities for advancement. Both groups, however, benefited substantially from a variety of institutional- and individual-level processes. Without financial aid and without the occasional guidance of campus faculty, counselors and staff, many students claim they wouldn't have been able to make it. The influence of these institutionally-located effects is the focus of this section.

School Bills – The Role of Financial Aid

Nearly all participants encountered difficulties meeting their financial needs and were struggling to pay their housing, food, child care, and utility bills as well as cover their educational costs for tuition and books. To assist in the payment of their postsecondary educations, all 19 of the TANF participants interviewed stated that they received some form of financial aid grant or scholarship. Of those 19, at least 10 had received Federal Pell Grants and six qualified for Georgia's Helping Outstanding Pupils Educationally (HOPE) scholarship. Two others qualified for campus sponsored scholarships or fellowship programs. Those students with higher educational aspirations tended to apply for the Pell Grant, HOPE Scholarship, and other campus-sponsored scholarships. Those students currently interested in educational programs lasting two-years or less more often relied on educational opportunities funded by the welfare office or its contingent organizations, although several of those students also applied for Pell Grants and HOPE Scholarships.

The Federal Pell Grant Program, created in 1972 and authorized under the Higher Education Act of 1965, was designed to increase students' opportunities of attaining financial assistance to attend postsecondary institutions. The Pell Grant Program makes grants available to undergraduate postsecondary students who are attending accredited colleges or universities and who have been identified as demonstrating financial need. In the 2003-2004 school year, nearly 7 million students across the U.S. applied for and were deemed eligible to receive federal assistance via the Pell Grant program. During that

same year, nearly 60 percent of the recipients of Pell Grants reported incomes of 20,000 or less. In the 2003-2004 academic year, the average grant distributed totaled $2,473, although the maximum annual grant the most needy students could receive totaled $4,050 (U.S. Department of Education 2004).

In addition, six students received Georgia's HOPE Scholarship, a merit-based scholarship program created in 1993 to provide financial assistance for undergraduate students attending Georgia's public and private colleges and universities. Since its inception, the program, which is funded by revenues from the state's lottery, has awarded over $2.7 billion to nearly a million students in the state of Georgia (Georgia Student Finance Commission 2005). To qualify for the HOPE Scholarship, students must be legal Georgia state residents at the time they start their postsecondary schooling and must have earned a 3.0 grade point average in secondary school or upon completing their first 30 semester credit hours of college or university. In 2004, the scholarship award was $1,500 per academic year for part-time students or $3,000 for full-time students.

The Pell Grant and the HOPE Scholarship together often covered all if not most of the tuition and book costs for many of these students. In 2004-2005, the full-time tuition for Georgia's regional and state colleges was $1,161 a semester or $2,322 a year. The full-time tuition for two-year colleges was $734 a semester or $1,468 a year. Students hoping to attend one of the state's four research universities, however, would find themselves harder pressed to pay the $1,684 per semester or $3,368 per year full-time tuition rates, particularly if they were not able to attain or maintain their HOPE scholarships.

Undoubtedly, these students are benefiting from the distribution of these grants and scholarships and couldn't afford to attend postsecondary school otherwise. However, both the Pell Grant and HOPE Scholarship programs have recently been experiencing fiscal strain as increasing numbers of students across the nation who qualify for aid have been choosing to attend postsecondary institutions. In part to deal with the program's budgetary shortfalls, the Pell Grant's maximum award has remained the same for four consecutive years. Even as tuition rates at state colleges have steadily risen, the maximum amount of the Pell Grant has remained steady at $4,050 from 2002 to 2006. In order to deal with existing and projected shortfalls, the Bush administration and Congressional leaders have proposed a variety of changes to the program, including changing the formula used by the government to determine financial need. In May of 2005, the General Accounting Office released a January 2005 report verifying educational lobbyists' claims that changing the family contribution formula determining eligibility would result in reduced awards for 36 percent of PELL Grant recipients and the elimination of the reward for 92,000 current recipients. At the time of this writing, legislators are currently debating whether and how this formula will change, an issue that will dramatically influence the future of the PELL Grant program.

Legislators in the state of Georgia have also sought to place limitations on the HOPE Scholarship Program, which in 2004 was anticipated to run at a shortfall by 2007. In order to save the program, local Congressional representatives put forth proposals to 1) increase academic eligibility requirements, 2) limit the use of scholarship monies to the

payment of tuition, or 3) implement family income caps for eligibility.[22] All of these proposals were put forth with the assumption that cuts to the program were imminent and that the program was worth preserving. Although generally heralded as successful by students, legislators, and state residents, the HOPE Scholarship program has received some criticism for its merit-based eligibility tactics and its reliance on lottery sales for funding. Critics arguing from an educational standpoint fear that secondary and postsecondary faculty members sympathetic to the financial needs of their students or influenced by the pressures exerted by students or parents might resort to grade inflation in the classroom. Opponents to merit-based scholarships in general, argue that need should trump merit, particularly for students coming from poor neighborhoods with inferior schools. Other critics of institutionalized gambling and lottery funded programs in general, argue that the monies used to support the HOPE scholarship disproportionately come from the pockets of the poor and the scholarships themselves disproportionately aid the wealthy. Such criticisms have been verified in studies comparing zip codes, median incomes, and lottery sales or winnings (Jones and Kempner 2003, Samuel 2002). Despite such concerns, the program has served as a model for numerous other states and is cited regularly for its perceived successes.

As stated above, without these financial aid programs, these TANF participants would not have been able to pay their postsecondary educational costs. Although we may debate the ethics of eligibility criteria or funding sources for these programs, there is

[22] Currently HOPE Scholarship monies can be applied to tuition, books, and materials. In 1993, when the program was started, only students whose family incomes did not exceed $66,000 were deemed eligible for the scholarship. In 1994, the cap was increased to $100,000, and in 1995, the income cap provision was eliminated completely.

no doubt that the Pell Grant and HOPE Scholarship programs in particular have increased the opportunity for struggling parents to finance their education. Clearly, however, given the small percentage of TANF participants who are pursuing a postsecondary education, many individuals who may qualify for such aid are not applying for it. Some are not aware of the financial aid opportunities available, some are not educationally prepared for postsecondary schooling—lacking either a high school diploma or its equivalent—and hence not qualified to apply, and some are simply too preoccupied with "getting by," and lack the time and energy to attend school. For those who have chosen that path, however, the financial aid offerings available are fundamentally necessary to make postsecondary education a viable choice, even if they are not always enough to ensure success.

Student Welfare and Welfare Students –The School as a Social Service Institution

As stated earlier, the impetus for this entire project was in part borne out of my asking questions about former students. As a teacher, I balance a sometimes precariously arranged set of obligations myself. I'm concerned about reaching students, intent on motivating them to learn and think deeply about important issues, all while maintaining high academic standards in my classroom. A concerned teacher wants to encourage and challenge simultaneously. Unfortunately, these goals often come in conflict, particularly when dealing with a population of students who have a variety of needs or outside obligations ready and waiting to interfere with their ability to effectively play out their role of student. The nurturing that may be required to encourage some students to

perform well may lie in direct contradiction to the high expectations one hopes to enforce via standardized evaluations.

Consciously aware of the role of the educational system in reproducing social inequalities, I and many teachers of students like those described in these pages—students who are often living on the edge and struggling to make education work in their complicated lives—find themselves contemplating the fundamental morality of every class assignment, every test, and every grade. When should deadlines be strictly adhered to and when can slack be cut when an outside force—a grandmother's death, a broken car, an absentee babysitter—is said to prevent a student from attending class when necessary? When are students' sometimes seemingly impossible excuses to be believed and how far should instructors go to ensure that a schooling system that is entrenched in and perpetuates social inequalities redresses some of those injustices and provides, at least in the circumscribed field of *this*, class, *my* class an opportunity for success?

I, as a teacher, have never been sure where to draw that line of responsibility. Some of my colleagues would regularly go out of their way to address their students' perceived needs. These rare educational "saviors" would call or email any student who disappeared two weeks into the term. They would occasionally travel to students' apartments or homes to bring them to school, and one went as far as to help a young man to pay his rent. They did whatever was necessary to pull students up and to help them survive college. On the other end of the spectrum were colleagues who argued against "handholding" and "babying" adults who needed to realistically assess their capabilities and determine their willingness to prioritize their academic goals. For them, it was all

about finding the will to make it work. "If students want it, they will make it happen," they would say. "If you accept an excuse, you're simply inviting more excuses." They took pride in their tough stance and gained respect from a number of the students on campus for maintaining relatively high expectations and standards.

I put myself somewhere in the middle. I've never paid anyone's rent, but I have given a student bus fare. I've never initiated a phone call to discern the whereabouts of a student I have met only twice during the term, but when reasonable sounding excuses were put forth, I've accepted papers late, despite my otherwise strict written policies on the matter. Am I someone who cares or am I someone who needs to maintain a professional distance? Am I a pushover or an authoritarian? Should I be more concerned with my students' lives or with their academic progress? Clearly these choices are artificially opposed, but they reflect some of the issues many faculty and staff face everyday, particularly those who are employed at the vast number of community or state colleges servicing a population of so-called "non-traditional" students.[23] As I listened to TANF participants' narratives about teachers or staff members who aided them along the way, I couldn't help but wonder how I might have responded had I been in the position of providing need. Although faculty and staff are not hired by their institutions to be social service workers, they often find themselves fulfilling that very role as was revealed in many of these interviews.

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[23] The term "non-traditional" is used in much educational research to differentiate generally older, working students from "traditional" 18-year olds entering postsecondary institutions directly from secondary school and attending school full time. The National Center for Educational Statistics uses the term "non-traditional" to denote students who may 1) delay enrollment in postsecondary school, 2) attend part time for at least part of the academic year, 3) work full time while enrolled, 4) be considered financially

For Candy the influence of a faculty member was low key, yet important. When I asked her how she found out she might be eligible to receive food stamps, she said, "I think a teacher at school might have told me that." In this case, while meeting with her instructor, she happened to vent some of her frustrations due to her financial struggles. Her teacher subsequently suggested that she visit the local social services office to determine whether or not she might be eligible for assistance. One off-hand comment to a professor on campus led to a helpful, and for Candy and her child, *necessary*, verbal referral to a social services office. And such a referral was not at all unusual. Nicky, a 26-year old case manager at Urban county's DFCS office acknowledged that "the schools definitely do say to individuals go on to the DFCS office and see if you qualify for any benefits." Financial aid officers, faculty, and even fellow students were all potential sources of information regarding the benefits available from the DFCS office.

Sometimes, the assistance provided was more substantive. Upon choosing to attend a local community college in 2003, Anne found that she was unable to concentrate as she once did as a result of the brain damage she experienced at the hands of her violent ex-boyfriend, who had viscously attacked her with an ax. However, without official documentation from her doctor, she was refused assistance from the disability office on campus. As Anne put it, "When I first came to [community college], I went into the disability section and it was like 'You don't have a reference from a doctor or social security? Be gone!'." Rather than seek the documentation necessary from her doctor, Anne chose to forgo requesting assistance from the campus's disability office. By not

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independent for purposes of determining eligibility for financial aid, 5) have dependents other than a

following through and taking advantage of the disability office's resources, Anne was arguably denying herself access to otherwise readily available and important support services. Her decision might be viewed as unfortunate and counterproductive in regard to her long-term goals. After all, such programs have been implemented as a means of improving the likelihood that students with identified learning needs are successful in school. But her decision is understandable and even logical in that it led her down the path of least resistance. She would rather go it alone than deal with the bureaucratic requirements of the institution. For her, it wasn't worth her time and energy to make a doctor's appointment, fill out the necessary paperwork and meet with a resource office counselor, all in exchange for "just what?" she wasn't sure.

Fortunately, however, her philosophy instructor intervened. Anne's instructor pulled her aside and told her definitively that she needed assistance. Anne describes her professor's unsolicited involvement:

> She noticed it, and she said "Honey, look—first of all, I'm tired of you carrying all these books in your arms," 'cause I was suffering a nerve in my neck. She went and bought me a book bag—a pull book bag. "I don't want to see that on your shoulder anymore." And [she] said, "Hey I want you to go see this person who's the head of the disability section in Georgia Perimeter." You know, so I bypassed all that mess. She said "It just don't make any sense—you're bright enough. You're smart enough. You just can't do everything like you used to. You just gotta relearn a little bit to learn."

Anne had needed this extra push. Due to her instructor's referral, Anne was able to meet the director of the campus disability resource office one-on-one, and discuss her situation

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spouse, 6) be a single parent, or 7) not have a high school diploma (Horn 1996).

at length in private. Although she eventually filled out the necessary paperwork, enabling her to receive the office's services, she had needed this initial connection and subsequent reinforcement to fully follow through on her part. Once Anne sought help from the disability resource office, she was evaluated and "that's when I found out I wasn't good at retaining things like I used to. I couldn't write and take notes and follow the teacher on the board at the same time anymore." The effects of her head wound had permanently altered her learning abilities. The office eventually assigned her a note-taker so she "could just concentrate on the board" while in class listening to lectures. She finished out the semester but realized that in order to succeed she was going to have to take things more slowly given her newly diagnosed learning needs.

Unlike Anne, Katerina did not need any extra pushes or convincing to take advantage of the opportunities available to her on campus. She was a savvy student and had carefully chosen her major, aerospace engineering. With two young children, she knew she needed to choose a program and career path that was not only interesting to her but financially lucrative (she could not have anticipated 9/11, an event which dramatically affected the airline industry and in part diminished the number of available jobs in her field when she graduated with her bachelor's degree in 2003, thereby prompting her decision to return to school to study business). Despite her initiative, Katerina found herself in need of additional assistance. Her case managers at the welfare office told her she needed to get some kind of job if she wanted to keep her TANF benefits. At this point, an African American engineering professor, who was known on campus for his mentoring of black students, had already been informally serving as a

mentor for her and offered to sign off on her work papers. Said Katerina of the arrangement, “And he was fine, like volunteer work—they considered it volunteer work into your major. So, I was able to maintain my TANF.” Admittedly, the professor gained free labor from the arrangement, but Katerina stressed that she appreciated his willingness to accommodate her immediate need, which was to locate a job, paid or unpaid, that demonstrated to her case managers she was at least working in some capacity in receipt for her TANF benefits. Volunteering her time may have been viewed as acceptable to her because, unlike so many of the TANF participants I talked with, she was somewhat financially stable as a result of her parents’ support. She explicitly stated that although the TANF cash benefits were helpful, she participated in the program not for the cash but for the medical benefits:

> It's not necessarily the 280 dollars or the 235 dollars a month ’cause that really isn't going to get you anything. Um, and the food stamps are nice, don't get me wrong, the food stamps are nice. You, you'll at least have food in your house. But honestly, the only thing I think TANF helps as far as going into college is not [having] that worry of if my child gets sick, I'm going to have to drop out of college 'cause I can't afford to take him to the doctor.

Katerina had the added benefit of having family members who were willing to watch her children for her while she attended classes. As a result, she didn’t have to worry about working the minimum 30 hours a week necessary to receive child care benefits. Her primary motivation for remaining in the TANF program was to receive Medicaid. Furthermore, she highlighted that she gained useful researching experiences when volunteering with a professor. Overall, she determined that the Medicaid and research experience that she gained was adequate compensation for her time spent volunteering.

Her professor was further supportive in terms of his allowing her to bring her children occasionally to the office or to class. When a grandparent, the children's father, or a friend couldn't cover her child care needs, Katerina found that her professors were generally sympathetic regarding her parental obligations. Said Katerina of her daughter, who more than once attended some of Katerina's engineering classes, "She worked out fine. She took better notes than I did, and everybody, all my professors knew her, 'cause aerospace is such a small department." Although she didn't need to bring her children to school with her often, she felt comfortable knowing that she could do so if the need arose. Although no participants whom I interviewed stated that any professor prohibited the attendance of their children, many did forgo attending class in order to care for their children. Tanya described bringing in her newborn to class two weeks after giving birth. Although her professor allowed her to remain in class with her child, Tanya stated that several fellow students threw "dirty" looks her way whenever her baby began to cry.

These experiences bring up issues of not just faculty but institutional effects—that is, what are parents to do when the educational institution itself is not constructed in such a way as to facilitate the success of parents? Historically, postsecondary institutions were not created with the working parent in mind and instead catered to the needs of adults with few responsibilities outside of the academic realm. However, as increasing numbers of older students, many of them with children, are populating college classrooms across the nation, educational institutions are responding accordingly. In response to concerns regarding the presence of students' children on campus, some colleges have implemented written policies that strictly prohibit the presence of children in classrooms and labs.

West Kentucky Community College, the State University of New York at Brockport, Georgia's DeVry University, and California's Clear Lake Campus of Yuba Community College are just a few campuses across the nation that have explicitly created policies prohibiting the presence of children in classrooms or labs. Most universities and colleges do not have specific policies targeting children, but they do have "disturbance" policies that more generally allow professors to use their discretion in determining when a student's behavior or action is interfering with the process of learning. Undoubtedly, bringing a child, particularly a very young child, to class can potentially disturb any postsecondary learning environment which is one reason why so many campuses have chosen to create specific rules prohibiting children in classrooms and labs.

No student that I talked with necessarily *wanted* to bring their child into class with them but felt that they had no other acceptable options available at the time that such a need arose. Although many campuses do have child care facilities on site, many of those facilities, particularly those with excellent local reputations are full, with long waiting lists. Also, such facilities often give professors and campus staff first priority. Admittedly, most of the parents I interviewed were not looking for full-time child care but care to cover an emergency situation. They needed coverage when schools or daycare centers were closed or when their children were ill and not able to be attended by their usual caregivers. Most campuses, however, like most businesses in general, do not offer emergency child care options. As a result, students were left to decide whether or not to miss a class meeting or seek a professor's approval to bring their child to class, that

is, if policies had not yet been created prohibiting the presence of students' children on campus.

Emergency child care coverage was a problem for many students. Like several others, Nia stated that when an emergency arose, her professors would generally allow her to bring her child with her to class. However, she also emphasized that she rarely had to make such a request because classes were frequently offered at times—at night or on weekends—when she could more likely locate emergency care:

> Nia: The one thing that I did like about [State University], to me it was conducive to, to parents, to single parents. Because they seem to be more understanding of the fact that everybody . . . every student is not the traditional 18, 19, 20 year old student and they have other issues and other experiences outside of school, so—that was definitely a major push to let me go ahead and finish school.
>
> Fiona: When you say they were conducive, who, who's the they?
>
> Nia: Just the department, the school in general to me is. It was, it provides—like the options of time of classes. My professors would allow me to bring my child on holidays when school would be out. It was o.k. for my daughter to come to class with me. Um, just, just things, just things in that way-it made it easier for me, I think.

Of course, a student taking night or weekend classes will likely encounter more difficulties in locating regular center-based care which tends to cater to the needs of the traditional employment sector in terms of times of operation. Furthermore, as Lisa's case indicates, one's child care coverage during these "after" hours can be more vulnerable to disruption, given the limited number of child care providers during that time. Lisa relied on her best friend to watch her son, Carl, from six until ten in the evening while she attended evening classes, but when her friend became pregnant herself and could no

longer care for Carl, Lisa had to drop out of school because she could not find anyone to watch over him while she was in class. Nevertheless, for those students who could locate regular care at these non-typical school hours, and who had a number of back up care providers should their current provider become unavailable, such flexibility in course scheduling could potentially enable them to balance their student, employee, and parental roles more effectively.

The assistance available on campus may not have dealt with social service offices or child care issues at all. Occasionally, as in Tanya's case, the assistance may have revealed itself in the form of bending rules in order to facilitate the long-term success of a student demonstrating distinctive potential. Tanya is well aware of her ability to win people over: "What has benefited me is I'm smart, so—and I work hard And I have a great personality! [laughs] So people tend to help me." Throughout her academic career, Tanya has received a great deal of assistance from her professors, staff members, and financial aid counselors.

Firstly, Tanya would never have made it into the academic program if a financial aid advisor wasn't willing to overlook existing restrictions on the release of her transcript. Secondly, she never would have been able to fund her educational pursuits unless the institution hadn't found the monies to cover her tuition and living expenses. In this case, the rules of the bureaucracy were bent in order to facilitate the long-term goal of educating a bright and potentially successful student.

In all of these cases, the micro- and macro-level processes within the educational institution served as substantial shaping forces in the lives of these students. The specific

needs of students participating in welfare programs were sometimes addressed by way of offering need-based grants or referrals to relevant social service agencies. And although educational institutions are changing in general to meet the needs of non-traditional students—who are often balancing families and jobs in addition to their schooling—those changes are both enabling and constraining for parents whose needs are complex and invariably tied to their financial and familial obligations.

STRUCTURE AND AGENCY REVISITED

Choice. The student parents participating in this study certainly made choices in their lives, but those choices were not made in social isolation nor were they always of their own choosing. When things went well, someone or some process or program was involved. So was the case when things went wrong. When Katerina needed a job, her professor found a way to make her work on campus count towards fulfilling her work requirements for the TANF program so she could continue to receive Medicaid for her two children. When Lydia Marie suddenly and unexpectedly needed a place to live after her husband's attack, her sisters stepped up and offered her and her four children a place to stay. When Tanya needed money to finance her education, professors and administrators on campus resuscitated a fellowship program that would waive her tuition and pay her a stipend. However, when Lisa could no longer depend on her mother or friend to watch over her son while she was in class, she had to drop out of school. For most of these parents, when employers offered no paid maternity leave nor subsidized their child care costs, welfare participants found themselves choosing to leave their jobs.

When Marie, Nia, Keisha, Lisa, and Elizabeth were laid off from their jobs, they turned to family for small loans and then the welfare system for support. Many of the choices made by these individuals ultimately hinged on the choices and subsequent decisions made by others that served to circumscribe, for better or worse, their available options.

And even when bad or poor decisions were made that may have involved a significant degree of agency, individuals were frequently willing to take responsibility for their actions. Cookie admitted,

> I love my son, but I shoulda went to college. And then decide to have a child. Cause I went and had a child when I was young. My mama had me when she was young, but she was in college-she was married. I wasn't married. See, I shoulda followed my mom's footsteps.

But Cookie didn't follow in her mom's footsteps. Upon learning that she was pregnant, she chose to keep her child. After giving birth to her son, her son's father left her and now she's struggling. Given her lack of familial connections and her diagnosed schizophrenia, depression, and attention deficit disorders, she will likely always have a problem maintaining herself economically. And her 12-year old son? His options are already limited because his mother's options are limited. A potential cycle of dependency may be borne out of these choices framed by a lack of familial connections, mental illness and poverty.

Chris, a director of a program servicing the needs of fathers and families receiving welfare benefits, forcefully argued against representations of "*cycles of dependency*" that focus on individual-level shortcomings and personal choice. Any cycles of dependency exhibited by welfare participants, he argued, were in great part derived from less apparent systemic deprivations:

Chris: I believe that most of the participants that we've had through here that take advantage of the programs . . . don't like being dependent on the system. . . .

Fiona: And even those individuals who have lived through generations of welfare, you would say the same thing?

Chris: Even thought they learn to adapt to [being on welfare], they never want it. And they never like it. Only because it puts strains and strong limitations on what they can do and be in life. You know, but they have to look at, "Do I survive, until I can do something and something, that's made available to make me do better? This is what's here to help me just make it from one day to the next." And survival, they're in survival mode all of the time.

Although Chris believed that these cycles of dependency were real in effect, he did not attribute them to individual-level weaknesses or faults. Instead he viewed these cycles as a product of individual choices constrained by social forces. To illustrate the complexities of social situations that might result in parents' choosing to make unconventional and potentially unwise or even dangerous choices, Chris explained why some of his hardest pressed clients forgo accepting welfare or educational assistance:

> There are some who just choose not to. They, they — and some of them are honest enough to tell you up front, "Don't try," because some of them have had to do things that they're ashamed of to survive. And they're protective level of being able to make it is being able to not deal with it, while if you come to our program, you've got to accept your shortcomings and values so you can correct them and deal with them! Yeah, and some of them don't want to do that because it would create even more problems. You know some of these young ladies . . . in the program, have had to deal with prostitution and stuff, or you know, "If I do better, I know it's wrong, I know I want a better life for me and my child, but right now between the system and this boyfriend I got. Yes, he's dealing drugs. Yes, that's how he's making it, but we're eating. We've got a roof over our

> heads. You know, we've got everything there. As long as I just stay there and keep my mouth shut." That's not a good way to be. It's a captive way to be, it's still like that terrorism thing, but they do learn and they've adapted to living in that mode. And they've got accustomed to some of the benefits of it. And they know, "If I rock this boat now, I'm falling out." It's a situation where . . . . they look at us and say "If they work with [your]organization, the both ends of support [I've] got, one [I've] got to give up. The boyfriend, though he may be a drug dealer, [I'll] have to give him up. At the other end, the welfare system is trying to give me up! So it's like, I'm being dumped twice by taking advantage of this! And I know I should [go to school] and I probably will one day, but not now."

Although these decisions and rationalizations may seem short-sighted, Chris argues that they emerge from a realistic assessment of the perceived current range of options.

Ultimately, all of the individuals whom I interviewed made the decision to seek assistance from this country's welfare system because they viewed the program as a comparatively reasonable option. Some of those individuals may be perceived as more deserving, some as more knowledgeable, some as more capable, but all of them shared a need for support. Public perceptions of the national welfare program resulting in its stigmatization have focused not on those social forces that might result in the creation of a person who might be perceived as deserving, knowledgeable, or capable, but on the person her or himself because after all, we only see the end product. We don't see the incremental effects of an illness over time. We don't see tenuous or severed family ties. We don't see how the cumulative effect of obstacles over time shape one's educational attainment. Lisa's words vividly communicate the despair one can feel when those obstacles mount:

> The biggest obstacle, I think, was, it was, it's the mental draining that you have when you're, you know, just, just, just the feeling of almost despair when you keep trying and trying to do something, but it's like you, you just can't succeed, you know? It's like it mentally wears you down, and knowing that you have a small child who has only you in the entire world to depend on, and it's like, "I can't find a job," you know, and you need diapers, you need a job. I think that, the mental wearing down was the hardest for me, even harder than physically going out there and looking for a job. Even harder than my babysitter's letting me down so I can't go to school, you know? Because, even while I was in class, I'm still worrying and thinking about what's going to happen and go on when I got out of class and had to go back home. I had to worry about was my mother going to come home? What is she doing in front of my child? You know, can I trust her? But I don't have anyone else. It's . . .that was the hardest thing for me.

Most of the processes that facilitate success for millions of other U.S. citizens are just as invisible. We don't see how access to preventative healthcare, good schools, and an economically stable and emotionally supportive familial network may collectively, over time contribute to the likelihood on one's success. This is not to say that success is ensured when the variables fall in our favor—after all, we do have agency and ultimately choose how to respond to opportunities or obstacles—but when those variables do fall in our favor the likelihood of success is heightened. The choice of an individual with multiple resource is undeniably different from the choice of an individual lacking those same resources. However, social institutions, culture, habitus, are all abstractly construed as compared to the concrete bodies filing across stages at graduation or sitting in our nation's welfare offices. It is easier instead to focus on those bodies. It is easier to look into a face and assign credit or blame and to assign "worthiness" based on the end result.

Individuals certainly have agency, but as these findings illustrate, that agency is circumscribed. The cumulative effect of these various factors fundamentally shaped the life trajectories of these economically-poor parents. Nearly everyone admitted to making at least one or two or even many bad choices, but rarely were those choices alone enough to produce their economically precarious positions. Yes, having a child when one is young and/or single can make going to school and earning a living challenging, but as several of these parents demonstrated, such a choice does not preclude potential economic or educational success. However, to succeed as a young and/or single parent, one needs good health, occupational and educational institutional support, and an equally healthy and strong support network of positively influential individuals (See Tables 3 and 4 for a summary review). And as these findings have shown, to succeed, one needs these things consistently. When any of these variables are lacking, choices become constrained and a parent's agency is diminished. As these narratives reveal, choices are individually acted upon but socially produced. Given the definitive role of social institutions and culture in shaping these choices, the question for social policy researchers, legislators, and the general public is to determine how to create policies that facilitate *enabling* choices for poor parents. Of course, asking such a question assumes the deservingness of poor parents and welfare participants in the first place; but as current policy trends indicate, this issue of deservingness is a stubborn obstacle yet to be overcome. Entitlement to agency, it seems, is tied to morality; and so the viscous cycle continues.

Table 3. Internal and External Forces Hindering Occupational & Educational Goals

External	
Familial Obligations	**Institutional Obstacles**

• Care of children
  o Economic*
  o Medical
  o Educational
• Care of sibling
  o Economic
  o Medical
  o Educational
• Care of parent
  o Economic
  o Medical
• Husband/Partner
  o Domestic violence
  o Occupational goals prioritized
  o Failure to provide child support
  o Drug addiction
  o Illness/Death
	• Job
	  o Low-paying
	  o Laid off
	  o Lack of paid maternity leave
	  o Inflexible schedule
	• Educational institution
	  o Loss of accreditation
	  o Lack of financial resources
	  o School Policies
	  ▪ Prohibition of children on campus
	  ▪ Rigid class or professorial expectations
	• TANF Policies & Procedures **
	• Transportation - Public transit inadequacies

Internal	
Individual	

• Medical – Psychological or Physical ailments restricting individual's capabilities
• Learning Disabilities
  o Cognitive limitations
  o Stigmatization
• Values
  o Prefers motherhood to working
  o Prefers education to working (hinders short-term occupational/economic needs)
  o Prefers working to education (hinders long-term occupational opportunities)	

* Includes food, clothing, shelter and day care provisions.
** See Table 6 for more detailed information regarding TANF policies and processes described as hindering educational success.

Table 4. Internal and External Forces Facilitating Occupational & Educational Goals

External	
Familial Support	**Institutional Support**

• Father
  o Financial
  o Emotional
  o Child Care
• Parents (mother)
  o Financial
  o Emotional
  o Child care
• Siblings (sisters)
  o Financial
  o Emotional
  o Child care
• Children
  o Emotional
	• Educational institution
	  o Financial aid
	  ▪ Pell Grant
	  ▪ Hope Grant/Scholarship
	  ▪ Counseling
	  o Faculty
	  ▪ Counseling/mentoring
	  ▪ Allowed children in class
	  o Disability Programs
	  o Policies
	  ▪ Various class offerings and times
	  ▪ Work study opportunities
	• TANF Policies & Procedures *

Internal	
Individual	

• Ability to create goals – "I had a plan"
• Ability to locate available resources - "I'm a research finder"
• Values
  o Self-reliance
  o Education important to success
  o Desire to adequately fulfill present/future needs of children	

* See Table 6 for more detailed information regarding TANF policies and processes described as hindering educational success.

CHAPTER 5
WORKING SUCCESS OR HARDLY WORKING?: HOW COLLEGE STUDENTS FARE UNDER TANF

Eastern County's Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) main offices are tucked away on a side street hidden from view. Most county residents would only know of DFCS's location if they went there knowingly with an address in hand. The office is fully accessible by bus and train, and during business hours, its small parking lot is crammed full of cars. On those days when the weather is fair, the low brick walls lining the building serve as benches for various people watching for their ride, needing a smoke, taking a work break, or waiting for someone still inside the four-story building behind them. Inside, people are everywhere, filling the halls and elevators with their movements and voices. Walking into this building, I am reminded of a city hospital or county courthouse; people are either determinedly moving in a specific direction, clear of their intent and objective, or are wearily and interminably waiting in an array of not-so-comfortable chairs.

After inquiring at the front desk, I am immediately directed up two floors where most of the case managers are located. Paper signs posted on the white walls direct me and the ten others emptying out of the small elevator where to go when we collectively reach the third floor. The lines here are long and the voices of staff members behind the counter are perfunctory, indicating a familiarity with each phrase, each answer, each instruction emitted. Plastic chairs fill the waiting rooms located on each side of the central counter and more paper signs hang from the ceilings. I sit down and read them: "Work means more than money," "Opportunities: Reach your potential," "Independence:

Make your own decisions about what affects your family," and "Life works if you work." These signs are intended to motivate, but no one but me seems to be reading this propaganda supporting the primary tenets of what has come to represent welfare reform. Everyone else is busy tending to children, chatting, or complacently staring off into space.

Before ever setting foot in this building, I had been told that all one needs to know about welfare policy could be learned in DFCS's waiting room. Like so many other governmental bureaucracies, this particular DFCS office has a notorious reputation of expecting that its patrons will spend significant amounts of time within its four walls, much of it waiting. In describing her experiences applying for welfare benefits, Katherine stated, "Even though I had good case workers . . . it's still a long wait. You have a set appointment, but you—two hours later, that's when they'll see you. . . . It's like going to the clinic. It's an all day thing." As individuals sit around waiting for their names to be called, they often get to talking and share information about welfare, its work programs, food programs, job training classes, and child care provisions. They also share personal stories about their children, their families, their medical histories, and their romantic lives.

Upon my first visit to Eastern County's DFCS office, I note the relatively intense security system separating administrators' and case managers' work spaces and the general waiting rooms. Later, as an approved "guest" of DFCS's chief director, I received a temporary key to the back offices that allowed me to move freely from the public waiting areas to the offices behind closed doors. The signs on walls, hallways and

locked doors clearly demarcated the various spaces in the building, directing the flow of foot traffic and creating a distinct sense imposed order.

I describe this scene because although the racial and ethnic demographics of the employees and individuals being serviced in Urban City's and Eastern County's DFCS offices are non-typical (see Table 1, Ch.2), the feel of the building is hardly unusual. In her description of Sunbelt city's[24] welfare office, Sharon Hays (2003) presents a similar portrait, emphasizing the building's "floors of dirty-gray institutional linoleum tile" and "barred windows." Hays ultimately uses these descriptive details to relay the importance of environment in communicating to clients their relationship to the institution at large:

> Despite the office remodeling that came with welfare reform's influx of federal dollars, the Sunbelt City welfare office retains the feel of a cold and impersonal state bureaucracy that serves the disadvantaged. . . .This office additionally has something of a prisonlike feel engendered by the seemingly endless rows of locking doors, each with its own number, leading into the tiny rooms where caseworkers conduct eligibility interviews with welfare clients. In all these ways—it's impersonality, its overcrowding, its image of impending danger, and its treatment of people as mere "numbers"—the Sunbelt city welfare office seems to reflect the nameless, faceless, "suspect" status of the urban poor. (P. 26)

Like the welfare office in Sunbelt City, Eastern County's office—although full of sound and the sight of children—was not comforting nor comfortable. Marie, who had been recently fulfilling her TANF work requirement by volunteering at the office confided, "When I first started, well when I started—I started coming here in February—I was physically sick. Physically! Because it was horrible." Upon reflection, she added, "It's just, I guess it's the treatment. It's the treatment and it's the whole—I don't know. It

would have to be mind over matter. I would really have to prepare to come in here." Marie's visceral response was far from atypical. No one I talked with looked forward to the task of visiting DFCS.

Even the slogans on the signs hanging from the ceiling described above—particularly the two reading "Life works if you work" and "Work means more than money"—imply that gainful employment is not an existing value or a goal of most welfare participants. For Lydia Marie, who was in the office as a result of domestic violence and Marie, whose job as a child care assistant simply didn't cover her base expenses, such signs were insulting. To be fair, there are participants who are hesitant to work in the formal economy for a variety of reasons, including their lack of self-esteem or their preference to parent; however, such individuals ultimately comprise a minority (See Edin and Lein 1997), and those who are physically and mentally capable of working outside of the home, usually *do* work. What such signs instead reify is an office culture where participants are frequently not recognized for their individual qualities and needs; assumed to be lazy and lacking motivation; and perceived as being in need of paternalistic supervision and punitive sanctions. This created culture is produced not only out of individual interactions but also of the bureaucracy and written policy that has come to define welfare under the program TANF. As Nia states, "I wouldn't even say it's the case workers—they're just doing their job. It's just, just the system period." Although some welfare participants were seemingly able to brush off such negative treatment and pursue their goals without internalizing the stigmatizing and alienating

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[24] According to Hays, Sunbelt city is a pseudonym for a location described only as a "western boom town."

interactions and office processes defining their experiences in the welfare office, most participants were either angry or worn down, if not both. Welfare programs, at least under pretense, have been designed to provide assistance, yet that assistance often comes at a price that takes its toll and, as described below, too often hurts the very individuals those programs were intended to benefit.

STIGMA & ANONYMITY IN THE WELFARE OFFICE

Applying for welfare can be difficult for a variety of reasons: the inconvenience of all-day appointments, the hassle of completing paperwork and interviews, the delays in receiving of payments, and the overall experience of feeling stigmatized. When I asked Anna how friends and family responded when she had first applied for welfare benefits, she responded,

> Anna: They didn't know.
>
> Fiona: Did you choose not to tell anyone?
>
> Anna: Mmhm.
>
> Fiona: Why did you choose not to tell anyone?
>
> Anna: Cause I just thought it was, uh . . . [8-second pause]. You know, welfare is welfare. *Welfare*. And that's really poor. So my kids didn't even know.

Although it can be difficult enough to experience the condemnation of family, friends, or strangers, facing that same condemnation from case managers or staff members in the welfare office itself can exacerbate an often already demoralizing situation.

Over and over, I heard how degrading the experience of applying for welfare benefits could be, as was made clear when Lydia Marie asked, “I understand some people

abuse the system, that goes without saying, but don't [case managers and staff] know it's the most humiliating thing to go down [to DFCS] with your children to seek help? I don't think they understand that." Another TANF client, Marie, described how her persistent anonymity in a DFCS office where her face and work title were recognized but not her "person" had steadily worn away at her self esteem:

> I've had one [case manager] that has made me feel like an actual person, like I have some kind of privilege and "It's o.k. if you need this for now, but don't make this a permanent, you know, do something so this is just temporary. This is what it's designed for." But I've had others that make you feel like they-sometimes they don't even give you a name. You're just a client. . . . You're just "work experience." I don't have any. . . . name or anything. I'm just "work experience." . . . I guess they have this idea that the people, the clients who come in don't want anything or don't want to do anything, they just come in and get the benefits and go home and that's it, but I guess, once they get to know me, then they'll "Oh, you're trying to go to school. Oh, you're doing this, oh you're doing that." Then their attitudes change towards me but I think they have this overall assumption that most of the people that come in here don't want anything so they treat you different. . . . I just had one in particular who's been great. And she's made me feel that it's o.k. that you need this for now. . . just don't make it permanent. But most of them—it's hard coming in here.

Even Marie's self-described positive experience is only marginally positive. The one case manager who according to Marie treated her "like an actual person," still felt the need to warn her that she must not abuse the system. From the beginning Marie has been placed on the defensive, having to prove to her case manager that she is not like the "others," and specifically not like those individuals who make TANF permanent, not temporary. When I asked Marie why she believed her past case managers might have

treated her so impersonally and suspiciously, she first exclaimed that she didn't know. She then, however, launched into a detailed and perceptive analysis of a social situation created out of mutually defensive expectations on the parts of welfare applicants and their assigned case managers:

> Because of what we believe the case worker is going to act like, I think a lot of clients come in with the attitude that I'm going to have to, I'm going to have to talk loud, or I'm going to, I can't be nice, because no one is going to be nice to me, and I want to get something done around here. Just going to talk real loud or make a scene because that's the only way. . . . Then somebody will hear me. Because most of the [clients] who come in here are like that, . . . [case managers] tend to put on this hard persona outside or [they] tend to put on this certain façade and say "Well, this is how I'm going to be because . . . of my clients."

As a result, many TANF case mangers and clients are prepared at every meeting for a confrontational interaction. Ready to have their authority and legitimacy challenged, case managers and clients are prepared to assert whatever limited power they have within their micro-level interactions, an assertion that frequently produces an equally defensive response. The potential of any "real" communication is diminished in this micro-battle of righteousness.

Hearing this from Marie was particularly telling because she did not appear to be someone who would be confrontational or resort to talking loudly to get her message across. Throughout our interview, Marie quietly and thoughtfully analyzed her own life and her observed experiences. She was careful, reasonable, and fair in most of her descriptions. It's clear that the case managers in Eastern County's DFCS office where she worked had grown to respect her and viewed her as a model client; after all, she was

the only welfare participant referred to me for an interview by them.[25] Although overall, Marie rated her case managers as generally supportive of her educational goals—at the time of our interview she was one-year away from earning her B.S. in sociology—she confessed that a DFCS office employee's occasional suggestion that she focus on getting a job rather than on her education or a case manager's comment that she was "wasting her talents" by fulfilling her work experience requirements in the DFCS office did little except to wear away at her self-esteem. In regards to the purportedly concerned case manager who chided her for "wasting her talents," Marie confided, "Man, I know he didn't mean any harm, but it's kind of like—you know, well? I've got to do what I've got to do now to take care of family and get myself through school. So, I mean—[being on TANF] is still tough." Marie used her interview with me as an opportunity to cathartically reveal her frustration with the depersonalizing effects of welfare office protocol and wanted to make it clear that even a relatively "good" experience at DFCS is far from empowering.

Nicole had yet another explanation for the sometimes negative interactions she experienced with case managers:

> I think they kind of put you into a category where they think you're lazy. They don't know your background unless you . . . go into detail, and I'm private, basically. I don't go into all of this and tell anyone anything, but that's what they want you to do. And I don't feel it's necessary for them to know or me to give them an excuse as to why I had to get on TANF. You know. It's just, they belittle you. Because they have a *job*, quote, unquote.

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[25] In regard to this latter point, at the end of our interview, Marie asked if all of the TANF participants in my sample had been referred by employees of the DFCS office—I told her no. She responded with a sigh

Unlike Marie, whose frustrations were borne out of the depersonalizing actions of case managers who didn't even know her name much less attempt to understand her situation, Nicole believed case managers should stop asking so many questions and determine need without requiring participants to reveal every detail about their home life. In exasperation Anna affirmed Nicole's complaint: "They want to know your life story." Nia likewise protested, "They just need and request so much!" As far as Nicole was concerned, if an individual chose not to comply fully with case managers' requests for detailed information and chose instead to retain a level of privacy, that person would be tagged as being contrary and would therefore be treated accordingly by office managers, staff, and supervisors.

Marie and Nicole cite the seemingly paradoxical effect of a system that requires so much personal information of its applicants and yet resists treating participants as individual beings. How does this happen? Furthermore, what are some of the consequences of such treatment in terms of TANF participants' educational opportunities? To answer these questions, it is first necessary to examine the application process itself and some of the basic state and federal requirements resulting from 1996 welfare reform legislation.

THE BUREAUCRACY THAT IS TANF

Although most case managers and applicants described Eastern County's TANF application process as straightforward, it was nonetheless time-consuming. After

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and said good, because if that were so, I'd probably get a more positively painted portrait of welfare office

checking in with a staff member at the front desk, where TANF applicants' names are initially screened to ensure that they don't already have an open case, applicants are expected to complete a four to six page application before being screened again to determine if they are eligible to receive expedited food stamps. After this initial stage, they are then ready to meet with a Family Independence Case Manager (FICM), who will determine their eligibility for food stamps, Medicaid and TANF, a process often requiring applicants to provide comprehensive documentation of personal records including but not limited to: bank statements, rent receipts, social security cards, child care receipts, school records, and proof of prior employment. Upon completing their interview with a FICM team member, applicants who are deemed eligible for TANF will then meet with an employment services case manager and undergo yet another interview where the client will work with the case manager to develop a Personal Work Plan (PWP), which may or may not involve a limited amount of education or training. Like the workings of any complex bureaucracy, the entire process from start to end is time-consuming, monotonous, and, until the final step, depersonalizing.

Until only recently in Eastern County's DFCS office, the creation and maintenance of a job plan, now overseen by employment services case managers, had previously been a duty undertaken by FICM team members. In early 2004, the work plan duties were separated out into a distinct position. By creating a separate employment services position, office staff were able to provide more customized services to each client, but perhaps even more importantly, this move enabled staff to more efficiently

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experiences than was the reality.

monitor TANF participants' educational and occupational activities. Carl, who was currently working as an Employment Services case manager, but had served as a FICM team member for four years prior, explained why he believed the work allocation changes took place:

> What happened — it was so overloaded — the caseworkers — that we didn't have time to follow up on who was attending what, who is in a work program, who's working, who's in school. So, consequently, they were just falling through the cracks, and we didn't have time to really keep up with their attendance, their work attendance, so now with this unit, we can—that's my final goal is to just keep up with those activities.

With this new structure in place, administrators hoped that the accuracy of their participation rates would be increased—those clients who were adequately meeting their work activity participation responsibilities under TANF would be identified and those clients who were not would be duly sanctioned and, if necessary, removed from the rolls. This change in the bureaucratic structure of case managers' jobs was particularly important because Eastern County's office and Georgia in general had not been maintaining satisfactory work participation rates as dictated by the federal government.

Ask any welfare administrator or case manager across the nation and that person will tell you that maintaining acceptable work participation rates is currently a particularly important priority. Under welfare reform, all states were required to ensure that 50 percent of all TANF participants were fulfilling the TANF's work activity requirements, which generally mandated that parents with children under the age of six must be involved in an acceptable primary activity for 20 hours or more each week and parents with children over the age of six must work a minimum of 30 hours weekly.

Georgia has never had high participation rates, consistently placing well below the national average and actually having the lowest rate, 8.2 percent, of all 50 states in 2002 (see Table 5). Despite these low participation rates that fall well below 50 percent, the state, along with most other states, has never been sanctioned due to an adjustment made to each state's expected participation rates based on the percent of clients who have left TANF since 1995.

Table 5. TANF Work Participation Rates, 1997-2003

Fiscal Year	Participation Rate Georgia	Participation Rate United States
1997	20.6%	30.7%
1998	29.3%	35.3%
1999	17.6%	38.3%
2000	12.2%	34.0%
2001	8.7%	34.4%
2002	8.2% *	33.4%
2003	10.9%	31.3%

(Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2006. "Office of Family Assistance: Work Participation Rates." Washington D.C.: Administration for Children and Families. Available on the Internet: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/

* = Represents the lowest participation rate in Georgia since the implementation of TANF in 1996 and the lowest participation rate in all 50 states in the year 2002.

Each year, states determine the percentage of TANF cases that have been reduced within their state since 1995 and subtract that rate from 50 percent. The resulting percent is the expected adjusted participation rate of that state. Because in 2002 Georgia's case load had been reduced by 57% since 1995, the 2002 adjusted participation rate was

zero.[26] That is, to be in compliance with federal participation rates, no TANF participants needed to be actively involved in a work activity. Administrators and legislators recognize the flaws of the current system, but solutions to this problem are not so clear because participation rates are notoriously complicated for a variety of reasons.

For starters, not all states similarly define who is to count as participating; for example many states define the work activities eligible for satisfying the 20 or 30 hour weekly totals more narrowly than the federal government does. Secondly, not all states similarly define the pool of possible participants to be considered in participation rate computations, offering waivers for a variety of circumstances or conditions; for example, Georgia, along with 28 other states, exempts parents with children under the age of one from having to fulfill work participation requirements (Hamilton and Scrivener 1999; Pavetti 2004; CLASP 2002). Furthermore, these point-in-time evaluations of work activity participation in effect do not acknowledge the dynamic flow of clients moving on and off of welfare and in and out of the labor market, which, as many researchers have documented, has become the reality for many welfare participants (Harris 1996; Loprest 2002). Therefore high participation rates do not in fact represent what might be considered actual success—sustained employment allowing for eventual self-sufficiency—and instead simply measure the percentage of individuals working at a particular point in time, regardless of their length of employment or wage.[27]

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[26] In 2002, a total of twenty states had adjusted participation rates of zero percent: Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Michigan, Montana, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006).

[27] Wage, I would argue is of particular importance because so many individuals received no direct economic compensation, other than their TANF grant, for their work. In 2003, just over 20 percent of

What these participation rates *do* promote is an intense focus on numbers that, as described above, reveal little about the reality of welfare participation, and frequently distract case managers from addressing individuals' actual needs. Nicky, who has been working as a FICM team member for two years explicitly shares this very concern:

> Because everybody is real oriented to the numbers right now, they're losing sight of the person, so much. You know because we trying to — it's all about the numbers because they're getting this big pressure from the state saying you need to get the numbers together, so . . . I think that's what's kind of messing with us doing a better job or making sure that — because I'm like "I don't want to have to make you do a job search," and they're in a shelter and — it's just the process of it is confusing to me as far as like the catch-22 that happens within the program versus real life.

As a result of the "numbers game," Nicky finds herself asking clients to involve themselves in activities that may or may not be relevant to their particular situation or capabilities. Nicky went on to describe the difficulties of a specific client who is attempting to fulfill her TANF work participation requirements while pursuing her college degree:

> One of my clients she's like how am I going to [go to school] *and* come over here? Because she goes to school—it's conflicting with her schedule at school to try to come over here and do work experience because everything is 8 to 5. So it's kind of hard for her to come over to do enough hours. . . . I don't know how she's going to do that. And then she has to do at least 25 hours to get the child care. So . . . I'm trying to figure something out for her, but it's hard. . . . It's challenging

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Georgia's welfare participants who were identified as meeting the state's participation requirements used work experience—unpaid office work (e.g. copying, filing, or data entry) usually performed in the DFCS office or one of its liaison organizations—or community service work to fulfill all or part of their requisite hours. As long as the weekly amount that the client is receiving in TANF benefits is at least equal to the minimum wage rate multiplied by hours worked each week, this exchange of labor for benefits is deemed acceptable under current labor laws (Holzer 2002). In essence, then, participants provide labor for the DFCS bureaucracy in exchange for their TANF grant and (if they didn't have them already) minimal low-level office skills, hardly a means of moving towards self-sufficiency, except for the "hardest to serve" cases, who, from what I saw, were rarely offered such opportunities, likely because those individuals would involve more intensive training and monitoring, activities that DFCS employees don't have the time nor energy to take on.

> to figure out how they're going to get, meet the federal guidelines and go to school, outside of vocational and things like that, because they have these rates, our participation rates—that's how we get the money for the programs. You know it's through their seeing results of their being on TANF. Because . . . they have to participate. They have to. They don't want to have them get TANF and do nothing. So that's the big issue right now. Get everybody placed in a primary activity that is countable towards the federal participation guidelines.

Nicky, who struggled as a single mother herself while attending college, can empathize with her client's problems, but as a state employee Nicky is also concerned about retaining federal funds, which could be dramatically reduced if she and other case managers fail to maintain satisfactory participation rates. Although she feels her client's long-term chances for success would be improved by attaining her educational goals, Nicky has a monthly work participation rate goal to think about, and as the TANF program is now set up, education does not easily fit in as an acceptable work activity. Said Nia, who was working on her degree in social work and had relied on TANF on and off for just over two years, "I think that more of the, more of an emphasis should be placed on the person and what might be going on in that person's life rather than, 'When are you going to get a job?'" But for now, at least, the emphasis is on work, not education; to boost participation rates, clients need to locate and land jobs, not degrees.

The participation rates were implemented with the goal of increasing TANF participant's "personal responsibility," making them accountable for their perceived actions or inactions; but, as described above, these rates aren't working as originally intended and it's not always clear what these numbers represent in terms of "real" success. However, instead of comprehensively examining the causes of these

measurement failures and instead of exploring why so many states have been, in real numbers, unable to meet participation rate requirements, the executive and legislative branches of government have simply recommended increases in the rate in their various respective welfare reauthorization proposals. Since 2002, when the TANF program was scheduled for reauthorization, every reauthorization proposal receiving serious consideration has recommended that state participation rates be increased from 50 percent to 70 percent. Because Georgia, along with 46 other states, would never have met the current 50 percent rate without the current standard adjustment credit—which in all reauthorization proposals is replaced by much more conservative reduction options—the proposed 20 percent increase would likely result in many more states being sanctioned for their unsatisfactory participation rates.

It is true that the current participation rates are virtually meaningless in terms of actual policy because of the collection of reductions and waivers that allow states to escape sanctions despite their miserably low rates. However, it is also evident that despite the lack of sanctioning, participation rates *do* matter in the eyes of local administrators and case managers. These rates—that easily, if inaccurately, quantify a welfare program's achievements or lack thereof—have acquired a symbolic meaning resulting in part from their resonance with legislators and the general public. Every DFCS employee with whom I spoke was acutely aware of the importance of these figures. Nonetheless, it was not always clear, to many of them nor to me, how simply raising the bar — by increasing participation rates 20 percent as has been called for in

proposed legislation — would improve the functioning of welfare offices that were struggling to meet current rates that didn't necessarily measure success in the first place.

But like the participation rate currently in existence, the proposed increased participation rate has little to do with lived reality. Instead participation rate policies are yet one more dimension of the discourse of deservingness used to court public favor for social welfare programs serving the poor. Legislators and high-level governmental officials who are shaping these policies are concerned with demonstrating to the public that tax monies are being put to good use and that only worthy individuals performing work in the formal economy (not house work or parenting) are rewarded for their efforts. For legislators and other high-level governmental officials, what those participation rates communicated to the general public has been much more important than how those rates have actually functioned in DFCS offices.

Nowhere is this made more clear than in a close examination of how those rates actually serve to limit opportunities for many potential TANF participants interested in increasing their chances of realizing sustained self-sufficiency by pursuing their postsecondary degree. For these students, participation rates in actual effect are yet one more obstacle preventing their success. As Nicky described above, she has found herself recommending that students leave school and forgo their long-term educational and occupational goals, so they can instead go to work in order to qualify for welfare benefits. When asked why more case managers didn't support TANF clients who expressed a desire to pursue a college degree, James a 31-year old case manager suggested that fault

lay with 1) a few past clients who due to their educational failures have spoiled it for the rest and 2) with a system that does not support educational opportunities:

> I think it's just a policy. I don't think truly in my heart, that the [case managers] who I deal with want someone to constantly be on [TANF]. I don't think that is. I just think at this point where [case managers have] been burnt so many times by clients who were supposedly in school, enrolled, but then dropped out or maybe had someone—very few instances, you know—just different things. And the guide, when the guidelines are set, when we violate those guidelines, then it tends to be we are wrong [and] we could lose funding for our county, so that's a big thing too, you know, as far as making sure they're in a primary activity. And because the government doesn't consider [education] a primary activity, you have to actually look at it like it's not. And we have to make sure [we account for their hours correctly] because if we don't, then everybody else is going to suffer for it.

As James points out, in the state of Georgia, hours spent pursuing a postsecondary education are considered a secondary activity, which are countable towards weekly participation rates only after the client has completed 20 hours of work in a primary work-related activity. Additionally, James highlights the fear case managers harbor regarding issues of fraud or error. Such fears tend to result in case managers and administrators placing more conservative restrictions on programs, a fact evidenced here in James's implied admission that case managers are likely to steer clients away from participating in educational activities as a means of avoiding potential violations if those clients should not follow through on their stated educational objectives.[28]

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[28] The conservative effect on the implementation of policy that can result from the threat of punitive sanctions is not unusual and was noted most recently in the functioning of Georgia's food stamp program. Soon after welfare reform was implemented in 1996, Georgia was regularly sanctioned by the federal government for its food stamp error rate. As a result of these sanctions, state-level policies were created that ultimately restricted food stamp program participation, effectively lowering the overall number of food

All of this focus on policy and a fear of violating policy is likely to produce one-size-fits-all solutions, even when case managers, like Nicky or James, know that such solutions are not addressing clients' needs. As a result, four-year degrees are discouraged, and TANF participants are steered towards jobs or short-term job-oriented educational programs representing a limited number of vocations. So TANF participants like Nicole, who already had a medical information degree that she attained in another state, is again enrolled in a short-term medical information program, while she harbors her *real* dream of being a business owner and running her own hair salon. Her work towards this second, and for the most part redundant, degree—one of the few short-term educational programs that has been approved as fulfilling work activity requirements under TANF—is helping her to maintain her benefits, but it's not clear that it's helping her to attain her life goals. For Nicole, the bureaucracy of welfare may be deemed effective at least as reflected in participation rates—she is engaged in the requisite hours of work activities and doing well in her classes—but she is not engaged in an activity that will aid her in attaining her stated long-term goals. Nicole has had to strike a devil's deal. To meet the needs of the bureaucracy, she is living in the short term, doing what is necessary today to put food on the table tomorrow. But it is questionable whether what she is doing today will help her next year, or in four years when her welfare time limits will have run out. Nicole's experiences are but one more example of how the current

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stamp clients. Said one unnamed state official, "In each case where the state had flexibility, it took the least restrictive path" (cited in Maloy, 2002). The net effect was a dramatic drop in the percent of individuals receiving food stamps although it was not so clear, given the corresponding rise in the level of poverty since 2000, that need in the state had diminished (Maloy 2002; U.S. Census Bureau 2005).

welfare system's rules and regulations can block long-term advancement and restrict access to permanent self-sufficiency.

THE EFFECTS OF POLICIES AND GATEKEEPERS

The 20-hour Work Requirement

Undoubtedly, the single most influential policy shaping the potential success of any TANF participant striving to attain a postsecondary degree is the federally mandated work activity requirement. As a result of this requirement, most TANF participants seeking cash and childcare assistance must work a minimum of 30 hours a week. In the state of Georgia, participants can use education to fulfill a finite number of expected weekly work activity hours. That is, participants must engage in a primary work activity (e.g. subsidized or unsubsidized employment or work experience) for a minimum of 20 hours weekly and only then, having completed 20 hours of work, may use education to fulfill the remaining 10 weekly hours required. Furthermore, the actual number of hours an individual spends going to school and studying is not counted. The number of hours accepted by the DFCS is determined by credit hours—e.g. 10 credits equals 10 hours—despite the fact that most universities and colleges designate 12 to 18 hours as being a full-time student.

When asked what is the biggest obstacle for welfare participants attempting to attain a postsecondary degree, James reiterated throughout his interview that the primary work activity requirement was the most prohibitive current regulation for students under TANF:

> The biggest complaint I have from clients is "How am I supposed to find a job, go to work, go to college and then come up here and do work experience? I have to do all of that and then at the same time still be a mother." Because you won't be eligible to be on TANF unless you are a mother. You know, so they have to actually to do that and also get their kids to and from school, and by the time they do all that, the time, it really leaves them no time to study. Really, it's just really--it's difficult.

Importantly, James highlights that the work activity requirement is but one of many obligations that TANF participants experience in their lives. First and foremost, TANF participants are obligated to care for their children—feeding them, getting them dressed, keeping them healthy, sending them to school, and providing them with the emotional attention they require. However, parental work, unlike the weekly work activity requirement, is difficult to quantify and is therefore generally omitted from debates regarding welfare, unless, ironically, that child care is being provided for children other than one's own—only then is such work considered legitimate in terms of the formal economy and hence policy. In short, the 20-hour primary work activity requirement for students, most of whom would need to enroll in three or four classes to meet the additional 10 hours of work activity requirements necessary to fulfill weekly participation rates, can only be viewed as reasonable when such parental work is ignored.

Because of the 20-hour work requirement, many participants eventually opt to drop out of school and instead focus on work. Carl a 57-year old case manager shared an anecdote of just such an effect:

> They are faced with, "I have to go to school, I have to study, I have to take care of my children, and I'm going to do an extra 20 hours a week here." So I think that is one of the biggest obstacles,

> right there. Not only that, it is *the* biggest obstacle. I had one who told me yesterday "I'm going to have to quit the school. I stopped going to school, I can't do it."

Of course, not all students opt to drop out of school—as Taylor, a case manager supervisor notes, when TANF recipients do the math, they often determine that going to work would pay more than doing work experience in the DFCS office in exchange for their TANF cash assistance payment as the only wage:

> Eventually, they would end up closing their cases, because like I said, basically for the amount of money that they're getting, they can continue to get that from family or friends, you know, and not have to worry about doing 20 hours of work experience. Whereas like I said, if you've only got one child, it's only about 235 dollars a month. And then, but you've still got to go to school, take care of your kids and still do 20 hours of work experience!? For the most part, if it was me, it's not worth it. I'd say o.k. I've got to beg mommy or daddy or do whatever I do. Yeah, most of 'em choose not to do it. They choose not to do it because like I said, they can't, they can't. Most of them really can't. I mean, and I tell them, we do understand that but — policy — we have to follow policy. You know and a lot of them get upset about it but a lot of them, they don't even pursue it because it's, you know, they'll come in but once you explain to them what all has to get done, that, that's it.

Taylor did not know how many individuals pursuing a postsecondary education chose to forgo even applying for TANF, but she ventured to guess that it was "most of them." Undoubtedly, these students in part accounted for the dramatic reduction in the welfare rolls that has been heralded as an indicator of welfare's success. Importantly, however, these students turned away not because they didn't need the assistance—they did. They turned away because they didn't want to give up their long-term educational goals.

Taylor in her response above, seems to assume that most TANF participants have access to such resources. Once again, the language of "choice" permeates her description of the situation even though, as I have shown elsewhere, "choice" is so often cloaked in the choices and actions of others that what one ultimately has to choose between is hardly any *real* choice at all, at least not as the word is commonly understood. In my own research I have determined that one pivotal issue that has differentiated more successful welfare participants from their persistently challenged counterparts was the strength and breadth of their familial support systems. Those individuals who did not have enduring familial resources were floundering and I can only speculate as to how many people were not even eligible for my study because they determined that attaining a postsecondary education while participating in the TANF program was not a realistic endeavor for them and therefore *chose*, if it is really a choice, not to pursue the option.

Although most case managers were aware of and frustrated by current restrictions on educational policies, seeing them as short-sighted, not all case managers were sensitive to the needs of TANF participants attempting to pursue a postsecondary education. Taylor, for example, explicitly stated that current work requirements were fair for individuals attempting to pursue a postsecondary education, arguing that she worked while going to school and that TANF participants made a "choice" to have unprotected sex and have children before completing their education. Nevertheless, Taylor stated she would support changes to TANF policies that would reduce those work hours—even she admitted that 20 hours of work was "a bit much" for a full-time student and parent.

Get Your Degree, But "Not On Our Dime"

Although, as stated above, most case managers I spoke with expressed sympathy for their clients attempting to pursue a postsecondary education, they simultaneously sensed a lack of support for such choices in the DFCS office. Divine, a former case manager with over 15 years of experience under the AFDC and TANF programs, shared her frustration with what she felt was her former colleagues' lack of perspective:

> I think that case workers have a hard time rationalizing why [TANF participants] would want to be going to school instead of at a job. They don't see the, the minimum wage portion of it. I mean right now, I work at the Goodwill for a business. I teach women how to go into business for themselves. And some of the run-ins that I have with TANF workers are: "Why do you think that these women should be in business for themselves when they can go out and get a job?" Because in the long run, the job is only going to make them this much, but then the business on their own is going to make them self-sufficient totally. And it's a hard, it's a hard, it's a hard sell.

Nicky stated that before she completed her college degree and became a case manager herself, she faced this same kind of resistance described by Divine:

> Actually I just came down for Medicaid because when you're 18, you get kicked out of your parents' insurance, so I was pregnant and I needed Medicaid. And, I didn't apply for services but I saw the other things that were on the application and it went into this whole thing where, uh, well how are you supporting your family now? Well, why don't you get a job, kind of thing. Well, I'm like, I'm trying to go to school so I can get a job that I want! But they don't see it that way. They're like, if you've got children, you might need to get a job. Like now. Not a school kind of like mentality. And I, I was denied.

As described earlier, Nicky was a sophomore in college at the time that she applied for welfare benefits. However, instead of receiving the aid that she needed in order to remain in school and pursue her career goals so she could move herself permanently out

of poverty, she was instructed to get a job. This job-focused mentality that Nicky and Divine describe is in part produced by the pressure placed on case managers to increase DFCS's work participation rates and, as Divine points out, the generally mistaken belief that any job is better than no job, even if that job does not provide a livable wage or adequate benefits.

Perhaps more difficult for case managers was how to deal with those individuals who were defined as "career students," individuals pursuing their graduate degrees or a second bachelor's degree. Although most case managers expressed a belief in the value of education and supported changes to TANF policies that might provide more educational opportunities for TANF participants, they didn't necessarily feel that the program should allow just anyone to get any degree. Ariana in general supports the offering of educational benefits, but explicitly expresses her limitations:

> Well it is a—it's a benefit. What happens too, let me interject, is—we do have folks too who want to be professional students. You know, we had a lady not too long ago that was working on her third degree, you know, and wanted us to support that. I mean, you can find a job, you know? You may not find the job that you want, but the answer is not just you continuously going to school to seek—not on our dime. You, you can do that on your own dime.

Clearly, an individual like Tanya, who, as described earlier, is looking to complete her doctorate while staying at home to care for her five children, would likely not be considered an eligible candidate for the TANF program in Ariana's eyes. According to Ariana, Tanya would already be employable with her two degrees in accounting and finance. For Ariana, the purpose of TANF is to make individuals employable with the goal of moving them out of poverty. TANF in this view is not the social welfare program

originally envisioned over 70 years ago. That is, it is no longer a program defined by its focus on economically-poor parents, primarily mothers, and their work in the home raising children.

Instead, the work of parenting (along with the work of being a student) is subsumed under the umbrella of employment, which in effect takes precedence over all other life activities. Under TANF, the unpaid labor required of parents is not considered work and neither is the mental labor exerted in an educational institution; instead, parenting and education are seen as secondary activities or, even more cynically, as obstacles to be overcome so that individuals can work in the public sphere. Parenting and educating oneself are instead viewed as supplements or rewards for adults in a cultural system where core valued behaviors, such as laboring in the formal economy, are generally identified as preeminent due to their economic exchange value. Only those adults whose labor power (or parents' labor power) has been highly compensated are deemed deserving of the so-called privileges of higher education or parenting. Such a narrow conceptualization of worth and work, marked by an emphasis on monetary exchange values, fundamentally restricts the kinds of activities that welfare participants may present to social welfare employees. From this perspective, it is worthwhile noting that Tanya's work ethic is not the problem. Her plan for the future has her working as hard, if not harder, than any case manager in the building. However, the type of work that she proposes to use to fulfill her TANF work activity requirements is perceived as problematic because of restrictive cultural conceptualizations and policy definitions of "work." Additionally, Tanya's case prompts questions regarding the limits of what might

be considered an acceptable use of TANF funds in large part because of the welfare program's evolving historical and cultural connections with issues of morality and deservingness. As a result, hypocrisies abound. Just as socially conservative critics laud middle and upper-middle class women who have made the decision to forgo employment in the formal economy to stay at home with their children, they simultaneously support the forcing of poor women out of their homes and into the formal economy. The message is clear: pursuing one's education and/or staying at home with one's children are both luxuries meant only for those who can afford it and who are essentially perceived as deserving.

Katherine's experience provides yet another example of the potential effects of these morally infused processes. Katherine tested assumptions of deservingness by pursuing her aerospace engineering degree while receiving TANF benefits. In her account, she reveals many of the existing inter-office disagreements regarding the role of education in the TANF program. She began this segment of her narrative by lamenting the general lack of information provided to TANF participants regarding their educational opportunities:

> I don't think they even tell the girls or the men that these are your options. You can go to a college or a university. You don't have to go to a two-year trade school. You know, you do need to go get your high school diploma and you don't have to flip burgers. There are options. And I don't think they tell them that. And I also think that's dependent on the case worker, so I can't speak for every case worker. Mine was adamant, 'cause she was once a TANF recipient while she was in college, so we kind of bonded that way. So mine was real adamant about—she tells her girls that this is what we can do, and she would go out of the way to help you fill out the financial aid package, fill

> out scholarship information. She would even . . . say, "You know, even though you got this baby, it does not mean that you cannot go to school."

Katherine repeatedly expressed relief that her immediate case manager was so supportive. However, that support came with a price. A year before Katherine was expected to graduate, another case manager in the office challenged Katherine's case arguing that the state's role in providing assistance is not to aid individuals in going to school:

> Fiona: I just want to go back to the one question, the issue with the case worker who challenged your case worker. Do you know what motivated that person . . . .?
>
> Katherine: [My case manager] kept me relatively out of that. She basically told me after the process was over. . . . She had told me about him challenging her . . . he actually did challenge. As much as I know about that particular person, I'd see—I met him like once. And he seemed short, short with all the clients. I mean it doesn't matter your color, your race, if you're female, he was short with you. It's just like a sexist attitude there, you know sexism here, like I'm, you know, just much attitude. And I'd just look at him like, "You don't even know me. You don't even know my situation and you're just assuming things."

Eventually, after supplying a record of Katherine's academic progress, TANF supervisors decided to override the case manager's challenge and allowed Katherine to complete her degree. Katherine mentions issues of race and gender because both are incredibly important factors shaping the everyday interactions of individuals participating in welfare programs. Although she ostensibly discounts the effects of race within this particular interaction, the very fact that she highlights the potential effects of race and outright

acknowledges the effects of gender on her experience indicates her awareness of the ways both social constructs function in the realm of the welfare office.

These dynamics of race, gender, and class are made even more complicated where case managers and TANF participants often share similar familial responsibilities and/or experiences of past or present inequalities. Within Eastern County's DFCS office, the overwhelmingly black and African American clientele are serviced primarily by black and African American case managers and staff. As a result, many of these case managers claimed to understand some of the obstacles presented as a result of living in a culture where past and present racism has shaped their parents' and their own educational and occupational trajectories. During our interview, Ariana, in a general discussion of values and the importance of promoting TANF participants' active involvement in the lives of their children, explained that she regularly visits her own children in school and takes them with her to the voting booth to convey to them the importance of regularly participating in democratic processes, particularly because racial minorities in this country have been denied full access to voting and educational processes for so long. Ariana is very much aware of the structural inequalities that have resulted from past and present racism in this country and she understands how racism has contributed to the economic poverty that has disproportionately affected many of her black clients. Of her clients, Ariana said "They're going to school in their neighborhoods . . . the schools they're going to are lower standard schools. . . . fewer resources. The PTA's are not big."

At that the same time, however, as Ariana acknowledges structural constraints in the lives of her clients, she simultaneously highlights the role of individual choice in such

situations. Although she understands why social inequalities exist and advocates "meeting people where they are at" and not blaming them for their poverty, she nonetheless believes that social changes will not take place until individuals themselves proactively enact changes in their lives. During our interview, she explicitly stated her steadfast belief that until the parents of children attending "lower standard schools" begin to invest time and money into their PTA organizations, those schools will not improve. Perhaps Ariana focuses on individualized, behavioral solutions because they are easier to offer up in the context of the welfare office. Suggesting that clients involve themselves in the PTA is more feasible than taking on a national educational system that is fundamentally flawed. Furthermore, at age 41, she is clearly a child of the U.S. Civil Rights movement and has likely been made aware of the benefits of actively demanding one's rights rather than accepting an obviously unjust status quo.

Ariana, was also very much aware of the various racial and class dynamics that can result in a "tough-love" approach to counseling TANF participants as a result of case managers' feeling that they can personally identify with the situations of their clients. In describing some of the case managers she supervises, Ariana stated, "Like I said, people work here because people may have been raised by welfare themselves. And now they're angry because 'Well, I did it. You know, my mom was on welfare, and I went to school and I went to whatever.'" Such an attitude is clearly expressed by Taylor who, as cited earlier, has limited levels of sympathy for her clients' educational barriers:

> I'm a firm believer in working. I feel that, o.k., because this, this is—in my experience, we have too many people up here working [at DFCS] full time and going to school and have families. So if they can do it, you can do it. You can do it. Now, I'm not, now that's your—everybody,

> everybody makes their own choices in life. I feel that you know, you chose to have your family before you got your education, and I feel that if you made that choice, then you should not ask anyone to give you or not ask you to do anything thing else but go to school, when that was a choice. Because when I went to college, even though I didn't have any kids, I worked, I worked. From the time I went to college, I worked.

In order to determine whether or not Taylor's viewpoint was shared by her peers, I asked all case managers to comment on what they perceived to be their colleagues' support of TANF clients' use of education to satisfy the work activity requirements. Nicky responded,

> It doesn't seem like it. I can't tell. But I mean, because like I said, we . . . I don't know what to say to this. I think that some of it has to do with—I don't know if it's true but I'm going to say what I think. Like when some of the workers here, are, go to college for a time and then graduate, you know, it's like kind of like what I was saying, "Well I didn't, I didn't get TANF and go to college." They think that's like a luxury. They like, you know, "How dare them trying to come." Not really everybody's like that but it's in the air. You know "We can't fund you going to school to get a better job than say I might have," you know. When—I don't know how to say it, but I kind of get that sense though.

Carl echoed similar sentiments, although he cites that such beliefs on the part of case managers are perhaps gendered in their source:

> Carl: Do I have to answer? [laughs]. It varies, I mean, you know, humans are humans, people are people, and . . . what I've observed during the four [years] I've been here . . . by and large some of the case workers, are, are, do not appreciate—let me put it this way—that the state is paying for these, these people to go on to higher education. Because "I did it on my own." That's the human tendency, and [laughs] I find it mostly—and I'm honest

with you because you want it—I find it mostly with women case workers. I find it mostly with women case workers.

Fiona: Yeah? Are most of the case workers women?

Carl: Mmhm. And maybe that's why. But from the male standpoint, I, I don't really hear [opposition to education]. [Men] kind of support it: "Go ahead if you want to get it." But the tendency is to think that well, "I get up at 6 o'clock in the morning. I can't afford to go study. You know, I don't have anybody to pay my rent or my lights, or giving me money. I have to go to work so I can do all this stuff, so why can't you do it?" Especially when they get a very irate client who is upset about not getting more money [laughs]. Then you know, those things come out. "Well, that's your decision to make. You made the decision to have four children before you went to school. I went to school before I had mine," and this kind of idea, even then. So, you find that sometimes. I would say by and large [education is] supported . . . . Whether it's supported or not, I'd probably say 50/50.

Some resentment can be explained by the lack of educational and economic incentives offered up to case managers. Nicky a 26-year old case manager, who once applied for TANF herself before completing her college degree and working for Eastern county's DFCS office admitted, "It's like I work every day, but I consider myself the working poor, because I make just enough to get by." Nicky is not exaggerating. In late 2004, a level one Family Independence Case Manager position at Eastern county's DFCS office was advertised as offering an annual salary of $23,614. To put this in perspective, in 2004 within the local formal economy of Eastern County, the median income of women working full-time, year round was $35,867 and the median income of men was $39,805 (U.S. Census 2004). The economic compensation for case managers falls well below these two medians. As a result, some case managers may be envious of TANF

participants who are receiving cash assistance while pursuing their goal of attaining a college degree.

Power Imbalances & Overloads

Although many of the TANF participants I talked with shared a number of complaints regarding their case managers' attitudes and behaviors, most, like Nia cited below, simultaneously acknowledged the difficulties facing their case managers each day:

> Sometimes I think caseworkers get a real bad rap because they're just doing a crappy job. The ones that have been nice and have sat down and talked to me, I don't think that, they don't really like their jobs. They don't like the policies and the procedures but they have families at home that they have to feed too, so this is what they do.

Nia, like many other TANF clients, knows that case managers are notoriously overworked, managing hundreds of cases at a time, and are daily barraged with frustrated clients who are tired of providing written records corroborating their life stories and have spent endless hours in DFCS's waiting areas. Anne is somewhat less forgiving than Nia in her general assessment, but she reveals that she too understands many of her case managers' predicaments:

> Nine times out of ten, most of them are just like robots. They couldn't care less about you as a person whatsoever. I even told them, it looks like, you know, it looks like you all got kind of short-handed. . . . Most of 'em admitted to me, "Yeah, you're right, we do need some help, but they put a freeze out." They put a freeze on the, uh, the hiring process, and then, from what I saw they didn't do very good training on those people that were newly hired. You know. And so, you just kind of get shuffled around, bounced around--it's not good. It's not good.

Even if case managers wanted to spend quality time with each client, they feel pressured to quickly shuffle through cases and complete their paperwork in order to move on to the next client. Nicky, who in a comment above described an office culture preoccupied with participation rates, also describes problems incurred overly large caseloads:

> We can help only so many people. How can you really, effectively help them when you can't even really sit down and talk to them about how they're going to get on that career path. Even if you want to, there's so many people on your caseload, you really don't get the opportunity to effectively counsel.

Nicky also described, however, her frustrations when clients ended up wasting much of her time because they refused to fulfill her basic requests:

> Nicky: Some people get upset, they're like "What do you mean, I have to fill out my paperwork?" That's how horrible it's getting. When it gets like that, I'm like I was wrong.
>
> Fiona: Do you feel that most clients have that feeling of entitlement, or do you think that's minority of the clients that you deal with?
>
> Nicky: That's the majority of the clients that I work with, unfortunately. It's becoming a majority of them . . . And it might be, I think it might be our fault because we are kind of just issuing—we're not really going, like I said, more into, like what your goals are that you want for yourself. You know, I don't get a chance to go into that. Because I have, just like I have you, I have another girl right after you, and after you, you know!? All month! [laughs] So, it's like, nobody gets a chance to say, "Now wait a minute." This is not working. I don't think it's working.

Nicky's comments reveal the ways interpersonal relationships are shaped by an environment that is not conducive to communication that might lead to long-term beneficial assistance.

As Nia's and Anne's comments make clear, many TANF clients are well aware of many of their case managers' frustrations. However, because case managers' goals frequently conflict with the needs of their clients and because the balance of "power" is clearly on the side of poorly paid and overworked case managers—who can close a case more easily than a client can open it—an environment has been created where clients feel weakened and on the defense. And such feelings are not unfounded. More than one case manager admitted to me that they have stalled work on cases when the client has displayed a negative or surly attitude.

What results is a combustible atmosphere where power is sought as a means of maintaining one's dignity and self-respect, and for TANF clients and their children, their subsistence. Interpersonal explosions are to be expected, argued Star: "They're overwhelmed and you're frustrated and then you meet. Boom!" Lisa perhaps best described these complex dynamics, which she claims to understand in terms of their source and has grown to accept as part of the process of applying for TANF, yet which she can't help hating:

> Most caseworkers who are—first of all, you already know that they are overworked because just, just talking to them, they'll tell you, "Hey, I got a thousand people sitting, waiting to see me and, you know, let's get this," or they make you feel like, um, it's almost like they're God. They have to—you have, you make an appointment with them. The appointment's at eight o'clock. You don't see them until two or three, and some days I would go up there, and my—the lady wouldn't even be there! I can't get in touch with her! Then when I see them, they have an attitude about everything, you know. They—I don't know. They know that you need them, and they know that you need to see them, and they know that you need benefits, but, they treat you like—I don't know, like—like crap [said quietly]. That's how I felt anyway.

As Lisa reveals, the more desperate the individual, the more desperate is the game. In the end, the losers on all sides vastly outnumber the winners.

PATERNALISTIC & PUNITIVE SOLUTIONS

It is impossible to read legislation relating to welfare reform and reauthorization and not be struck by the charged and accusatory language. In an introductory section of PRWORA detailing findings that explain why welfare reform was necessary, the Congressional authors nowhere cite the problem of domestic abuse or of the challenges facing families as a result of the growth of a postindustrial service economy where wages and benefits, and most importantly access to health care, have been dramatically reduced. Instead, the entire section is devoted to statistics regarding the rise of "out-of-wedlock" births, implying that promiscuous women and "predatory men" are at the heart of the problem of familial poverty evidenced in the U.S. Very explicitly, this law outlines as its primary objective the reduction of the number of "out-of-wedlock" births in the U.S. Furthermore, the law explicitly asserts, in all capital letters no less, that there is "NO INDIVIDUAL ENTITLEMENT," and that the law "shall not be interpreted to entitle any individual or family to assistance under any State program" (Section 401, PRWORA 1996). References to "penalties," "limitations," and "prohibitions" abound within this 251 page long document, clearly revealing its writers' preoccupation with fraud, dependency, and punitive solutions.

Reauthorization proposals put forth by the Senate and House of Representatives similarly share a preoccupation with marriage promotion and punitive policies as the

solutions to poverty (see Table X for a summary description of current and proposed TANF legislation). In response to the emphasis on marriage that has come to dominate the framing of TANF reauthorization proposals, a number of prominent social policy researchers have forcefully argued that such a narrowly construed solution to familial poverty is fundamentally misguided for reasons including that: it often ignores the very real problem of domestic abuse; it implicitly encourages women's dependence on men for economic support; and it distracts from the more pressing problem of jobs offering inadequate compensation in a postindustrial economy, particularly for women (Cherlin et al. 2004, Edin and Kefalas 2005, Mink 2001). Although this research has to some degree influenced reauthorization proposals that were put forth in 2005—for example, explicit references to the problem of domestic abuse were included in Senator Grassley's proposal of March 2005, S.667, which is undeniably the most socially "liberal" of recent reauthorization proposals—the punitive policies and "blame the victim" language that marked PRWORA have nonetheless remained firmly in tact. The social problems producing welfare are still defined in terms of dependency and moral depravity not poverty.

As a number of welfare researchers have previously determined, the emergence of the so-called "problem of dependency" within welfare discourse was hardly accidental and, as evidenced in current legislation, not without consequence. In their highly referenced genealogical analysis of the term "dependency," Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon (1994) demonstrate how use of the term during various historical moments has shifted, reflecting simultaneous changes in economic, sociolegal, political, and

moral/psychological spheres in which meaning is made. This currently highly recognizable keyword in social welfare discourse, they argue, has for too long remained unexamined in terms of its emergence, attendant assumptions, and deployment in debates surrounding welfare policy. To enhance general awareness of the potential effects of this particular analytical absence, Fraser and Gordon convincingly trace the historical processes that have resulted in a distinctly gendered, racialized, and devalued understanding of dependency" in contemporary U.S. culture. Their analysis culminates in an examination of the construction of welfare stereotypes that epitomize current notions of a perceived dangerous manifestation of dependency. To be dependent is to be a problem.

Sanford Schram (1995) has likewise examined the discourse of dependency, demonstrating how dependency discourse has fundamentally legitimized current social welfare practices that malign the poor and shift the public's gaze from the problem of poverty to the problem of dependence; yet, as he astutely notes, public determinations of dependency are frequently influenced by individuals' gender, race, and class positions and not any "essential" understanding of dependency. In an essay exploring the disjunctions between social welfare research and social welfare policy, Schram argues

The contemporary discourse on dependency suggests that the rich and poor really are different; where rich people may need tax incentives to be productive, poor people need welfare disincentives to encourage them to work. As the distinctions solidify, it is easier to argue that opposites have to be treated differently—rewards for some and punishments for others—in order to get the same result. (p.129)

Importantly, Schram highlights the competing and contradictory discourses of dependency that result in rewards or punishments. This sleight of hand is in part made possible via the emergence of social welfare programs that have over the past thirty-five years increasingly focused on perceived problems of dependency and "workfare" solutions rather than the many empirically-identified problems that have produced poverty. It is within this ideological framework that individualistic and punitive welfare proposals began to thrive, shaping the "prison-like" culture currently evidenced in so many welfare offices across the nation.

Although few welfare participants have actually read Federal social welfare legislation, they are fully aware of the ways its specific mandates and general tone shape state and office level policies. Lydia Marie clearly revealed her frustration with the generally punitive culture of the welfare office: "You can't do this, you can't do that. It—you know, it can still be taxing even with all the help!" Nia similarly described the ways an environment based on surveillance and punishment rather than trust and rewards has been created via correspondence and personal interactions:

> They send you these threatening letter—well, I wouldn't even call them threatening, just these little reminders of how, how long you have to receive [benefits]. You get those sporadically. And then they just question you, hound you. Because like when I told you I left the job for a year, I applied for TANF because it takes a while for unemployment benefits to kick in. And so when I got my unemployment, they were harassing me about the unemployment, but I told the case worker when I did my initial interview there, I'm waiting on unemployment, and I have no income right now. So then you get the unem—I mean it was just, it's just too much for just a couple hundred dollars anyway.

This lack of trust on the part of "the system" has the potential of breeding more mistrust in return. Chris, who at the time of our interview was working primarily with a program focusing on the needs of fathers, described the mistrust expressed by many of his clients:

> They're not used to working with the government, or the government trying to help them. Even with the welfare system, none of them are actually looking at the welfare system as actually a source of help. Um, one of the old adages I hear some of the students use sometimes and, uh, I'll hear the case managers say is "Uh, you're not here to help me-you're just a poverty pimp. You're existence is based upon my demise. So why should I trust you?" And a lot of them have that mentality. "You're here, your job is based upon the fact that I have, I don't have when I'm doing badly, so you're survival is to keep me down," so they don't trust them.

And policies such as the minimum number of work participation hours and time limits on the number of months that clients can receive benefits do seem created to keep people down rather than move them permanently out of poverty. As stated earlier, TANF is designed to assist poor families with children under the age of 18—for example, a parent and two children, which is the average sized family receiving TANF in the state of Georgia, could qualify for TANF benefits in 2002 if their assets were worth less than $1,000 and their gross income was below $784 a month (Georgia Department of Human Resources 2002). Although the federal government has mandated a five year maximum time limit for receiving TANF benefits, Georgia administrators, like administrators in eight other states, have chosen to impose a stricter time limit (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2004). Georgia's current limit is 48 months. The implications of this imposed time limit were realized on January 1st in 2001 when DFCS administrators called for the removal of 3,761 TANF clients from the welfare rolls because they had

exhausted their allotted four years of cash benefits. Overall, from January 1997 to June of 2002, the number of mothers and children receiving cash assistance decreased from 302,473 to a mere 130,409, representing a 57% drop.[29] Of the 130,409 recipients remaining, 100,369 were children (Georgia Department of Human Resources 2002).

Although case managers and clients alike had mixed feelings about these time limits and their potential effects—with some arguing that limits provided much-needed motivation and others arguing limits are short-sighted and unfair—it's clear that time limits prevent case managers from recommending extended postsecondary education as a secondary activity option for their clients. Admitted Nicky, "I think we kind of say 'Oh you don't really want to go there,' with our students [attending] four-year institutions because our program is geared more to try to get on that first step into something because it's a temporary assistance program. It's only 48 months." With time limits in place, formulaic quick fixes take precedence over long-term solutions; band-aids are systematically applied while the deeper, real problems are ignored.

Very few case managers felt that state and federal TANF educational policies were fair but they felt it important to emphasize that their job was not to make policies, but to carry them out. Case managers frequently presented themselves as merely the messengers. Said Ariana, a case manager supervisor, "Policies will change because of federal policies, you know, because TANF is a federal program. It's not anything that we could change." Taylor echoed Ariana's defeatism: "I go into detail explaining to them,

[29] As noted earlier, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Sevices, Tommy G. Thompson cited that nationally the percent drop of caseloads receiving cash assistance was 59.2 in September of 2002. Therefore, the state of Georgia's percent drop is in line with, although slightly lower than, the national average.

we cannot support this activity unless you participate in another activity for 20 hours or more. So, yeah. So, I mean it's—and I mean they may not agree with it, but like I tell them, I can't change that."

Until policies are changed, the likelihood is dim that capable and willing TANF participants will attain postsecondary degrees that will increase their likelihood of locating a well-paying job. As the above findings reveal (see Table 6 for a summary description) current policies and office processes more often serve as a disincentive for TANF clients pursuing educational options than as an incentive. Chris adamantly makes this point clear in describing his frustration with a welfare system that sometimes takes away more than it gives:

> What happens is that you've got them in school and they're able to go to school because all their childcare is taken care of, because the insurance piece is all taken care of, and then you remove either piece of that or hinder or cut it, drastically cut it, then that means that they've got to work more and go to school less which means now they won't be able to achieve that academic level in that allotted time before they lose everything! So, they find themselves, "Well, why am I trying?" You know. Some of them are close enough: "What do I need to do? I've got family support now. Let's see if we can make it." . . . I've seen on rare occasions, some people, their condition, when they have to leave under those circumstances, was worse than when they came in! Because at least when they came in, they had hope. We were able to give them hope and it hurts when you have to snatch it back. And now when we snatch it back from them and they can't finish? They can't go forward and they realize because of the clock, they can't go back.

Parents turn to welfare because they are poor, and in the United States the need for welfare will continue as long as segments of the population remain poor. We now need an honest assessment of current and proposed welfare policies that acknowledges the

very real systemic problems that cause and perpetuate poverty and not a presentation of smokescreens that result in moralistically-framed solutions that primarily locate fault within family units themselves. We need an honest examination of the lives of women and men receiving welfare to determine what solutions will best meet *their* needs; for as the findings presented here clearly demonstrate, what is currently in place is not working well.

Table 6. Aspects of TANF Policies and Processes Serving to Hinder or Facilitate Program Participants' Educational Goals

Hindering Educational Success	Facilitating Educational Success

POLICIES
 	
General:
• Income Cutoffs - Denied benefits because income is too high.
• Benefit Reductions – As income increases, benefits decrease.
 	
Education Related:
• "Workfirst!" – Prioritizes work activities over educational activities.
• 20 or 30 minimum hours of participation in a work-related activity.*
 	
PROCESSES
 	
General:
• Applications
  o "Not worth the hassle"
  ▪ Need life story
  ▪ Benefits do not provide enough money
  o Encouraged to lie
• Appointments
  o Time spent in waiting room
  o Length of appointment
  o Frequency of appointments
  o Lack of personal attention because case managers are overloaded with clients.
• Case Managers
  o Stigmatize clients as lazy
 	
Education Related:
• Case Managers
  o Withhold information regarding educational opportunities
  o Emphasize job over education
	POLICIES
	
	General
	• Childcare – Available care while parent is at work.
	• Medicaid – Health care provided for parent and child(ren).
	
	Education Related:
	• Childcare – Available care while parent is at school.
	• Postsecondary education counts as a secondary activity.
	
	PROCESSES
	
	General:
	• Case Managers
	  o Maintain positive attitude
	  o Clearly present TANF policies orally and in writing.
	
	Education Related:
	• Case Managers
	  o Present information regarding educational opportunities
	  o Encourage education

* Postsecondary education counts as a secondary activity. Primary activities are defined as 1) unsubsidized employment, 2) subsidized private employment, 3) subsidized public employment, 4) work experience, 5) on-the-job training, 6) job search and job readiness assistance, for up to 6 weeks (12 weeks if the State's unemployment rate is 50% above the national average)), of which only four can be consecutive, 7) community service programs, 8) vocational education training (max. 12 months), 9) provision of child care to TANF recipients participating in a community service program. Secondary activities include 1) job skills training directly related to employment 2) education directly related to employment (for high school dropouts only) 3) satisfactory attendance at a secondary school or in a course of study leading to an equivalency certificate (for high school dropouts only) (Source: PRWORA 1996: Section 407).

CHAPTER 6

SURVEYING THE PRESENT & LOOKING AHEAD

The training of the schools we need to-day more than ever,--the training of deft hands, quick eyes and ears, and above all the broader, deeper, higher culture of gifted minds and pure hearts.

W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 1897

The sad stories that I've heard, I've heard them from those who were called in one week by their case worker and told "You have one week to find a job. You're running out of time, so I don't care, just go find a job anywhere." So we have people running around, in my opinion, you know really trying to make it look like they're searching when realistically they don't have the skill level or haven't pursued any postsecondary education that would make them eligible for jobs. The typical job I see now that's worth anything in terms of a good salary, over 12 dollars an hour, definitely requires postsecondary education. So my, the challenge I give to any legislator or any decision-maker dealing with the TANF program is that Workfirst should be changed to career development first.

Katherine, Coordinator, Student/Career Mobility Program

Only the kids who get a postsecondary education are even keeping even in term of income in their lives . . . The rest are falling behind, year by year. Only about a twelfth of the Latino kids and maybe a sixth of the black kids are getting college degrees. The rest of them aren't getting ready for anything that's going to have much of a future in the American economy.

Gary Orfield, Graduate School of Education, Harvard University[30]

Over one hundred years ago, W.E.B. Du Bois recognized that African Americans were likely to experience a different kind of slavery — a de facto if no longer a de jure slavery — when black citizens were systematically denied educational opportunities. A higher education was necessary, he argued, if African Americans were to advance economically and politically and racial equality was to be realized in the United States. It is now a century later, and as racial and gender inequalities persist, legislators have made the seemingly backward decision to prioritize employment over education in social welfare programs serving poor families. As Katherine reveals, these decisions have resulted in the creation of programs that maintain if not increase racial and gender inequalities rather than programs that work toward their eradication. In effect, social processes that effectively steer targeted groups of individuals away from postsecondary education — processes that, as Gary Orfield points out, are highly racialized in both their origin and functioning — in part contribute to the persistent poverty that disproportionately affects many racial and ethnic minority groups in the United States. Furthermore, these processes are blatantly gendered; women — who are more likely than men to be primary caregivers, particularly in single-parent households — are not deemed worthy of an education and in accordance with current welfare policy are instead being forced into the low-wage workplace.

The overall negative effect of such racialized and gendered processes on lifetime earnings cannot be overestimated. Researchers have consistently verified that a positive correlation between educational attainment and income exists. Researchers have also

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[30] Quoted in the New York Times, January 30, 2006 (Herbert 2006, p.A23)

demonstrated that these gains in income vary along gender and race lines. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2004, the median earnings of white men with bachelor's degrees was 53,466 dollars; whereas black men and white women with comparable levels of educational attainment earned only 40,891 dollars and 35,438 dollars respectively (See Table 7 below). Interestingly, both black and Asian women with bachelor's degrees report higher median earnings than white women with a comparable level of education. This may in part be explained by white women's increased likelihood of marrying white men—who report the highest level of earnings of all racial groups—and leaving the workforce for a period of years to care for children or other family members. Although differences between racial and gender groups are problematic, it is nonetheless clear that for every group higher education pays off in increased earnings. Certainly a degree does not promise success, but it undeniably increases the likelihood of success.

Table 7. Women's and Men's Median Earnings* by Race/Ethnicity and Educational Attainment, 2004

Gender & Racial/Ethnic Category	High School Diploma	Associate's Degree	Bachelor's Degree
Men -White	32,427	41, 803	53,466
Men - Black	26,079	31,538	40,891
Men - Hispanic**	26,660	35,539	43,808
Men - Asian	27,122	34,158	48,519
Women - White	21,047	27,402	35,438
Women - Black	20,638	27,019	36,524
Women - Hispanic**	19,540	25,028	31,507
Women - Asian	20,698	30,304	36,463

(Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2004. Current Population Survey: Annual Social and Economic Supplement. Retrieved 2/26/05. Available on the Internet: www.census.gov).

* = Reported dollar earnings of men 25 years and over.
** = May be of any race

Of course, these figures are complicated by the fact that lower percentages of blacks and Hispanics — two racial/ethnic minority groups who have historically faced significant levels of discrimination in the United States — choose to attend college in the first place (see Table 8).

Table 8. Educational Attainment by Race or Ethnicity,* 2004

Racial or Ethnicity	High School Diploma	Some College	Bachelor's Degree
White	83.6%	54.1%	26.1%
Black	72.3%	42.5%	14.3%
Hispanic**	52.4%	30.3%	10.4%
Asian	80.4%	64.6%	44.1%

(Source: Bauman, Kurt and Nikki Graf. 2003. Educational Attainment 2000. Retrieved 2/26/05. Available on the Internet: www.census.gov).

* = Population 25 years and over.
** = May be of any race

Clearly, social processes that result in individuals choosing to attend college are fundamentally racialized, a fact that is based on evidence of racial inequalities prevalent in the U.S. educational system and that serves to verify theories of cultural and social reproduction.

Such racial disparities in students' likelihood of attending college have prompted researchers and policymakers to not only question educational inequalities that might produce such differences but also question the additional impact of professedly "race-neutral" admission policies in colleges and universities. In the late 1990's a number of high profile educational policy changes and cases in the states of California, Texas, Georgia, Washington and Michigan dealt explicitly with the proposed elimination of race as a determining factor for consideration of admission. In 2003, the U.S. Supreme Court

in its landmark decision regarding the case of *Gratz and Hamacher / Grutter vs. The Regents of the University of Michigan*, determined that although quota-style admission policies that simply assign differing points based on one's race or ethnicity are unacceptable, schools can and should consider the race and ethnicity of potential students in order to ensure a level of diversity in the general student body. In her written opinion, Sandra Day O'Connor noted that perhaps in 25 years we might reevaluate race-based policies of admission; however, today enough evidence exists to demonstrate the effects of persistent inequalities that disproportionately affect racial and ethnic minorities. For the most part, the court recognized the importance of increasing access to education for those who have been historically disenfranchised, and perhaps more importantly it recognized the role of institutional policies in ensuring this access.

It is this latter message by the courts that legislators and policymakers need to consider as they determine the potential role of education in the TANF program. In a country where social inequality plays out along race and gender lines, policy decisions, particularly as they relate to issues of education, are not race- or gender-neutral. In the case of TANF, disproportionate numbers of economically-poor women and racial and ethnic minorities are the individuals most negatively affected when education opportunities are restricted. Only those with the most resources will make the attempt to attain a degree in the first place, but with public policy working against them, their likelihood of success is diminished. Hence, social inequality is reproduced. These processes are summarized below.

POOR PARENTS AS "SPECTACLE"

What happens to poor parents who have overcome the odds and have chosen to pursue a postsecondary degree in order to improve their economic well-being? They are forced into a game of "tug-of-war." Parents enact their agency, relying on their physical, cognitive, and emotional capabilities and pull at the rope hoping to gain their degree, move out of poverty, and win the game. Some parents are stronger than others with greater individual resources, which might include: better mental or physical health, more highly developed analytical skills, or an ability to present oneself favorably in social situations. Who or what is at each end of the rope — working against parents or facilitating their success — is ever changing. Working against them could be an unreliable babysitter, an ill relative, a violent husband, an uncooperative case manager, or a policy requiring them to work. Pulling on their side might be an unexpected scholarship, a sister who can help out with child care, or a TANF supervisor willing to waive a requirement. When the sheer power of opposing forces increases, the rope and individual move toward educational and occupational failure; when the power of supportive forces increases, they move toward educational and occupational success. Although the number and type of influential familial and institutional forces in this "tug-of-war" game are important, so are their intensity and duration. The more ill the relative, the more powerful the negative effect. The more money provided by the scholarship, the more powerful the positive effect. However, the cumulative effect of these outside forces is just as important. When an individual's support system is multifaceted and vast, that person's likelihood of success is dramatically increased. Nonetheless, each player can

endure this “tug-of-war” for only so long. Experiencing multiple small obstacles within this game of war can wear one down.

Furthermore, as is the case in so many wars, elite members call the shots while often those who are most disenfranchised — due to their lack of economic, educational, or political capital — work the front line. While elite members use the spectacle of “war” to advance their ideologies and distract the general public from the messiness of other arguably more pertinent social ills—including child poverty and gender and racial inequalities—poor parents who “choose” TANF must engage in this public game. Of course, so many factors that will shape the outcome of this war game have been rendered invisible. No one notices the work of a parent at home caring for her children; the hours of study required when an individual persists in her attempt to attain a college degree; or the TANF participation policy that forces parents to sacrifice their educational and long-term occupational goals. The effects of these obligations, activities, and policies are ignored for the most part by legislators and policymakers who created and have supported current TANF program policies. Those who are exploiting the spectacle instead turn the spotlight onto the individual and her failings: her inability to economically support herself, her inability to find a suitable marriage partner (assuming of course she is heterosexual and able to assail herself of this “right”), and her inability to prove herself deserving.

Furthermore, the coverage of this war game is rigged, as are the many policies enacted that effectively ensure players’ failure. And with each failure, “undeservingness” is reified as is the racialized conceptualization of the “welfare queen,” for after all, the

proportion of women of color comprising the rolls has been steadily increasing. Current TANF policy is then serving to exacerbate the effects of historical inequalities, trapping welfare participants and their families in a cycle of forced poverty. Unless, of course, players "choose" to leave the game. Unable to heed the rules of participation, they turn to other sources to facilitate their attainment of their educational goals. They join the ranks of the "invisible poor," no longer serviced by the social welfare system. In other words, those who might benefit most in the long term are turned away and left to fend for themselves. In the words of Nicky, "It makes no sense." It makes for a great spectacle, but if self-sufficiency is really the goal, it makes no sense at all.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

By focusing on work-first solutions when constructing welfare policy, legislators have relegated a particular segment of the general population — economically poor, single-parents, most of whom are women and many of whom are women of color — to the low-wage service sector, a move that effectively serves to maintain the status quo. White male hegemonic control is retained, low-wage employers are supplied with a pool of applicants, and, because access to postsecondary educational opportunities is restricted, the likelihood that existing economic and political social structures might be challenged is lessened. People are put in their "rightful" place (after all, not everyone can be "deserving") and the machine rolls on.

To be fair, some legislators have been working to change these trends by introducing bills that allow for more flexibility regarding the inclusion of educational

options for welfare participants. In February of 2005, Senator Olympia Snowe sponsored S.458, the "Pathways to Self-Sufficiency Act of 2005," a bill that specifically called for an amendment to TANF that would allow for the inclusion of longer term postsecondary educational programs. The contents of S.458 have served as a template for educational programs included in Senator Chuck Grassley's PRIDE legislation—the Senate's version of TANF reauthorization—which was introduced as S.667 in March of 2005 (see Table 11 in Appendix D for an overview of S.667's educational provisions). During the same year, Senator Maria Cantwell introduced S.1161 which proposed that postsecondary educational preparation for high-skill, high-demand jobs be exempt from state and federal TANF program participation and time limits. Although none of these bills have made it past committee status, it is clear that some legislators are seriously considering the educational needs of TANF participants. However, given the stalled status of these bills and of the many bills similar in content presented in prior Congresses, not enough legislators are prioritizing efforts to address the educational restrictions evidenced in current TANF policies that are in effect hindering rather than helping many poor families.

Although most welfare offices across the country do not provide formalized postsecondary educational programs that allow clients to prioritize their educational activities as they towards 4-year degrees, welfare offices in the states of Maine and Wyoming are striking exceptions. Educational programs developed in Maine and Wyoming have provided a unique opportunity for TANF-eligible parents currently enrolled in postsecondary programs and the Maine program in particular has served as inspiration for the educational components of Senator Snowe's and Senator Grassley's

TANF-related legislation. In the following section, I describe both programs in more detail.

Integrating Education

Wyoming: State Adult Student Financial Aid. As described earlier, with the passing of PRWORA in 1996, federal monies that had previously been used for developing educational programs were instead directed toward work programs and support services. In response to these changes, most states dramatically reduced or eliminated their educational programs; however, in Wyoming legislators and welfare program administrators took a different route, creating the State Adult Student Financial Aid (SASFA) program, which focused on the needs of postsecondary students who were eligible to receive TANF benefits.

To be eligible for this program, students first need to be identified as eligible for TANF benefits and need to have been employed for a minimum of 32 hours per week for at least 10 of the 16 weeks prior to their enrollment in an accredited postsecondary institution. Having met these basic eligibility requirements, students can then use their full-time enrollment—a minimum of 12 credit hours per term and a minimum of 30 credit hours per year—to fulfill their work activity requirements. Students are also expected to work a minimum of 32 hours per week during the summer in order to maintain their cash benefits and support services throughout the year. As long as students maintain a 2.0 grade point average and comply with all other TANF-related departmental rules and guidelines (e.g. assisting in the establishment of paternity and regularly meeting with

their case manager), students can participate in this program until they attain their degree. Students in this program are not restricted by the federal 60-month time limit because this program is state-run using maintenance of effort funds[31] and is therefore not subject to federally imposed regulations including work participation rate requirements (Department of Family Services 2003).

This program has received very little national attention and evaluations of its success have not been systematically conducted and disseminated. However, local legislators and welfare administrators have been able to keep it running given the generally accepted notion that offering educational options to welfare participants is in the best interest of all Wyoming residents.

Maine: Parents as Scholars. As in Wyoming, when welfare reform took place, leaders in Maine chose to address welfare participants' educational needs rather than force motivated and successful students out of school and into low-wage jobs just so they could receive welfare assistance. Legislators and welfare administrators responded by creating the Parents as Scholars (PaS) program. Just like Wyoming's SASFA program, PaS, which is state-funded, provides TANF-eligible individuals with cash assistance and support services while they are enrolled in a two- or four-year postsecondary institution.

The program is open to individuals who 1) are eligible for TANF, 2) do not have a marketable bachelor's degree, 3) have matriculated into an undergraduate two- or four-

[31] In order to receive federal TANF monies, states are required to spend 75 to 80 percent of the state dollars that they had previously allotted for AFDC programs. These state contributions are called "Maintenance of Effort" (MOE) funds. These state dollars can be used for programs or activities that states might want to support, such as the PaS program in Maine. However, there are fewer MOE dollars than federal dollars to spend and many states will option for activities or programs that will in the short-term boost weekly participation rates.

year degree program, 4) can demonstrate that they do not have the skills to earn at least 85% of Maine's median wage,[32] 5) are enrolled in a degree program that will improve their ability to support their family, and 6) have demonstrated that they have the aptitude to complete their chosen educational program (Maine Equal Justice 2005). As in Wyoming, because the program is funded with state-controlled maintenance-of-effort (MOE) funds, program participants are exempt from the restrictions imposed on individuals participating in the TANF program. That is, the 60-month lifetime limit and work participation requirements are not applied to students involved in the PaS program.

Once individuals are accepted into the program, they are expected to participate in educational or work activities for a minimum of 20 hours per week. Both time spent in class and time spent studying are counted towards the 20-hour minimum (administrators accord one and a half hours of study time for each hour that students spend in class). Students who are enrolled full time — at most institutions students who have registered for at least 12 credit hours are considered full time — are allotted a minimum of 18 hours for studying. In other words, any student who is enrolled full time, and some students enrolled part time, can easily meet these program requirements. After being enrolled in the program for two years, students are expected to increase their weekly activities from 20 to 40 hours per week. These additional hours may be satisfied by either taking more classes (a minimum of 15 credit hours) or by being involved in an internship, practicum, work study, or other general work activity. In the final semester, students may use such activities as resume preparation, job research, or interviewing activities to fulfill their

[32] In 2005, Maine's median wage for a family of three was $41,985 (Maine Equal Justice 2005).

weekly work activity requirements. During the summer, students involved in PaS must either attend summer school or work a minimum of 30 hours a week in order to continue receiving benefits. As long as students meet these weekly work/educational activity requirements and maintain a cumulative GPA of 2.0, they can receive the support services that most TANF participants receive including cash assistance, child care, transportation assistance, eye care, dental care, and money for school supplies and books.

Since its inception, the program has been restricted to 2,000 students, but according to Smith, Deprez, and Butler (2002), the number of students participating in the program has never reached that number. In 1997 and 2001, fewer than a thousand students were enrolled in the program and in 2005, that number had increased to just over 1,000, far below the allowable minimum (Hastedet, Henderson, and Hicks 2005; Smith, Deprez, and Butler 2003).

Despite these relatively low rates of participation, the program has been deemed a success by legislators, researchers, and program participants themselves. In their longitudinal evaluation of the program Smith, Deprez, and Butler (2004) determined that PaS participants benefited in a variety of ways from their involvement in the program. In addition to improving their likelihood of receiving higher wages and better benefits as compared to TANF participants who had not participated in the program, PaS participants had increased levels of self-esteem and improved familial relationships (Deprez, Butler and Smith 2004). Perhaps because this program has been the subject of comprehensive evaluations and because researchers and community organizers have been able to successfully forge strong relationships with local and federal legislators — most

notably Maine's Senator Olympia Snowe — the program has received a great deal of regional and national attention. In 2005, the PaS program received the New England Higher Education Excellence Award for its achievements and successes.

Policy Recommendations

Very few states have implemented formal educational programs for TANF participants seeking 4-year degrees in part because of the strict participation limits imposed at the federal level. As described in this study, those same participation limits have shaped the interpersonal interactions of welfare case managers and their clients that have resulted in case managers recommending that clients put aside their schooling in order to participate in the low-wage work sector. According to a study conducted by the Center for Law and Social Policy in 2002, current TANF reauthorization proposals—which have only changed negligibly in the past four years and in which participation limits have been increased and the caseload reduction eliminated or revised—would effectively result in states having to eliminate their existing educational programs. In other words, given the current proposed direction of legislative TANF reauthorization proposals, the number and scope of already limited educational programs would be decreased[33] and more motivated and capable students would be forced out of school and into the low-wage service sector.

[33] According the report, over 40 states would have to eliminate their educational programs if participation rates were increased and the caseload reduction credit were eliminated. Most of those programs are already dramatically limited serving clients enrolled in short-term programs of 24-months or less.

Legislators need to consider how increasing participation rates will affect the lives of individuals currently receiving TANF. Legislators should also consider expanding current definitions of work activities to include postsecondary education. Under proposed work activity definitions, participation in postsecondary education is eliminated and or heavily restricted in terms of the number of months an individual may participate. To allow clients to pursue educational options, legislators should explicitly add postsecondary education as an option and eliminate caps on the number of months during which TANF participants can participate in educational programs. Additionally, to allow for the completion of four-year degrees, legislators should consider "stopping the clock" for TANF clients enrolled in postsecondary programs. As long as students are progressing at a reasonable rate—to be determined at the local level by case managers as every client has different needs—they should not fear having their benefits cut a term or two before graduating. Current participation requirements and time limitations at the federal level disallow states and case managers discretion to allow motivated and capable students from pursuing an activity that may ultimately improve their likelihood of attaining self-sufficiency.

Clearly such recommendations do not effectively confront the problems incurred by an ever-increasing service economy where many jobs do not provide a livable wage. Legislators need to simultaneously consider how to address the needs of individuals who choose not to pursue their education or who have achieved a postsecondary education but are employed in the service sector without a decent wage and necessary benefits. Education is not the answer to the problems of a changing economy and employment

sector where salaries and benefits are increasingly inadequate and instability is the norm. Until legislators examine the multifaceted sources of the complex problem of poverty in this country, effective solutions will not be found.

RE-IMAGINING THE FUTURE – PRIVATE TROUBLES VS. PUBLIC ISSUES[34]

In addition to heralding the importance of education in creating a more egalitarian society, Du Bois also taught us a grand lesson about the power of perspective and the shaping of social problems. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois demonstrates how an examination of the processes by which "problems" come to be defined can reveal a great deal about the structuring of power in contemporary society. Du Bois artfully demonstrates how in a culture where racial and ethnic minorities are persistently discriminated against, white hegemonic control results too often in the reduction of racialized public issues to private troubles. Even his beneficent white admirers too often perceived the problem of the color line to be a "Negro problem." It was perceived to be a problem with certain individuals, not a problem permeating the very fabric of society. It was a problem belonging to "others," not a problem belonging to and produced by all.

Welfare participants are acutely aware of their stigmatized status. They know they are perceived to be a "problem" by legislators and many of the constituents those legislators represent. But in the United States the problem of welfare masks the deeper

[34] In defining the sociological imagination, C. Wright Mills (1959) reveals the connections between personal troubles and public issues as both are embedded in history. He wrote: "Know that many personal troubles cannot be solved merely as troubles, but must be understood in terms of public issues - and in terms of the problems of history making. . . . Know that the problems of social science, when adequately formulated, must include both troubles and issues, both biography and history, and the range of their intricate relations" (226).

problems of poverty and of gender and racial inequalities. Until we can honestly address issues producing familial poverty, racism, and sexism, we will never resolve the social problems that are perceived to emanate from the welfare system. As Mark Rank argues in *One Nation Underprivileged: Why American Poverty Affects Us All* (2004), we all, directly or indirectly, feel the effects of poverty and inequality in our lives. We all pay the price when people are denied the education they deserve or when a mother can barely feed her children. How much talent is being wasted in our nation's poorest schools? How many prisons are filled with individuals who resorted to deviant actions — drug dealing, robbery — as a means of survival? Although we are all negatively affected by these social ills — evidenced in a U.S. culture that is dominated by fear and punishment — undeniably, the real costs are highest for those who are daily living in need. Until we come to acknowledge that the *real* problem is not a fraud-plagued welfare system but racialized and gendered social inequalities, all proposed solutions will be merely superficial.

As many social welfare researchers have noted, a large number of social welfare employees and their clients were optimistic when welfare was initially reformed. Said Carl, who had worked as a case manager under both the AFDC and TANF programs, "Before "96 . . . my observation was that you are not training the people to get out. You were just recycling and I was hoping that there would be something else. So when I came here, I found out that there was TANF so that was like — I was happy with that." Carl continued, "Before, there was no training. It was o.k. just apply for TANF. There was no training and they were unmotivated, but under that TANF there are a lot more

benefits for them. So, yes that's good. But now, the next step is to either go to college, higher education . . . there should be some kind of support." Like any complex bureaucracy, the welfare system has had to adapt to corresponding changes in the culture and economy, and it has not always successfully met the varying needs of its very diverse clientele. However, as Carl recommends, it is now time to move on to the next step.

This study clearly details just *how* federally-mandated rules and regulations regarding work participation have produced work-first programs that effectively push TANF clients into jobs — most of which do not provide a living wage or adequate benefits — and away from postsecondary education. As a result, many individuals who were successful students even *before* applying for TANF, found themselves having to forfeit their educational goals, and hence their long-term occupational goals, in order to maintain their TANF benefits. Who benefits from such a move? Certainly not former or potential students. Instead, low-wage employers reap the benefits as the TANF program provides them with a steady stream of "needy" poor parents to clean their buildings and to work behind their counters and in their childcare facilities. An education is often not needed for such "careers" and because these jobs are often not perceived as desirable given their low pay and lack of benefits, these jobs can be hard to fill. With current TANF policies in place, a ready pool of desperate labor is created. Furthermore, government officials benefit as their perceived reputation of promoting wasteful public programs is countered with images of fiscal responsibility and control. In a culture where neoliberal perspectives are gaining currency, reports regarding the successes of welfare—after all, the welfare rolls are decreasing—predominate and reinforce the perception that

less government is better government and that people cannot expect to rely on others for what they should do themselves.

As described above, changes in welfare policy that resulted in the implementation of TANF were in part based on welfare stereotypes and on the assumption that most welfare participants need to be urged to work. Such stereotypes and assumptions are for the most part ahistorical and attribute poverty not to issues of racial and gender discrimination, residential segregation, and limited educational and occupational opportunities, but to individual failings and a "culture of poverty" that essentially pathologize and blame individuals for their impoverished predicaments. Until we can eliminate the "welfare queen" from the discourse of welfare, we cannot expect to move away from individualistic explanations dominating public and private discourse. It is therefore up to researchers to continue to combat these stereotypes, further enhancing nuanced details in their portraits of poverty, and it is up to policy makers to rely on sound research, not emotionally-resonant caricatures of poor mothers, when debating welfare policy.

Current legislation regarding welfare does not address the complicated realities shaping many economically-poor families' lives. When asked how legislators might work to improve the lives welfare participants, Nia responded,

> If they're going to do something . . . that gives [TANF participants] a source of income that they can live off, that's fine, but don't tell them to work even harder at being in poverty. That's a slap in the face! Give them some type of opportunity to not need you anymore . . . Sometimes I get the impression that the people in the Senate, the legislators who have the powers that be, if you will,

> they give the impression that[TANF participants] are living high off the hog on this money and that is definitely not the case.

Punitive work-first programs are not likely to solve the problem of familial poverty within a culture where the work of being a poor parent is often devalued and where structural causes of poverty are not seriously acknowledged. Although a comprehensive examination of possible solutions for these complex social problems extends beyond the scope of this study, what I hope to have convincingly argued is that we can begin by reconsidering the educational limitations imposed on TANF participants in regard to welfare policy. Instead of closing school doors in the faces of motivated student parents, legislators and welfare program administrators need to work toward creating long-term solutions that will facilitate these students' educational and occupation success. Until welfare policy is restructured to allow for the diverse educational and occupational needs of the mothers and fathers of families that the program is intended to serve, we will continue to relegate an already vulnerable population — primarily consisting of single mothers and their children — to a future riddled with instability and poverty. Jobs may come and go, but the acquired skills and knowledge that a postsecondary degree has come to represent remain with a person for a lifetime. Everyone is worthy and deserving of such an educational investment.

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APPENDIX A – Interview Schedules

Interview Schedule
TANF Recipients
Postsecondary Educational Experiences of Georgia TANF Recipients

Date of Interview: _____ Interviewer: _____

Demographic Information:
Actual Name: _____
Self-Chosen Alias: _____
Age: _____
Gender: _____
Race: _____
Contact Information (address, phone #, email):
_____
_____
_____

Family and TANF Information:
Number of Dependents: _____
Gender of Dependents: _____ Male _____ Female
Ages of Dependents: _____
Amount of TANF Benefits (monthly): _____

Educational Information:
Postsecondary Institution Attending: _____
Degree/Major: _____
Number of Credits Earned: _____
Average Number of Credits Attempted Each Term: _____
Cumulative GPA: _____
Grants/Scholarships Received: _____
_____
Educational Awards/Honors: _____
_____

General Questions -TANF & Educational Experiences:

1. How long have you been receiving TANF?

2. What life events/situations caused you to apply for TANF?

3. How were you made to feel (by family, friends, caseworkers) when you first applied for TANF?

4. What kind of work (paid or unpaid) have you done in the past?

5. How long have you been taking university/college classes?

6. Did you enter university/college with an end goal or job in mind? Please explain or describe your personal or professional goals.

7. Do you believe that you are successful in school? Please explain your answer and provide your own definition of educational success.

8. Have you encountered any problems or faced any obstacles (e.g. financial, academic, familial) while pursuing your education? Please explain your answer.

9. Does your family (e.g. parents, children, and partner) support your choice to attend university/college?

10. Do your friends support your choice to attend university/college?

11. How did you first find out that you could attend school while still receiving TANF?

12. Have TANF case workers supported your choice to attend university/college?

13. In regards to your educational benefits, do you feel that TANF policies and procedures are easy to understand and follow? Please explain.

14. What do you feel are successful TANF policies/procedures in regards to educational opportunities?

15. How could TANF policies/procedures regarding educational benefits be improved?

16. At this time, Georgia is one of only 12 states in which TANF recipients can use postsecondary education hours to fulfill work requirements. How do you feel about currently proposed federal policies that are focusing on 1) increasing job and not educational opportunities and 2) increasing weekly work hours?

17. Do you consider yourself to be a feminist? In your answer, please provide your own definition of feminism.

18. Is there anything else you feel I have missed or that you would like to discuss before we end our interview?

Talking about decisions on the spur of the moment may have been difficult. If you think of anything else you want to tell me more about, please contact me at this phone number (provide participant with a business card).

NOTE: Given my emphasis on discovery over hypothesis testing, responses will be probed and additional questions may be asked regarding emerging themes and patterns detected in participants' answers.

Interview Schedule
TANF Case Workers
Postsecondary Educational Experiences of Georgia TANF Recipients

Date of Interview: _____ Interviewer: _____

Demographic Information:
Actual Name: _____
Self-Chosen Alias: _____
Age: _____
Gender: _____
Race: _____
Contact Information (address, phone #, email):
_____
_____
_____

TANF Work History (all questions below specifically refer to DFCS employment)
Length of Time Working (months/years) _____
Location of Employment _____
Average Number of Cases Handled at One Time _____

General Questions -TANF & Educational Experiences:

1. Have you ever worked with a TANF recipient who has been actively pursuing a postsecondary education?
   If "*Yes*": Please describe your experiences working with TANF recipients who are/were pursuing a postsecondary education.
   Possible probing questions:
   - Who is likely to pursue an education (gender, race, class background)?
   - What kinds of classes/degrees are chosen?
   - Are these individuals successful students? How/why?
   - What obstacles do these individuals face?

   If "*No*": Why do believe so few TANF recipients choose to attend postsecondary institutions as a means of fulfilling their work requirements?

2. What do you perceive to be the benefits of allowing TANF recipients to use postsecondary education as a means of fulfilling work requirements?

3. What do you perceive to be the drawbacks of allowing TANF recipients to use postsecondary education as a means of fulfilling work requirements?

4. Please describe some of the policies and procedures regarding educational opportunities for TANF recipients.

5. Do you believe that the policies and procedures regarding postsecondary opportunities for TANF recipients are clear and easy to understand and follow? Please explain your answer.

6. Do you assist TANF recipients in attaining funding and financial aid for their postsecondary education?

7. Do you believe that TANF recipients support offering educational opportunities to other TANF recipients?

8. Do you believe that case workers support offering educational opportunities to TANF recipients?

9. Do you believe that politicians and the general public support offering educational opportunities to TANF recipients?

10. Do you believe that federal trends emphasizing work over education represent a positive change for TANF recipients? Please explain.

11. Do you consider yourself to be a feminist? In your answer, please provide your own definition of feminism.

12. Is there anything else you feel I have missed or that you would like to discuss before we end our interview?

Talking about decisions on the spur of the moment may have been difficult. If you think of anything else you want to tell me more about, please contact me at this phone number (provide participant with a business card).

NOTE: Given our emphasis on discovery over hypothesis testing, responses will be probed and additional questions may be asked regarding emerging themes and patterns detected in participants' answers.

APPENDIX B – Network Sample Origins and Relationships

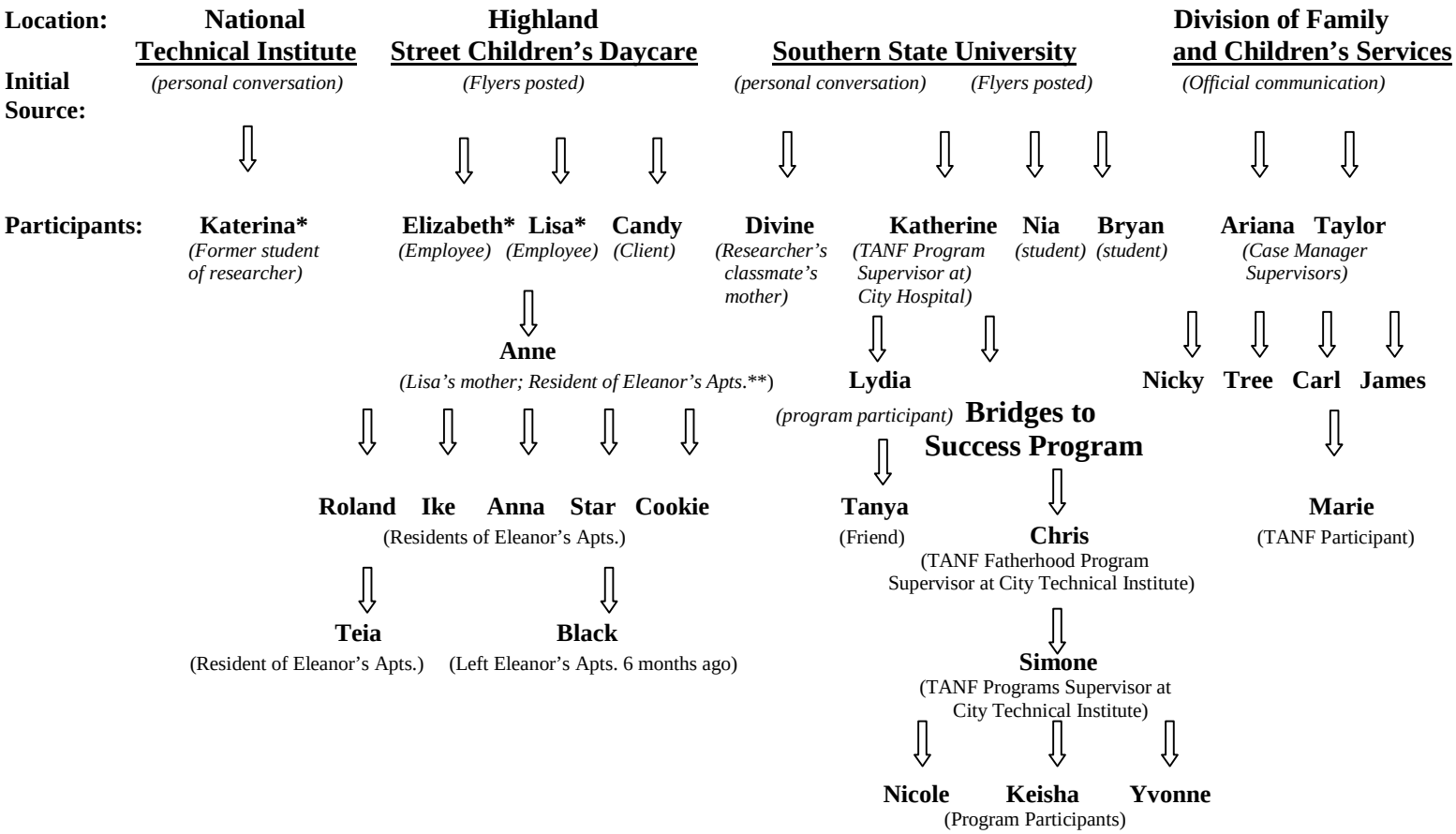

Figure 1 – Network Sample Origins and Relationships (N = 30)

** Research participants whom I interacted with on a personal or professional basis prior to the project interview.*

*** Eleanor's Apartments is a housing complex serving individuals diagnosed with HIV/AIDS or mental illnesses. The apartments are partially subsidized by state and federal grants.*

APPENDIX C – Student Demographics, Family Information, and Educational Histories

Table 9. Summary Description of Selected Demographics and Family Information of Student Participants – 2004, N=20

Name	Age	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Number of Children	Ages of Children	Welfare Program
Anna	41	Female	Black/African American	2	13, 18	AFDC and TANF
Anne	47	Female	Black/Cherokee	2	20, 29	TANF
Black	42	Male	Black/Multiracial	1	4	TANF
Brian*	23	Male	Black/African American	0	N/A	N/A
Candy	20	Female	Black/African American	1	2	TANF
Cookie	33	Female	Black/African American	1	12	AFDC and TANF
Elizabeth	23	Female	Black/Multiracial	1	2	TANF
Ike	47	Male	Black/African American	3	21, 24 ,27	AFDC and TANF
Katerina	35	Female	Black/African American	2	5, 12	TANF
Keisha	25	Female	Black/African American	3	1, 6, 8	TANF
Lisa	29	Female	Black/Multiracial	1	3	TANF
Lydia	40	Female	Black/African American	4	3, 10, 13, 15	TANF
Marie	23	Female	Black/African American	2	2, 6	TANF
Nia	25	Female	Black/African American	1	4	TANF

Nicole	33	Female	Black/African American	5	10, 11, 13, 15, 17	AFDC and TANF
Roland	38	Female	Black/African American	1	2	TANF
Star	47	Female	Black/African American	1	23	AFDC and TANF
Tanya	44	Female	Black/African American	5	9, 10, 13, 15, 16	AFDC and TANF
Teia	23	Female	Black/African American	1	3	TANF
Yvonne	32	Female	Black/African American	3	13, 14, 15	AFDC and TANF

* I include Brian in my final sample because I used his comments in my methods section. During the course of our interview I quickly determined that he did not qualify for participation; however because his parents had relied on AFDC while he was growing up and because he was currently receiving food stamps while attending Southern State University, he had many relevant insights regarding issues of race and welfare receipt that I draw upon in my analysis.

Table 10. Summary Description of Education-Related Variables For Student Participants - 2004, N = 19

Name	Type of Postsecondary Institution	Current Program of Study	Postsecondary Degrees Achieved	Educational Aspirations	Self-Reported GPA	Financial Aid (Past and Current)
Anna	2-Year College	Culinary - Pastry	Medical Assistant	Certification	2.5	HOPE
Anne	2-Year College	Sign Language	None	Certification	Not Known	Campus-sponsored Scholarship
Black	Vocational / Technical College	Cosmetology	None	Certification	Not Known	Grant Funded
Candy	2-Year College	English - Secondary Education	None	B.A.	2.0	Pell Grant
Cookie	Vocational / Technical College	Medical Assistant	None	Certification	Not Known	Grant Funded
Elizabeth	Vocational / Technical College	Medical Assistant	None	R.N. and M.S.N.	4.0	HOPE and Pell Grant
Ike	Vocational / Technical College	Auto Mechanic	None	Certification	Not Known	Grant Funded
Katerina	4-Year College or University	Business Management	B.S. Aerospace Engineering	Ph.D.	2.1	Pell Grant
Keisha	2-Year College	Medical Assistant	None	R.N.	4.0	Pell Grant

Lisa	4-Year College or University	Computer Science	None – Junior Standing	B.S.	3.5	HOPE and Pell Grant
Lydia	4-Year College or University	Business	A.A. Business	B.S.	3.6	Pell Grant
Marie	4-Year College or University	Sociology	None – Senior Standing	B.S.	2.7	HOPE and Pell Grant
Nia	4-Year College or University	Social Work	B.S. Social Work	M.S.W. and L.C.S.W.	3.1	HOPE and Pell Grant
Nicole	2-Year College	Cosmetology	A.A. Medical Information / Certification – Cosmetology, OH	Certification – GA	2.5	Grant Funded
Roland	Vocational / Technical College	Ultrasound Diagnostics	None	Certification	Not Known	Pell Grant
Star	Vocational/Technical College	Personal Computer Technician	None	Certification	Not Known	Grant Funded
Tanya	4-Year College or University	Accounting / Corporate Finance	B.S. and M.B.A. Accounting and Finance	Ph.D.	3.3	Campus-sponsored Fellowship
Teia	Vocational / Technical College	Medical Assistant	None	Certification	Not Known	Grant Funded
Yvonne	2-Year College	Business	Certification – Medical Assistant	A.A. Business	3.0	HOPE and Pell Grant

APPENDIX D

Table 11. Cross Comparison of Selected Characteristics of Federal and State TANF Plans to the Senate and House and Representatives TANF Reauthorization Proposals of 2005

	Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act 1996	**State TANF Plan Georgia 2003**	**Personal Responsibility and Individual Development for Everyone Act, 2005 (S.667)**	**Personal Responsibility, Work, and Family Promotion Act, 2005 (H.R.240)**
Program Goals	Four purposes of TANF: 1. provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives; 2. end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage; 3. prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies; and 4. encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.	Same as Federal plan. In the administration of the TANF program in Georgia: 1. work is given the highest priority in the provision of services and benefits; 2. needs of children receive high priority in choosing program options; 3. benefits are directly linked to the exercise of responsible behavior on the part of parents receiving benefits on behalf of their children; 4. parental responsibility and employment initiatives are incorporated into the program's design; 5. efforts to reduce teen pregnancy are pursued in cooperation with non-profit agencies and other governmental organizations.	Four purposes of TANF***:*** 1. provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives; 2. end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage; 3. prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies; and 4. encourage the formation and maintenance of **healthy** 2-parent **married** families**, and encourage responsible fatherhood**.*	Four purposes of TANF: 1. provide assistance **and services** to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives; 2. end the dependence of needy **families** on government benefits **and reduce poverty** by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage; 3. prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies; and 4. encourage the formation and maintenance of **healthy** 2-parent **married** families**, and encourage responsible fatherhood**.*

Time Limit	60 months	48 months	60 months	60 months
Participation Rate	Participation rates: All families = 50% Two-parent families = 90% 30% limit of individuals who are participating in vocational educational activities.	Same as federal guidelines	• All families = 70% • Eliminates 2-parent rate • 10% limit of individuals pursuing postsecondary education. • Partial credit awarded for individuals working at least 20 hours weekly	• All families = 70% • Eliminates 2-parent rate
Hourly Work Requirement	• 30 hours min. weekly • 20 hours min. weekly for single parents with a child under age 6 • Single or married teens who are in secondary school are considered meeting the work requirement	Same as federal guidelines. In addition, single parents with a child under age 1 are exempt from work activity requirements.	• 34 hours min. weekly • 24 hours min. weekly for single parents with a child under age 6 • 39 hours min. weekly for 2-parent families without childcare • 55 hours min. weekly for 2-parent families with childcare	• 40 hours min. weekly for all participants, including parents with children under age 6. • Partial credit awarded for individuals working at least 24 hours weekly
Direct Work Activities	1. Unsubsidized employment 2. Subsidized private-sector employment 3. Subsidized public-sector employment 4. Work experience 5. On-the-job training 6. Job search and readiness assistance (up to 6 weeks) 7. Community service 8. Child care work for	Same as federal guidelines.	<u>Priority Activities (24 hours):</u> 1. Unsubsidized employment 2. Subsidized private-sector employment 3. Subsidized public-sector employment 4. Work experience 5. On-the-job training 6. Job search and readiness assistance (up to 6 weeks) 7. Community service 8. Child care work for TANF participants	<u>Priority Activities (24 hours):</u> 1. Unsubsidized employment 2. Subsidized private-sector employment 3. Subsidized public-sector employment 4. Work experience 5. On-the-job training 6. Community service. 7. Education or training to fill a known job (Limit: 4 consecutive months in 24

	community service participants 9. Vocational educational training (up to 12 months) 10. Job skills training, directly related to employment 11. Education directly related to employment 12. Secondary school attendance The first nine activities have priority status; at least 20 hours per week must be spent involved in a priority status work activity.		9. Vocational educational training (up to 12 months) <u>Non-priority Activities</u> - These activities may be used as countable hours after the 24-hour minimum is met with one or more priority activities: 1. Job skills training 2. Completion of secondary school 3. Education directly related to work 4. Marriage education/conflict resolution <u>Qualified Activities</u> These activities may fulfill the priority activity requirement for a limited time—6 months in any given 24-month period: 1. Postsecondary education 2. Adult literacy 3. Drug and alcohol substance abuse counseling (time limit may be extended if deemed necessary) 4. Barrier removal activities 5. Financial literacy (5 hours per week) 6. Parenting skills building	month period). 8. Secondary school attendance for teens. <u>Non-Priority or Qualified Activities</u> - These activities may be used as countable hours after the 24-hour minimum is met with a priority activity or may fulfill the priority activity requirement for a limited time—3 months in any given 24-month period: 1. substance abuse counseling 2. rehabilitation treatment 3. work-related education or training. 4. job search or job readiness 5. any other activity that addresses a purpose of TANF.
Additional Educational Activities			Option for state to create postsecondary educational programs: • Students may be enrolled in a 2- or 4-year	None

			postsecondary program • 10% cap on number of TANF participants • Support services may be provided (transportation, child care, cost of books). • Study hours (1-1/2 hours per hour in class), work study and internships may count towards the work activity requirement.	

(Sources: American Public Human Services Association (APHSA). 2005. *TANF Reauthorization Legislation: Comparison of Present Law to H.R.240 and Senate Finance-Passed PRIDE Act*. Washington D.C.: APHSA.; U.S. Congress. 1996. *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996*. Public Law 104-193. H.R. 3734. U.S. House of Representatives. 2005. *Comparison of Current Law With H.R.240, the Personal Responsibility, Work, and Family Promotion Act of 2005*. Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service.; U.S. House of Representatives. 2005. H.R. 240 – 109th Congress. Available on the Internet: http://thomas.loc.gov/ U.S. Senate. 2005. S.667- 109th Congress. Available on the Internet: http://thomas.loc.gov/)

* Text added to the original or revised is noted in bold typeface.