

# **SPEAKING OUT:**

**WOMEN, POVERTY, AND  
PUBLIC POLICY**



**Edited by Katherine A. Rhoades  
and Anne Statham**

# **Speaking Out: Women, Poverty, and Public Policy**

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and Anne Statham



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Studies Conference**

**University of Wisconsin System  
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## **Dedication**

To all of the courageous women we have met who are making strides to move beyond the grasp of poverty.

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## Introduction

There are many stories behind this volume and the conference that gave rise to it. We began our walk along this path in the mid-1990s. Welfare reform was being seriously considered in Wisconsin, and our state government was anxious to be “ahead of the curve,” as it had been with many earlier welfare reform experiments, such as “learn fare,” “bride fare,” and “work not welfare.” Bill Clinton had successfully campaigned just a few years earlier to “end welfare as we know it.”

It was in this atmosphere that the University of Wisconsin Women’s Studies Consortium Outreach Program, representing the interests of many Women’s Studies faculty around the state, began a collaborative project with women in the poverty community to dispel the myths and stereotypes and educate the general public about the realities of living in poverty. We had no idea things would move as quickly as they have, that within a few years we would see the dismantling of the welfare safety net and the institution of work-only programs that ignore the problems many women are having with this mandate.

Wisconsin is known as a leader in this reform, although it is happening in similar ways in many other states. Under the auspices of the Institute for Women’s Policy Research, we were able to meet women in other states who were doing similar work. Some of them came to our conference and their work is included here.

When we planned the conference—held on the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire campus, October 29–31, 1998—that resulted in this publication, we chose a theme of “Speaking Out.” It seemed critical that a feminist analysis be included in the ongoing debates about welfare reform, and the related issue of women’s economic security. In Wisconsin, and elsewhere around the country, that voice has been effectively stifled. With this conference, and the Action Agenda that resulted, we begin the journey to right that imbalance.

“Speaking Out” remains one of the most cherished acts of freedom in a democratic society. From organizing “Speak Outs” against racism to breaking silences about domestic violence, feminists have long embraced the power of “speaking out” about systematic injustices that limit women’s lives and curtail their opportunities. At the same time, feminists have also understood that because of the diversity among and between women, some women are in a position to speak out more easily and will be heard more readily than others.

Given their relative position of power, it seemed likely that people housed within institutions of higher education would be among those joining the pervasive public outcry

that erupted in response to the current spate of welfare reforms. It is therefore surprising that few academics spoke out even though the reforms in effect were tolling a death knell for many women who could improve their chances for future economic self-sufficiency by participating in higher education. This seemingly muted response from higher education, coupled with the depth and rapidity of welfare changes sweeping the nation, prompted the Planning Committee for the twenty-third annual University of Wisconsin System Women's Studies Conference to focus the conference on speaking out about women and poverty issues.

From the beginning, the conference was fueled by the hope that the conference would enable feminist scholars to join more actively in conversations with activists, policy makers, and women who are most directly affected by welfare changes. The papers comprising this volume, gleaned from among the nearly 100 papers presented at the conference, salute the success of that conversation.

We have divided the papers into six sections. Five authors provide an historical perspective for policy critiques. Rigdon revisits the concept of "culture of poverty," providing a new way of viewing the findings of Oscar Lewis. The internal workings of the welfare state and reactions to it are provided by Sachs' analysis of the welfare rights movement and Deprez' examination of the concept of "dependency." Messer-Davidow shows us the agenda of the "radical right," and suggests ways we might counter their efforts. McCallum provides a more contemporary analysis of the ideology of TANF, and Sarah Harder suggests how we can frame our efforts to provide long-term sustainability for women now living in poverty.

In Part II, we include views of welfare reform in specific states. Barnard and Turner look at implications for children and families in Wisconsin. Kahn and her coauthors consider the situation in Michigan; Lewis looks at Pennsylvania; and Frances Payne Adler and her coauthors speak to the situations in both Wisconsin and California.

Part III offers several international perspectives. Walter offers a comparison between the U.S. and Denmark; Banda compares family leave policies in the U.S. with those in other countries; Crow describes changes in women's status in East and West Germany; and Bala describes women's poverty status relative to the employment situation in India.

The authors in Part IV are concerned with the role of education in addressing issues surrounding poverty in our society. Shaddock argues for the importance of higher education, especially the liberal arts, as a long-term solution. Pederson-Benn uses her own experiences with moving out of poverty to design a model program for helping other women make this transition. Welch and Bertilson/Griffith offer ideas for teaching about this issue, including how to deal with students' resistance and strategies to incorporate voices from the poverty community effectively into courses we might teach.

Part V focuses on mechanisms of resistance. Grabowski considers the importance of self-efficacy, and how it can be nurtured systematically. Stokes describes a successful

process of organizing a community-generated Neighborhood Center that serves many of the residents' needs. Salamun describes a workshop she offered at the conference (and does routinely elsewhere), as another way to build confidence and a sense of empowerment. Poupart illustrates the importance of countering racial stereotypes.

Part VI offers a look at the issue of poverty through literary devices. Thomas analyzes the work of Cisneros in this way. Schlacks discusses author Meridel LeSueur who wrote about women facing poverty during the Depression Era. Sen examines women-friendly literary traditions in India, taking exception with Salman Rushdie's assertion that Indo-Anglican fiction can supplant more regional Indian writing.

All of these authors offer intriguing views of the multifaceted issues related to poverty. Each author "speaks out" in a distinctive way, making this collection a cacophony of voices, ideas, and conclusions from activists, women who have lived or are living in poverty, scholars, and policy makers. These diverse perspectives capture well the conference's intent to bring many voices to the table to create an agenda of change in response to current welfare reforms.

As we continue our dialogue, we are convinced a better policy alternative will emerge, one that more fully acknowledges the complexities of the issues women face than the experiments many of these authors are critiquing. We hope that this volume will serve as a legacy in service of that goal as it taps the roar that resides on the other side of silence.<sup>1</sup>

Katherine A. Rhoades and Anne Statham

#### NOTES

1. George Eliot refers to such a roar in *Middlemarch*, Volume I, Chapter 20. There are many reprintings of this classic text including a recent one edited by Margaret Harris and Judith Johnston (Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle, 1997).

## **Part I:**

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# **Historical Perspectives and Policy Critiques**

# Limitations on the Use of Culture as an Explanatory Concept: The Case of Long-term Poverty

Susan M. Rigdon  
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

*The trouble with being poor is that it takes up all your time.*

Willem de Koonig

This paper is based on an analysis of anthropological field data on poor Puerto Rican families living in San Juan and New York City.<sup>1</sup> The objective of the larger research project was to account for economic mobility, or the lack of it, across four to six generations in each of the families studied.<sup>2</sup> This paper deals with the role culture plays in perpetuating poverty within families. I use the life history of one of the dozens of women interviewed to illustrate the analytic limitations of using culture to account for the inability to escape poverty.

## **Introduction: The Conceptual Problem**

While anthropologists may still better remember Oscar Lewis for his work in Tepoztlán and contributions to the critique of Redfield's folk-urban continuum, those outside the discipline are much more likely to remember him for family studies and the culture of poverty thesis. In 1959, after doing field work in rural and urban Mexico, Cuba, Spain, India, and on a Northern Piegan reservation in Canada, Lewis began to argue that there was a universal sub-culture shared by millions of the world's poorest people, a culture spawned by—not just in, but by—stratified capitalist systems which, passed along primarily through the agency of family, perpetuated long-term poverty.

One can speak of the culture of the poor, for it has its own modalities and distinctive social and psychological consequences for its members. It seems to me that the culture of poverty cuts across regional, rural-urban, and even national boundaries.<sup>3</sup>

The culture of poverty is both an adaptation and a reaction of the poor to their marginal position in a class-stratified, highly individuated, capitalistic society. . . . Once it comes into existence, it tends to perpetuate itself from generation to generation. . . . By the time slum children are six or seven years old, they usually have absorbed the basic values and attitudes of their subculture and are

not psychologically geared to take full advantage of changing conditions or increased opportunities which may occur in their lifetime.<sup>4</sup>

Not long after Lewis's first statement of the culture of poverty thesis, the labor organizer and political activist Michael Harrington helped popularize the phrase by using it in *The Other America*, his widely-read overview of poverty in the United States.<sup>5</sup> The thesis immediately attracted strong opponents and adherents, and throughout the 1960s, whether under attack or being promoted as the explanation of long-term poverty, the concept was rarely absent from writing on the poor or the debate over how to fight the war on poverty.

The culture of poverty phrase, which prefigured the era of the sound bite, hints at an explanation for a complex problem, but in its effect is similar to Ruth Benedict's generalizations in *Patterns of Culture*, which Marvin Harris characterized as: "ingenious in evolving a Dilthean feeling of understanding, achieved entirely in the absence of explanation in any scientific sense."<sup>6</sup> I have argued elsewhere that the culture of poverty was at its inception a descriptive phrase for a way of life (complete with modal personality) of the poor people Lewis studied, not a theory of the cause of long-term poverty. Lewis usually referred to his research as the anthropology of poverty: anthropologists study culture; he studied the cultures of poor people, hence the culture of poverty.<sup>7</sup> Later as Lewis tried to transform description into explanation, the shift from the plural "cultures" to the singular was necessary because the essence of the thesis was that there was a universal subculture of poverty.

Well after his first statement of the thesis Lewis constructed a comprehensive defining list of traits for the (sub)culture and elaborated on how the culture reproduced itself. This discussion paid little attention to agency outside the family despite the fact that the theory posited systemic causes.

I am impressed by the remarkable similarities in family structure, the nature of kinship ties, the quality of husband-wife and parent-child relations, time orientation, spending patterns, value systems, and the sense of community found in lower-class settlements. . . .<sup>8</sup>

By taking the family as a "small social system" that mirrored the culture, Lewis implied that it was the reproduction of a set of behaviors and attitudes within the family which perpetuated a culture (or subculture) that doomed people to economic and social marginality. But in fact the family and culture became the principal explanatory factors by default, simply because they were the foci of Lewis's research. This laid the basis for the gap between problem—as revealed through biography and family studies—and explanation, as attempted in the culture of poverty thesis.

Long after his research focus shifted from community to family studies, and then more specifically to the psycho-dynamics of family life, Lewis still believed the cause of deep,

long-term poverty and the solutions to it lay in the nature of the socio-economic system. So while the family-agency explanation worked really well for some people, it did not work at all well for Lewis because it shifted the burden of responsibility. Although he was convinced that the family helped perpetuate a lifestyle that was not conducive to rising out of poverty, he also believed that most families who fell into deep poverty did so not through any fault of their own but due to macro-economic conditions. He said so flat out on a number of occasions:

In general terms poverty in our times is never caused by the poor themselves; it is the product of socio-economic systems. . . .<sup>9</sup>

One way of abolishing the culture of poverty is the abolition of capitalism—that's quite clear. That involves a change of major institutions.<sup>10</sup>

The crucial question from both the scientific and political point of view is: How much weight is to be given to the internal, self-perpetuating factors in the subculture of poverty as compared to the external, societal factors? My own position is that in the long run the self-perpetuating factors are relatively minor and unimportant as compared to the basic structure of the larger society. However, to achieve rapid changes and improvement with the minimum amount of trauma one must work on both the “external” and “internal” conditions.<sup>11</sup>

Taking culture as the central concept, and the family as the focus of research on the premise that it was a mirror of culture, Lewis argued that a culture could be reconstructed through a series of family studies. He compounded this by not portraying the cultures of the poor as anything more than the aggregation of traits culled from life histories, observations of family life, studies of material culture, and the administration of a battery of personality tests. All those variables acting on the family from a distance and not necessarily reflected in the mirror (wage and opportunity structure; social stratification; political marginality), which Lewis believed were crucial to his thesis, were progressively less visible in his writing on the poor as he moved from community studies in the 1940s and 1950s to individual and family psychology in the 1960s.

Had Lewis not been an anthropologist—let us say he had stayed in history, his original field of study—and had gone to Mexico City to do similar research, then would he have said that what he was doing was not the anthropology of poverty, but an oral history of poverty in urban Mexico? If so, he could have published the very same life histories in the same format but introduced them in a completely different way. Instead of writing about social and economic mobility being restricted by cultural practice, he could have written about how Mexico's economy and political history restricted vertical mobility. Instead of taking the family as a microcosm of culture and explaining long-term poverty in terms of acculturation, he could have discussed cross-generational poverty in terms of wage and opportunity

structure in Mexico. In this instance, the causal focus would have been on systemic factors instead of on the values and behavior of the poor. But as an anthropologist Lewis believed culture had to be the starting point of any explanatory framework. He never found a way to work macro-economic factors into his explanation except by positing them as a source condition of poverty and social stratification.

### **The Project: Using the Field Data to Critique the Thesis**

I have no independent empirical basis for refuting the culture of poverty thesis. Instead, after a review of Lewis's raw field data from Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Cuba (1943-1970), I have tried to show why there was little support in this data for his theory, and specifically that they show distinct differences in culture and life outcomes for the poorest of his Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban informants. With just a few examples from Lewis's Puerto Rican archive (most of it unpublished), I illustrate how the concept of culture obscures rather than facilitates explanation and how, in turn, this may impede the formulation of sound policy.

To make a convincing counterargument to Lewis's thesis, one has to demonstrate either the lack of generational continuities within families or show why the family was not the transmitter of a distinctive subculture responsible for impeding upward mobility. My conclusions are consistent with Lewis' own conviction—despite what the thesis purportedly claims or what others have tried to make it say—that both systemic and idiosyncratic factors play strong roles in the perpetuation of poverty, and that it is very difficult to make any comprehensive cross-cultural generalizations about the poor other than that they lack money and are often socially and politically marginalized.

Because Lewis's data are so dense, so complex, and because his argument is dependent upon generational continuities in cultural "traits," I chose to present much of the evidence for my argument on genealogical charts, using a variation on McGoldrick and Gerson's diagramming of family psychodynamics across generations.<sup>12</sup> More specifically I have tried to identify the source conditions of generational continuities and discontinuities in the families Lewis studied: local economy, larger social-political structure, idiosyncratic characteristics of the family, the structure and dynamics of community life, and biological factors, specifically inheritable health problems.

Using the data from six of the families studied in La Perla section of San Juan, I extracted and charted onto nineteen computer-generated genograms (not shown) data on: family structure and household composition over time; job and income histories; health histories; criminal histories; residential and migration histories; and homogamy, in this instance meaning marriage within the family, or among several families of similar economic and social position within a single community.

It is in reading the field materials on family life in rural Puerto Rico that one sees the strongest similarities among the six families: nature of employment in the rural economy, housing, diet and dress, childbirth and rearing practices, incidence of opportunistic diseases

associated with rural poverty, marriage patterns, size of family, educational and skill levels, religion, and strength of identity as Puerto Ricans. Differences are more notable among the families after they migrated to San Juan, where distinctions began to emerge in occupation, income level, housing, religious practice, and prevalence of criminal and violent behavior. The explanation lies in the greater number of economic options (“options” being more accurate than “opportunities”) and the wider latitude for behavior in La Perla. The limited occupational choices for unskilled workers and the control of the family over its members in small rural settlements had a greater leveling effect on social and economic behavior than the economy and strong community life of an urban slum.

Distinctions in health, mental capacities, family unity, and social skills, for example, had an even greater impact on economic outcomes in the opportunistic subeconomy of an urban ghetto like San Juan’s La Perla than they did in the countryside. Exposure to urban life and to the social life and recreational activities in the community diluted the influence of the family on children, even while they still lived at home.

This observation contradicts Lewis’s claim that the family was the main agency of transmission of a subculture of poverty. At the same time, however, if the principal agent of socialization had been greatly weakened, then the observation lends support to Lewis’s claim that new migrants to urban ghettos were vulnerable to rapid reacculturation. But did La Perla embody an alternative way of life and a “ready-made set of solutions,” as Lewis suggested? Were young people, by the age of “seven or eight,” socialized into a set of values and behaviors that would make it difficult for them to improve their economic condition, even when presented with opportunities to do so?

La Perla never was as homogeneous a community as the phrases “culture of poverty” and “slum culture” suggest. It began as a squatters’ settlement where people staked out housing sites on beachfront land to be near work opportunities—on the docks, in the slaughterhouse, and in nearby laundries, restaurants and bars. Its sea wall and beachfront boundaries, its distinctive housing and location, gave the community the appearance of separation from greater San Juan but it was as vulnerable to battering by larger social and economic forces as it was to high tides and hurricanes. Growing concentration of land ownership, changes in export markets, Prohibition, the Great Depression, post-war foreign investment, increasing drug use, and the building of a U.S. army base in the vicinity all affected the flow of migrants into La Perla and the ways in which its residents earned their livings. The nature of life in La Perla then was like that in most places which are not isolated or cut-off from outside forces: it was in flux. (My longer work contains a fuller history of the community’s rise and fall.)

At the time of Lewis’s field study, the population of La Perla still included people who had come during the community’s earliest days as a squatter settlement and it was still a place of distinct residential sectors, each with its own ambience. It was a community where workers employed at the margins of the mainstream labor force lived with one foot in the underground economy that was the sole support of some of their neighbors.

La Perlans themselves were in a state of transition. All but seven of the adults in Lewis's original survey had been born elsewhere. Rural migrants to La Perla often saw a sharp rise in their cash income, while long-term residents who had come to La Perla to work in the slaughterhouse or on the docks but were no longer able to work—due to age, illness, or job-related disabilities—had declining incomes. Furthermore, a number of people who settled in La Perla after the nineteen-forties were in states of physical, mental and/or emotional deterioration and unable to function in mainstream society or economic life. La Perla was their place of last resort.

Near the end of his research Lewis argued that communities like La Perla attracted people with high levels of psychopathology who came from families or subcultures which were in the process of disintegration. He wrote:

It strikes me that Carmen [mother of Dolores, discussed below] was just enough of a rebel and a deviant from her traditional rural culture to prepare the way for the later deviation and breakdown which is represented by the sub-culture of poverty.<sup>13</sup>

In essence I am arguing that there are selective psychological factors among migrants which predispose them toward the deviations of the traits of the sub-culture of poverty in urban slums, because they come from rural families where the traditional forms of control were already weakening or breaking down....<sup>14</sup>

In this interpretation the attraction of ever greater numbers of such people into La Perla changed its nature and laid the basis for a subculture that had personality disorders and mental illness as its core. Is it possible for a community like La Perla to evolve and transmit a distinctive subculture when it is in constant economic transition and its population base is shifting from the working poor to the physically and mentally disabled and the criminally deviant? In La Perla's subeconomy, where people lived by their wits, openness to change and maximization of every small opportunity could mean the difference between subsistence and malnutrition or even death. But coping with immediate conditions is not a cultural phenomenon.<sup>15</sup> To determine whether what began as "coping" has become a patterned, learned response handed down through agencies of socialization, requires more data than from a single generation.

One needs not only longitudinal studies to sort out the role of culture in impeding upward mobility, but also some methodological means for disaggregating the political, economic, health, and other factors that are subsumed under the culture concept when it is used to mean a "comprehensive totality." How can we weigh the relative influence of macroeconomic and political factors, culture, genetic endowment and idiosyncratic elements in family history, as well as nutrition and environment in the perpetuation of poverty? The extraordinary complexity of this problem becomes evident when one tries to

account for life outcomes of individual informants, as seen in the context of their family history.

In this short space I can offer just one illustration, the life of Dolores (Lola) Figueroa. Lewis and his field team interviewed Lola, her five sisters, mother and maternal aunt, and dozens of other family members over a six year period. Lola's sharp wit and intelligence shine through in interviews conducted when she was being consumed by tuberculosis. Sent to work in the coffee harvests as a child, with no chance at an education, and in misery all of her life from paralyzing seizures and violent fits of temper, Lola never found an outlet for her energy or intelligence. Defiant and unwilling to accept a life in domestic service as the alternative to farm labor, she survived several suicide attempts only to destroy herself in prostitution and alcohol.

What relationship does Lola's life outcome have to the culture/subculture she lived in? Her socialization in rural Jayuya took place in a chaotic household headed by Carmen, a woman not well enough to rear her children, and a drunken stepfather who molested Lola and some of her half-sisters. Carmen had been raised by a drunken father and stepmother after her own mother hanged herself; she too became a heavy drinker who consistently ignored the molestation of her daughters by their step-father and whose negligence probably led to the death of another child. Idiosyncratic aspects of this upbringing were probably influential in shaping personalities that made life in domestic service intolerable for Lola and her sisters and led them to prostitution. An estimated two-thirds of all women living in La Perla, including many of Lewis's other informants, were in economic situations similar to Lola's but never relied on prostitution to earn a living. This was true even though as illiterate, or barely literate, women in an urban area, their employment choices were few, and those at a living wage nonexistent.

Lola's family also followed the practice of homogamy, common to the time and place: They tended to marry cousins or other relatives living nearby, or to find partners within several families that had been intermarrying for generations. Since almost all were *agregados* (tenant farmers and agricultural laborers), or in very similar economic situations, marriage was rarely a vehicle for upward mobility. When members of these families moved from countryside to city, they practiced a variation on this pattern, marrying within their *barrios*, relatives of inlaws, and former partners of relatives; in Lola's generation, for example, sisters often married ex-brothers-in-laws.

Concerning Lola's health history, we know she inherited predispositions to alcoholism, diabetes, and clinical depression, which help explain her drinking and multiple suicide attempts. Her biological vulnerability to each may have been increased by the cultural practice of intrafamily marriage. But there are also class or income-based theories of why someone of Lola's economic status would be at high risk for mental illness or emotional instability.<sup>16</sup> The causes of the Puerto Rican syndrome (characterized by seizures and trance-like states), another of Lola's debilitating illnesses, have been explained in terms of both culture (child-rearing practices)<sup>17</sup> and biology (diet and environment).<sup>18</sup> Whatever

their causes, all of the illnesses Lola suffered from were preventable or treatable; the fact that little medical care was available to her until late in life was a function of the political and economic system. But when treatment was made available for tuberculosis, the disease that finally took her life at age forty-one, Lola refused it.

Like the dearth of economic opportunity and the inadequacy of medical care, the lack of educational opportunity was also a systemic problem. Yet the unwillingness to educate girls even in the elementary grades that were available was cultural (although not peculiar to a subculture of the poor). Because Lola was not well and because the system presented her with virtually no educational or economic opportunities, it is a misplacement of emphasis to single out the role of “culture” in shaping her economic fortunes. Why define work habits, for example, as traits of a subculture when the structure of the national economy defines the range of employment opportunities, the educational system limits options, and the lack of child care and medical care for disabling diseases leaves people unable to work?

Lewis’s informants did not share a personality construct, a subculture unique to the poor, or even an absolute economic condition (their incomes ranged from destitution to lower working class). What they did share was a living space, and the condition of living at the margins: the margins of society, the mainstream economy (but in states ranging from subsistence to solvency), and of physical and/or mental health. But there was no single reason why La Perla’s residents came to be living in the same community, no one cause of their marginality. They lived in tolerance of one another but not in an understanding that they shared a coherent set of values or way of life specific to the place or to their economic condition. In this sense La Perla is more accurately seen as a society of people who were poor rather than as the locus of a subculture of poverty. To some of its residents La Perla was a kind of solution to the residence and employment problems created by their inability to conform to social norms. The community allowed much more latitude in ways of coping, if only in the sense that its residents often could not prevent the acting out of a wide range of behaviors by others.

La Perla was also a kind of solution for mainstream Puerto Ricans who did not know how or want to cope with the people marginalized by macroeconomic and social factors or by some combination of economic condition and idiosyncratic family and health factors, or to deal with the causes and consequences of deviant lifestyles. La Perla became a refuge or retaining area for people who could not integrate into the economic or social mainstream, due to a combination of low educational level, lack of marketable job skills for the urban economy, criminal deviance and/or poor state of physical and mental health.

The only other community that Lewis studied that was at all similar to La Perla was Las Yaguas in Havana. There he met people whose lifestyle more closely approached that of La Perlans than of any other people he studied. Las Yaguas, too, was set off from Havana and shared La Perla’s reputation as the home of criminals and social deviants because so many gun smugglers, drug users and sellers, prostitutes, and thieves lived among the working poor. In these two communities Lewis was really dealing with the a very special element

among “the poor.”

The Castro government’s solution for “anti-social behavior” (a political and legal category) in Las Yaguas was to level the community with bulldozers. Families were relocated in seven different parts of Havana, a deliberate attempt to break up existing social networks and make Las Yaguans more dependent upon and amenable to integration into revolutionary society. Their standard of living and access to public services changed drastically. There is no information available to make a generalization about how successful the last generation born in Las Yaguas was in integrating into the Cuban economic mainstream. But their children were born into a society where forced integration was the norm and where no space was allowed, let alone set aside, to accommodate the behavior of the socially deviant. With educational and medical programs that were aggressively inclusive, it was more difficult for parents to withhold their children from, or for children to refuse, integration into the larger society.

While neither denying nor minimizing the political problems of forced integration, this policy approach contrasts sharply with the avoidance and indifference that have been the hallmarks of policy in the United States, where slums, like European ghettos, at least until very recent years, have tended to be seen as solutions rather than problems. Because too few people outside care what happens in these communities as long as it is contained within them, they are vulnerable to use for activities unacceptable on the outside, as well as to many people on the inside. If the permanent residents do not have the power or the will to set and enforce standards of behavior, their neighborhoods lose their centers and any unified sense of community.

The year before he died Lewis wrote that he no longer cared whether people called that mode of living he labeled “a culture or subculture of poverty,” a “no culture” or “Phenomena x.”<sup>19</sup> If I were to assign Lewis’s San Juan/ New York informants to a culture group it would be to that of “Puerto Rican,” not to a universal subculture of the poor. From their interviews it is clear they thought of themselves as Puerto Ricans, in most cases with intense attachment. If one were to encounter a gathering of Lewis’s Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban informants, even if all were from roughly comparable economic strata, few observers would confuse the nationals of one country with those of another. This is because poverty is not so much a cultural leveler as it is a determinant of social and political status.

I think that the majority of the adults whom Lewis singled out for intensive study in La Perla were—to use Ruth Benedict’s phrase—“at a loss in society” and “unavailable” for complete acculturation.<sup>20</sup> This was not because of poverty as such, but because of the assorted physical and mental health problems that made it so difficult for them to cope economically. The consequence was—to paraphrase Edward Sapir—that while they may have been “effective carriers” of Puerto Rican culture, they were not effective transmitters of it, or, I would add, of any culture, unless one wants to refer to any particular family dynamic as a subculture in itself.<sup>21</sup> Many La Perlans adhered to what Barrington Moore has called “watered down” versions of the larger culture, but they were unable to act in

accordance with the values they espoused due to their marginal health and economic status.<sup>22</sup>

### Summary

Despite its utility for making sweeping descriptive statements, “culture,” when used to mean a whole way of life, has little analytic potential. In theorizing, Lewis focused too much on the family as a social system and cultural microcosm and not enough on heredity, state of health, and gender discrimination within and outside the family. He made families, but to a lesser extent individuals, seem, in theory, almost equally vulnerable to the effects of poverty. The capacity of individuals and families to cope with extreme deprivation depends in part on their genetic endowments and how these endowments are mediated by general and family-specific environmental conditions, as well as families’ access to, and ability to utilize public or private resources to mitigate or offset their own economic condition or hereditary problems. Poverty often greatly restricts opportunity but, where mental and physical health are intact, it is more likely to channel than to level industry and ambition. Where health is not intact, due to malnutrition, untreated illness, or neglect by family and community, then the economic consequences will be even more grave than those inflicted by restriction of opportunity alone.

Finally, and central to his thesis, Lewis paid too little attention to discussing how families were articulated into their communities—specifically how social institutions compete with families as agents of socialization—and how the communities he studied were articulated into the larger political and economic system. By not discussing how culture shapes and is shaped by changing macroeconomic and political conditions, one is left to infer that culture is a self-contained system that reproduces itself, and that families, as the main agency of transmission, are responsible for conditions that are in fact beyond their control. It is these essential interconnections that are left unexplained in the culture of poverty thesis and reduce its usefulness in explaining how specific families or individuals have come to be poor or why they have been unable to rise out of poverty.

### NOTES

1. This article has been excerpted from a monograph-length work prepared with a grant from the Social Science Research Council’s Puerto Rican Poverty Initiative.

2. This paper is based on an analysis of anthropological field data from San Juan Puerto Rico and New York City collected over a six-year period from 1963-1969 by a field team under the direction of Oscar and Ruth Maslow Lewis. The data consist of approximately 35,000 pages of transcribed interviews, plus a battery of questionnaires; projective tests and analyses; genealogical data; household day studies; income and budget studies; and material culture inventories. The field team surveyed 100 households (600 individuals) in four poor San Juan neighborhoods, and another 50 related households (198 individuals) in New York City neighborhoods. Seven extended families from the barrio of La Perla, and relatives in

rural Puerto Rico and New York, were selected for intensive study (157 individuals in 50 households).

3. Oscar Lewis, *Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty* (New York: Basic Books, 1959), p. 2.

4. Oscar Lewis, *Anthropological Essays* (New York: Random House, 1970), p. 69.

5. (New York: Macmillan, 1962).

6. Marvin Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 402.

7. Susan M. Rigdon, *The Culture Facade: Art, Science, and Politics in the Work of Oscar Lewis* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988). Among many earlier critics of the culture of poverty concept are: Charles Valentine, *Poverty and Culture: Critique and Counter-Proposals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); Eleanor Burke Leacock, ed., *The Culture of Poverty: A Critique* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971); and Anthony Leeds, "The Concept of the 'Culture of Poverty': Conceptual, Logical, and Empirical Problems, with Perspectives from Brazil and Peru," in Leacock, 1971.

8. Lewis, *Five Families*, p. 2.

9. Quoted from an interview with Lewis by Lorenzo Battallan for the Caracas newspaper, *El Nacional*, "Oscar Lewis: Los Hijos de la Pobreza," November 6, 1967. (Quote translated from the Spanish by author.)

10. From a taped lecture delivered at the Latin American Institute, University of Wisconsin at Oshkosh, 1967.

11. Response to Charles Valentine critique, *Current Anthropology*, v.10 (April-June 1969), p. 192.

12. Monica McGoldrick and Randy Gerson, *Genograms in Family Assessment* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1985).

13. Letter from Lewis to psychologist and test analyst, Carolina Luján, November 8, 1968.

14. Letter from Lewis to Luján, November 12, 1968.

15. A problematic assumption of the culture of poverty thesis pointed out to Lewis early on by the anthropologist Conrad Arensberg in a letter (May, 10, 1960).

16. See for example a widely used work of the time, August B. Hollingshead and Fredrick C. Redlich, *Social Class and Mental Illness* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1958).

17. Ramón Fernández-Marina, "The Puerto Rican Syndrome: Its Dynamics and Cultural Determinants," *Psychiatry* v.24, no.1 (1961), pp.79-82.

18. Anthony F.C. Wallace, "Mental Illness, Biology and Culture," in *Psychological Anthropology*, ed. by Francis Hsu (Cambridge, MA.: Schenkman, 1972), pp. 363-401.

19. Letter from Lewis to Janet Brown, February 17, 1969.

20. Ruth Benedict, "Configurations of Culture in North America," *American Anthropologist*, v.34 (January-March 1932), p. 25.

21. Edward Sapir, "Social Psychology and Anthropology," *Journal of Abnormal and*

*Social Psychology*, v.27 (October-December 1932), p. 233.

22. Barrington Moore, "In the Life," *New York Review of Books* (June 15, 1967), p. 4

# Zap FAP: The National Welfare Rights Organization's Assault on Nixon-Era Welfare Reform<sup>1</sup>

Andrea Sachs, University of Minnesota

In March 1972 the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* ran an ad featuring a photo of two small children. The headline read, “A couple of shiftless, cheatin’, good for nuthin’ welfare recipients,” and went on to point out that “Over fifty percent of those on welfare are children and another thirteen percent are mothers. And they are hungry. So who’s cheating whom?”<sup>2</sup> The ad publicized the Children’s March for Survival, a weekend-long event planned by the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO). The primary goal of the march, and indeed a key focus of the NWRO’s work between 1969 and 1972, was to defeat Richard Nixon’s welfare reform proposal, the Family Assistance Plan. The Children’s March for Survival is an important episode in the history of the National Welfare Rights Organization, which represented a national social movement of poor women, mostly women of color, between 1966 and 1975. While planning the 1972 march, NWRO leaders decided to shift the rhetorical focus away from the rights of welfare mothers and onto the needs of poor children. As I will discuss below, the decision to position children as the key beneficiaries of welfare rights activism was a response to the political climate of the early 1970s, as well as to the organizational demands of the NWRO. At the same time, the Children’s March for Survival foreshadows some of the paradoxes and dilemmas embedded in recent changes in the social welfare system.

The National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO), which was founded in 1966, mobilized welfare recipients across the country and coordinated the efforts of local welfare rights organizations. Like the public welfare system it sought to reform, the NWRO and its affiliated chapters operated on national, state, and local levels. The NWRO’s vision of welfare activism included both material and ideological components. On one hand, activists struggled for wider access to Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) benefits and more generous payments. At the same time, they defined welfare rights in terms of social justice, seeking to destigmatize poverty and reframe issues of “dependency.” The goals of the NWRO are summarized in the phrase “bread, justice, dignity, and democracy,” which was also the closing line of many letters written by national leaders.

The NWRO grew quickly during its first three years of operation, reaching a peak of about 23,000 members in 1969. Founded by George Wiley, a chemist and former associate national director of the Congress of Racial Equality, the NWRO reflected the goals of the civil rights movement, as well as the War on Poverty’s call for “maximum feasible participation” of the poor. Although originally conceived as a movement of poor men and women, most members were in fact African American women who lived in large cities and

received AFDC. Many of the national leaders, and virtually the entire Executive Committee, were former welfare mothers who joined the NWRO after organizing women in their own communities. Johnnie Tillmon, for example, the NWRO's chairperson and later Associate Director, first became involved in welfare rights when she mobilized fellow welfare recipients in the Watts section of Los Angeles.

In order to amplify the voices of the poor—and ward off so-called “middle-class takeover” of the organization—the NWRO limited membership to those who were, or who had once been, poor. Middle-class volunteers were welcomed into the movement, but they could only join through auxiliary groups called Friends of Welfare Rights.<sup>3</sup> Liberal supporters provided much-needed financial support for the financially strapped NWRO. High-profile liberals also lent their names to NWRO efforts, helping to generate publicity, awareness, and a degree of mainstream legitimacy that welfare rights activists could not always generate on their own. This reliance on middle-class support often pressured NWRO leaders and members to make their message as appealing as possible to these supporters. The decision of some in NWRO to emphasize the needs of poor children over the rights of poor women, best exemplified by the Children's March for Survival, reflected changes in both public perceptions and support from sympathetic outsiders.

Although it was founded during the Johnson Administration, when the ink on various War on Poverty initiatives was still wet, the NWRO roughly followed the rise and fall of the Nixon Administration. During its first two or three years, as local welfare rights organizations were springing up across the country, activists and organizers worked in communities to enroll as many eligible families as possible in welfare programs. Besides providing much-needed money and supplies, this strategy was designed to “break the back of the system” and thus necessitate larger-scale reform. Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, who first called for this approach in 1965, saw it as the most effective way to mobilize the poor and disrupt the welfare bureaucracy.<sup>4</sup>

As the grass-roots membership was expanding through this mobilization, national leaders initiated lawsuits to call attention to states that did not comply with federal welfare legislation, as well as government agencies that failed to enforce this legislation. To offer just one example, in 1967 Congress mandated that states must provide cost-of-living increases in welfare benefits. In March 1969 NWRO leaders notified the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare that thirty-one states had failed to comply with the policy.<sup>5</sup> Joining forces with Legal Services attorneys, the NWRO also successfully argued welfare-related cases before the Supreme Court. Such court challenges led the Supreme Court to abolish man-in-the-house provisions (*King v. Smith*, 1968) and residency requirements (*Shapiro v. Thompson*, 1969), and to guarantee recipients a fair hearing before termination of benefits (*Goldberg v. Kelly*, 1970). These court decisions invalidated punitive midnight raids and “substitute parent” rules that declared a woman ineligible for benefits if welfare agents found any evidence that a man was living in her home.<sup>6</sup>

Nixon's welfare reform proposals provided an important backdrop for the NWRO's alternative plan, which included a standardized guaranteed adequate income for all citizens.

Nixon unveiled his welfare reform plan about halfway through his first year in office, in August 1969. The Family Assistance Plan, or FAP, would have eliminated AFDC and established a federally funded income floor of \$1,600 a year per family, along with \$800 in food stamps. His plan also included wage supplementation for those earning barely above the minimum figure. The notion of a guaranteed minimum income was fairly liberal, especially coming from a Republican president. Most of FAP's components, however, made it more appealing to conservatives and completely unacceptable for the NWRO. State and county officials, particularly Republican governors, welcomed Nixon's plan to shift much of the welfare burden to the federal government. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the architect of FAP, included a stringent work provision that would have required recipients to accept low-paying jobs as part of their benefits package. Moynihan reiterated many of the points he made four years earlier in his famous 1965 report on "The Negro Family," arguing that the work requirement would fend off the "growing parasitism" and "disorganization" that were infecting poor minority communities in cities across America.<sup>7</sup> The Family Assistance Plan thus embodied what Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward have called the "chain of reasoning . . . that crime, civil disorder, and other social pathologies exhibited by the poor had their roots in worklessness and family instability which, in turn, had their roots in welfare permissiveness."<sup>8</sup>

Between the introduction of FAP in 1969 and its defeat in 1972, the NWRO directed a large share of its scarce resources to challenging the legislation. FAP flew in the face of all four tenets of the NWRO: adequate income, dignity, justice, and democracy. The minimum figure of \$1,600 a year would have lowered the benefits in every state outside the Deep South. FAP also would have repealed the cost-of-living increase that was mandated by the 1967 Social Security Amendments. Activists argued that even if states supplemented the federally mandated \$1,600, the resulting system would be more cumbersome and multi-layered, and thus present recipients with even more bureaucratic obstacles. The NWRO also saw FAP as a step backwards in procedural safeguards since it would have undermined some of the protections that the NWRO had so recently fought for, including the right to a prompt response to welfare applications.<sup>9</sup>

In place of the stingy benefits and erosion of due process put forth in FAP, the NWRO advocated a guaranteed adequate income of \$5,500 a year. Unlike Nixon's \$1,600 income floor, the \$5,500 figure was based on Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates of the resources necessary for a family of four to live "at a minimum standard of health and decency." "Fifty-five hundred or fight" became a rallying cry for the guaranteed adequate income project.<sup>10</sup> Along with the higher guaranteed annual income, the NWRO's plan protected the procedural safeguards the FAP eliminated. While the guaranteed adequate income plan never made much headway in the national arena, it nevertheless represented a carefully constructed and well-circulated alternative to FAP.

Another of FAP's features that alarmed the NWRO was the work requirement, which bears a striking resemblance to Clinton-era "welfare-to-work" provisions. The work provision did not guarantee a living wage, or even a minimum wage. In one rather

impassioned testimony to Congress, NWRO leaders decried the “radical provisions in the Nixon plan that would force mothers with school age children out of their homes.” The testimony went on to compare the work provision to slavery: “With this provision the Nixon proposal not only ressurects [*sic*] the ‘badge of servitude’ outlawed for years by the courts, but comes perilously close to compelling individual servitude itself in violation of the 13th Amendment.”<sup>11</sup>

Immediately following this bold comparison, the testimony warned that the changes the work provisions “would bring about in the traditional parent-child relationship would also be drastic.” Here the emphasis was on family autonomy, not just on child welfare. The testimony continued, “One would have thought that no concept was more central to the way we Americans have looked at family life than that of the absolute right of a parent to determine what is best for his or her child.” Responsibility without control, it was argued, “is bad enough in most situations but in the family relationship it is intolerable.”<sup>12</sup> While child welfare was implicit in this argument, the testimony clearly underscored the rights of American parents to determine what is best for their children. While it mentioned the risks faced by children who were put in inadequate, “government-run” day care centers, it highlighted the rights of parents—even single welfare mothers—to a measure of autonomy and dignity.

The battle over FAP was quite protracted, and the NWRO struggled mightily to alert local chapters and supporters of the labyrinthine legislative process. During this same period, the NWRO’s membership base began to shrink, as many of those who joined in 1967-69 did not maintain their membership. This waning grass-roots participation—combined with dissent among NWRO leaders and the increasingly conservative political climate that carried Nixon into office—precipitated a shift in focus for the NWRO. The change in anti-FAP rhetoric between 1969 and 1972 points to some of the liabilities of a social movement that is dedicated to articulating and protecting the rights of poor single mothers.

In January 1972, two and a half years after Nixon introduced the Family Assistance Plan, the NWRO proposed a new spring campaign that centered around a Children’s March for Survival that took place over a weekend in late March. Bert de Leeuw, a staff member in the Washington office, outlined the spring campaign in an internal memo to the NWRO department heads. The campaign, he explained, had three goals: first, it would “Kill FAP”; second, it would “attempt to change the focus away from welfare moms, work, etc., to a much more politically and emotionally acceptable group, i.e. children”; finally, the campaign would “develop and [begin] local WRO organizing around a number of specific children’s issues.”<sup>13</sup> De Leeuw went on to articulate the goals of the children’s march:

1. It will serve as a shot in the arm for the entire organization.
2. It will serve to help the national office reorganize and reinvigorate itself and put it back meaningfully in touch with local WRO’s.
3. It will serve to [force] the national office to develop a variety of childrens [*sic*] issues into NWRO campaigns ready to be started after the march.

4. It will forge NWRO into a leadership position in what more and more looks to be “the year of childrens [*sic*] issues.”<sup>14</sup>

The goals of the march allude to some of the organizational problems the NWRO was facing as it tried to sustain a grass-roots membership base while maintaining a national office. The memo also suggests that, in a period of increasing conservatism and an anti-welfare backlash, some NWRO leaders were willing to emphasize the needs of children over the rights of poor women, for the sake of the organization.

The publicity materials announcing the march, as well as the leaflets distributed at the event, reflect this conscious shift in emphasis away from welfare mothers and toward their “more politically and emotionally acceptable” children. In a statement issued in February 1972, George Wiley framed welfare issues strictly in terms of the “plight of children.” Jobs with living wages, he argued, ensure that “parents may provide for their children,” while adequate housing means that “children grow up in a healthy environment.”<sup>15</sup> The unifying theme of children’s needs helped the NWRO draw together a wide range of issues, including anti-FAP and antiwar efforts, child care, health care, food programs, and education. The broad-based, politically palatable agenda also attracted a long list of high-profile co-sponsors, including Coretta Scott King, Benjamin Spock, Bella Abzug, Gloria Steinem, Jesse Jackson, Shirley MacLaine, and a wide range of civil rights and child welfare organizations. Another co-sponsor was Marion Barry, then president of the Washington, DC Board of Education, who supported the march by transporting busloads of DC school children to the march.<sup>16</sup>

Shortly before Christmas in December, 1971, Nixon had vetoed a Child Development Act that would have funded day care facilities for poor and middle-class families. The NWRO strongly supported the bill, as did “virtually every women’s organization in the country.”<sup>17</sup> The veto inspired a key slogan of the march, “Nixon Doesn’t Care,” a phrase that appeared in publicity materials alongside a child’s artwork depicting a caricature of the stern chief of state. The march thus revolved around the figure of a callous president whose malice imperiled millions of poor children. Nixon issued a statement, through a special assistant, deploring the NWRO’s and DC school system’s tactics, calling the “Nixon Doesn’t Care” slogan “blatantly emotional, political and irresponsible.”<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, about 30,000 participants, most of them school children from the Washington area, showed up to march and to play on the Ellipse in front of the White House.<sup>19</sup>

George Wiley declared the march an unqualified success, claiming that it “clearly exposed Nixon’s unresponsive attitude toward poor people and dramatized for the Nation as a whole that poor people are clearly opposed to Nixon’s Welfare and Child Care policies.”<sup>20</sup> That weekend local welfare rights organizations hosted smaller marches in communities across the country, thus broadening the message of the DC event. More than three years after its introduction, FAP was finally defeated in October of 1972. Wiley and other NWRO leaders took much of the credit for helping to “zap FAP,” although other observers have wondered about the impact the organization had on the legislative process. Piven and Cloward, for instance, attribute FAP’s defeat to southern congressional opposition, arguing

that the NWRO's impact was limited to one Senate Finance Committee vote in 1970. Sociologist Jill Quadagno argues that Nixon proposed FAP in order to drive a wedge between Democratic factions, making the Republican party more attractive to working-class Democrats.<sup>21</sup>

Whether or not the NWRO could justifiably take credit for sinking Nixon's welfare reform proposals, the anti-FAP campaign and the Children's March for Survival provide important historical lessons. The more cautionary, and potentially dispiriting, part of the story raises the question of how, and whether, a movement centered around the rights of poor women can gather the political momentum and currency necessary to effect change. The Children's March for Survival generated considerable support and publicity, but it did so only by muting the voices of the children's mothers, the very people who formed the grassroots base of the welfare rights movement. Women leaders and members of the NWRO certainly weren't quiescent; indeed, they were vocal and active partners in the fight for welfare rights. In the case of the NWRO's high-profile anti-FAP campaign, however, they were visible primarily as the assumed caregivers of their needy—and deserving—children. While such an assumption helped create a politically attractive campaign, it also reinforced some of the gender inequalities that are encoded in welfare policy. By focusing the campaign exclusively on the needs of children, NWRO activists also risked reinscribing stereotypes that scorn poor women as blameworthy and undeserving, while depicting their children as innocent and deserving.

The current wave of welfare reform, and welfare backlash, confronts feminists and activists with many of the same perceptions and dilemmas, along with some new ones. Welfare activists during the Nixon administration found solid allies among liberal Democrats, while Bill Clinton and other centrist Democrats have fulfilled the 1992 promise to “end welfare as we know it.” Politicians in the 1990s often approach former welfare recipients with a “tough-love” attitude, expounding on the “dignity of work” for women who are struggling to support themselves and their families. Child poverty, on the other hand, is often treated as a separate issue entirely—one that still evokes pity, sympathy, and ethical appeals. Today, as in 1972, our challenge lies in focusing public attention on the ways that poverty and welfare policy affect all of the members of poor families, and thereby eliminating the false choice between advocating for women's rights and protecting children. By recognizing—and urging policymakers to recognize—single mothers' dual roles as wage earners and caregivers, we can look to solutions that favor rights over pity, and justice over facile prescriptions.

#### NOTES

1. This article is related to my dissertation-in-progress, entitled “Bread, Justice, Dignity, and Democracy: Welfare Activism, Single Motherhood, and the National Welfare Rights Organization, 1965-75.”

2. Newspaper advertisement from *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, March 1972.

George Wiley Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin (hereafter Wiley Papers), Box 15, Folder 5.

3. This middle-class support reflects what Barbara Ehrenreich has described as middle-class liberals' desire to align themselves with the poor, following the so-called "discovery of the poor" in the early sixties. See Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class* (New York: Harper Collins, 1989), pp. 42-48.

4. Piven and Cloward's proposal, which they wrote and circulated in late 1965, was called "Mobilizing the Poor: How It Can Be Done." It was published the following year under the title "A Strategy to End Poverty," in *The Nation* (May 2, 1966).

5. Beulah Sanders, George A. Wiley, and Carl Rachlin, Statement to the House Ways and Means Committee, Oct. 27, 1969, p. 5, Wiley Papers, Box 17, Folder 3.

6. Guida West, *The National Welfare Rights Movement: The Social Protest of Poor Women* (New York: Praeger, 1981), pp. 329-330.

7. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *The Politics of a Guaranteed Income* (New York: Random House, 1973), p. 76; qtd. in Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail* (New York: Random House, 1977, 1979), pp. 338-39. For the complete text of the Moynihan Report, see Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1965), reprinted in Lee Rainwater and William L. Yancey, *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1967), pp. 41-124.

8. Piven and Cloward, *Poor People's Movements*, p. 338.

9. "NWRO Analysis of the Nixon Welfare Plan," 1972, Wiley Papers, Box 17, Folder 6.

10. When the figure was later adjusted upward to \$6,500, there was some discussion over whether to keep the less alliterative version of the slogan.

11. Beulah Sanders, George A. Wiley, and Carl Rachlin, Statement to the House Ways and Means Committee, Oct. 27, 1969, pp. 6-7, Wiley Papers, Box 17, Folder 3.

12. Sanders, Wiley, and Rachlin, p. 7.

13. Bert De Leeuw, memo to NWRO Department Heads, Jan. 22, 1972, Wiley Papers, Box 15, Folder 5.

14. The march's goals are quoted from De Leeuw.

15. Children's March for Survival Announcement: Statement from George Wiley, Feb. 8, 1972, p. 2, Wiley Papers, Box 15, Folder 5.

16. "D.C. School Bd, Superintendent, Endorse Children's March," *The Welfare Fighter* v. 3, no. 2 (March 1972), p. 1, Wiley Papers, Box 15, Folder 5.

17. "Nixon's Veto of Child Care Bill," from *The Welfare Fighter* (1972), Wiley Papers, Box 17, Folder 6. The article accuses Nixon of vetoing the Child Development Act in order to appease the right wing of the Republican party. The article also speculates that, by signing child care legislation, Nixon would have slowed the momentum of his Family Assistance Plan.

18. Statement by Robert J. Brown, Special Assistant to the President, March 3, 1972, Wiley Papers, Box 15, Folder 5.

19. As is often the case with public demonstrations, estimates of march participants varied widely. The figure from a *New York Times* article (“30,000, Many of Them Children, Protest Nixon Welfare Policies”) from March 26, 1972 was three times as high as a *Los Angeles Times* article from the same day (“Children March on White House”). See clippings in Wiley Papers, Box 15, Folder 5.

20. Memo from George Wiley to WRO leaders, staff and friends, April 12, 1972, Wiley Papers, Box 15, Folder 5.

21. Piven and Cloward, pp. 341-346 and Jill Quadagno, *The Color of Welfare: How Racism Undermined the War on Poverty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), chapter 5.

# **Classist Conceptions of Dependency: Conservative Attacks on Poor Women With Children**

**Luisa S. Deprez**  
**University of Southern Maine**

*Dependency*, a term whose meaning is representative of one the most essential connections between human beings in any society, an association upon which our very survival depends, is now almost solely reserved for the promotion of stereotypical images of poor women on welfare raising children. It is the new mantra of late twentieth century “welfare reform” zealots, the siren’s song of conservative and not-so-conservative theorists, politicians, and citizens.

What is so captivating about the notion of dependency, one used by conservatives and liberals alike, to embed into their rhetoric the proclamation that being dependent on someone is almost always bad? Is there anyone among us who has not, at some time, for some thing, been dependent on someone else? What does it mean to be dependent? When is it “legitimate” to be dependent? When is it not? “At some stage in the lives of each of us,” Eva Kittay writes, “we face at least one period of utter dependency.”<sup>1</sup> In reality, not a day passes when each and every one of us is not dependent on someone(s) for something(s).

Why is it then that poor women heading households, less than four percent of the population getting benefits from one percent of the federal budget, receiving meager levels of financial support in the richest country in the world, are so demonized in the name of curbing, containing, or ending their “dependent” status? Persons of wealth, reliant on household helpers to maintain family image and status, are not chastised for being dependent. Nor are downsized, laid off corporate managers characterized as deviant, lazy, or aimless, even when they receive generous buyout or layoff packages,

Dependency, we find, has not only been constructed around issues of gender but also issues of class and race. As a multidimensional concept it can only be accurately understood within the broader parameters of a political, philosophical, ideological, and historical context. It cannot, and should not, be divorced from the wider structures of power, control, and subordination. “The horror of class stratification, racism, and prejudice,” novelist Dorothy Allison writes, “is that some people begin to believe that the security of their families and communities depends on the oppression of others, that for some to have good lives there must be others whose lives are truncated and brutal. It is a belief that dominates this culture.”<sup>2</sup>

### **The Social Construction of Dependency**

Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon write that in preindustrial times dependency was seen as a structural social feature; women, like men, shared a subordinate status in a system characterized by powerful patriarchal hierarchies. The change in industrial and postindustrial society to a “male-supremacist” independent wage-earner/breadwinner hierarchy feminized the notion of dependency.<sup>3</sup> Stigmatized images of deviant and immoral behaviors emerged as commonplace characteristics associated with gender (women), race (non-white), and class (low-income). Dependency came to be most associated as a “characterological feature of the poor who rely on public assistance,” most often women.<sup>4</sup>

Yet, women have long been primarily defined as dependents mostly because others depend on their dependency - among them children, elderly persons, and able-bodied men.<sup>5</sup> However, “neither biology nor domestic obligations *alone* give rise to dependency; it is the social construction of the relationship between the two that does.”<sup>6</sup> Further complexity and complications arise when one realizes that “having dependents to care for mean(s) that without additional support, you cannot—given the structure of our contemporary industrial life and its economy—simultaneously provide the *means* to take care of them and do the caring for them.”<sup>7</sup> The very nature of caring work limits one’s bargaining ability as well as one’s access to resources and power. Without access to personal resources, a woman is forced in one of two directions: into a private dependent relationship or into reliance on supplementary social assistance. Either presents problems, but the former (a private dependent relationship) commands societal sanction, whereas the latter (supplementary social assistance) does not. Hence, as Virginia Sapiro writes, “The goodness or badness of dependency depends upon who is dependent on whom.”<sup>8</sup>

The emergence of the modern bourgeois family, we discover, occurred not as the result of an abstract separation of household and workplace, but with the entrenchment of motherhood as a vocation for white middle-class women. Domestic science became the preferred program of study for girls, preparing them to undertake their future role as guardians of the home.<sup>9</sup> Hence, economic dependency on men, constructed as “a moral, God-given principle for women,” contrasted sharply with a Protestant work ethic that embraced “income-producing work [as] a moral and economic principle for men.”<sup>10</sup>

The maternal and reproductive roles of many ethnic women, on the other hand, were ignored in favor of their roles as workers—theirs was a different construction of motherhood. The testimony of African American women domestics in fact exemplifies a racist construction of motherhood: these women, most always poor, were clearly expected to leave their children and home cares behind to devote full-time care to their white employers’ homes and families. Current welfare legislation, which requires that recipients work for benefits, also sanctions women’s work as caretakers for the children of others, since they are forced to leave their own children and homes to work.

### **The Contemporary Welfare Debates**

The 1980s neoconservative focus on morality ushered in a welfare agenda wrought with contradictory intents. Charles Murray’s work, *Losing Ground*, the domestic policy

bible of the Reagan administration, had an extremely important effect in changing the definition of welfare by focusing attention on dependency,<sup>11</sup> as did the emerging “new consensus” between neoconservatives and so-called liberals extolling the vices of dependency.<sup>12</sup>

The conservative strategy seemed intent on creating a moral panic centered on notions of dependency which posited a firm, almost incontrovertible relationship between welfare and dependency. The strategy was infused with language steeped in morality that constructed poor women as “welfare dependents” whose “parasitic” relationship with the state was cast not only as a moral dilemma but as an onerous economic burden. Hence, the construction of a gendered, racialized, class-based “problem” was firmly entrenched in the public mind.

The contradictions were subtle. On the one hand, conservatives sought a return to traditional families which supported women’s participation in marriage, childbearing, and at-home work, but not their movement into the labor market. Women’s “apparent abandonment of [their] exclusive domestic roles” was cited as both the cause of an increased demand for social services and as a force that weakened men’s incentives to be providers.<sup>13</sup> Brigitte and Peter Berger in an academic version of this argument put forth in their book, *The War Over the Family*, asserted that “the very foundation of democracy rests upon the devotion of women to the nurturance of children. When family obligations...are obstacles to self-realization in careers, individual women will have to decide on their own priorities. Our own hope is that many will come to understand that life is more than a career and that this ‘more’ is upon all to be found in the family.”<sup>14</sup>

George Gilder, author of *Wealth and Poverty*, the “bible of supply-siders,” argued that welfare programs represented a “moral hazard.” About the role of women in society, he said: “They should stay home and nurture husbands and children. Women’s participation in the workplace, he professed, not only threatens the stability of marriage and home life but erodes the work ethic for men.”<sup>15</sup> Nathan Glazer, a Reagan confidante, confidently affirmed the “moral hazards” of AFDC policy by claiming that it “encouraged women to take up with other [than the children’s biological father] men.”<sup>16</sup>

On the other hand, Martin Anderson, domestic policy advisor to President Reagan, adamantly stated that the *real problem* was the refusal of welfare mothers to take jobs. Here, neoconservatives managed to equate dependency with the use, or the constructed misuse, of public money. Anderson agreed with William F. Buckley, Jr., who said that “poverty is a state of mind, not of income” and further that higher welfare payments would make women less likely to work because it would be more profitable to loaf.<sup>17</sup>

Welfare debates in the 1990s both echoed these earlier beliefs and centered discussion on what was construed as “the problem of dependency,” more precisely, welfare dependency. Victorian-era distinctions of “worthy” and “unworthy” were reinstated: women receiving welfare were cast among the “unworthy”; character assaults were plentiful; images of recipients were vile; the verbal attack on poor women was vicious. Hillary Clinton, when asked in a 1995 meeting with prominent British women why attacks on single parents were the totem for the American right, cited U.S. research showing that children from single-

parent families were more likely to get into trouble with the law, do less well at school, and seek assistance from the state.<sup>18</sup> Newt Gingrich arrogantly suggested that the children of welfare mothers be sent to orphanages so as to stop the supposed generationally transferable predisposition to welfare dependency.

Family caps in the current welfare legislation can also be characterized as an attempt to decrease the chances that indigent women would continue to over-breed, raise socially irresponsible children, and cause undue burdens on the fiscal solvency of the nation. Yet while chastising and penalizing poor women for having children and wanting to stay home to care for them, a 1998 Republican initiative proposed tax incentives for (presumably non-poor) women, to stay home and care for theirs. In a recent message posted to a *New York Times* online forum, the writer ponders this further:

It seems particularly odd to me that at the same time welfare for poor women and their children is getting the old heave-ho, right-wing papers such as the *Wall Street Journal* are on a crusade to encourage middle class women to stay home and take care of their kids because it is GOOD FOR THE CHILDREN TO HAVE A MOTHER AT HOME FOR THE FIRST FEW YEARS!!!! And also because it is a “natural instinct” for women to care deeply about their children. Well, I guess they think poor kids and poor women are exempt from these realities! Perhaps they think it is perfectly okay for poor children to come home to an empty house, but rich kids and nannies are in danger. Makes their usual kind of sense.<sup>19</sup>

The reconceptualization of dependency among poor women not only heightened hostility and misunderstanding among observers but blurred distinctions between poverty and dependency. While poor women were demonized for their dependency on the state, non-poor women received accolades and rewards for their dependency on men. Deeply embedded in this hypocrisy is gender discomfort, a tension and ambivalence about the fact that women can, and do, choose to not be dependent on men.

But the attack on poor women heading households is particularly vicious. It is, as Piven and Cloward so aptly term it, a class war in addition to being a race and a gender war.<sup>20</sup>

### **Welfare and Dependency**

Welfare legislation in the United States, however, has historically insured the dependency of poor women not only because it assumed them to be dependent but because it needed them to be dependent to care for young children and remain out of contention for jobs in the competitive labor market. Dominant ideology, beliefs, and attitudes “encompass a dual hierarchy of responsibility, one for provision, and one for caring.”<sup>21</sup> “The origins of the welfare state,” writes Ann Orloff, “were marked by the attempts of feminists and women to valorize caring work and motherhood as a basis for claims to honorable citizenship benefits. Claims based on motherhood were not seen as inferior to claims based on work or

—“universal citizenship”—they were claims that women’s work, their form of service to the state, *entitled* them to honorable citizen benefits.”<sup>22</sup>

While caring is not, for the most part, forced on women, many do place a higher priority on it than do men. Yet while the exchange has consequences—limited access to resources and power—for the most part, a woman “cannot [will not] plausibly threaten to withdraw from care-giving.”<sup>23</sup> “Nowhere in the industrialized West,” Orloff reminds us, “can married women and mothers choose not to engage in caring and domestic labor unless they are wealthy enough to purchase the services of others,”<sup>24</sup> a situation Land and Rose characterize as “enforced dependency and compulsory altruism” for women.<sup>25</sup>

Of late, numerous scholars have provided us with brilliant analyses of the gender and the race bias inherent in U.S. social policy. Their findings play a critical role in our continued understanding of the complex dimensions of the welfare state. Few analyses, however, transcend the dimensions of gender, race and class and seek to explore the consequences of this convergence. Fewer still seem to question the liberal ideological base of U.S. social policy. Hence, issues of class are ignored, or at least, notably absent.

Contemporary “welfare reform” is a classic example of liberal ideology which, to a considerable extent, ignores class-related handicaps and assumes that any individual, given the opportunity, can make it in this society.<sup>26</sup> In essence, adherents are taught “to believe in a society in which people are able to break through old patterns of discrimination and to achieve what they deserve,” as Jennifer Hochschild says, to embrace the American Dream.<sup>27</sup> Yet through varied and often covert means U.S. social policy preserves status and class differentials and offers strong commitments to the maintenance of the *traditional* family.

While this may sound contradictory—how does a nation which ignores class distinctions preserve them?—it is not. In a 1996 news article, for example, Robert Rector, a Heritage Foundation analyst, says, “History and common sense both show that values and abilities within families—not family income—are what determine children’s achievement.”<sup>28</sup> The Traditional Values Coalition, active in 1995 in the welfare debates, lobbied hard to convince legislators and citizens that “poverty is a matter of choice, that with little effort and elbow grease anyone can get out of it.”<sup>29</sup> And George Will, the astute defender of conservative causes and rhetoric, said in 1994 that “the urban poor have a poverty of inner resources . . . that contribute to their condition. Today’s impacted poor,” he continues, “represent what has been called an *internal secession* from society—from school, work, parenting, lawfulness.”<sup>30</sup>

Rather than being humbled by images of people so desperately poor in the richest country in the world, legions of citizens, persuaded by this ideological rhetoric of the right, are angered by those images and at the people whose lives are so affected. Clearly these individuals do not see “class” in the way that novelist Dorothy Allison does when she writes: “The poverty I knew was dreary, deadening, shameful, the women powerful in ways not generally seen as heroic by the world outside the family.”<sup>31</sup> The statements of Rector, Will, and the Coalition, in fact, more cogently illustrate their refusal to acknowledge the complexity of the integration of the gender, race, and class dimensions in American society—and the realities of life experienced by those living in poverty. Their views,

enshrined in a value-based political ideology, offer distinct interpretations of dependency which strengthen the prevailing ideology and contribute to the resulting polarization about issues of poverty.

The current debates on welfare, as well as those in the 1980s and early 1990s, have served to more markedly isolate women, poor people, and people of color from the “rest of the population” than ever before. It is as if, not being one of them, one is protected or immune from the experiences and situations “those others” encounter. Dorothy Allison captures this most vividly in an essay on class when she writes, “My people were not remarkable. We were ordinary, but even so we were mythical. We were the *they* everyone talks about—the ungrateful poor. *They*, the ones who are destroyed or dismissed to make the ‘real’ people, the important people, feel safer.”<sup>32</sup>

### **Challenges for the Future**

The evolution of the welfare state has witnessed a great number of changes. Of late, they have not been good—not for people who are poor, or for women, or for people of color. In many ways, the recent arguments about affirmative action and bilingual education are extensions of those about welfare and dependency. Ironically, it is the rich and powerful who have managed to convince the middle classes that “the poor”—most often women and persons of color—are the enemy. And, nowhere is this “decentering of class” more evident than in the discourse surrounding notions of dependency.

Strong public sentiment promotes a belief that in this achievement-driven society the contest system is fair and that only individual effort counts. Despite evidence to the contrary, deeply held public beliefs that work is always available for those who want it sustains public hostility toward those dependent on public assistance. Traditional cultural responses praise individual success and divert attention from the inequality between classes and the systemic causes of poverty.

An entrenched family ethic vows to “keep women in their place.” For many women, the work of bearing and raising children lies outside the conventional system of hierarchy and reward, and although crucial to the survival of the species, is neither valued nor rewarded. Women who are poor and need help caring for their children are in an even more tenuous position; women of color are in a position so precarious that it defies belief. Yet, they are labeled “undeserving” when they turn to federal welfare programs for support. Their “dependence” on federal assistance, regardless of reason or length of use, is not regarded as an earned right but as a conscious and deliberate choice of convenience. And the dependency, which public social policy should prevent, is more often encouraged than not.

We are witnessing the evolution of a welfare state that is “redrawing boundaries, opening to public scrutiny and debate matters previously confined to privacy, raising questions about the relationship between state and civil society,” and redefining the social contract.<sup>33</sup> These are discussions that affect each and every one of us and, in ways we do not yet know, will determine the fundamental structure and nature of this nation-state for years to come.

Antonio Gramsci, the Italian Marxist philosopher, cautioned that a state tends to create and maintain a certain type of civilization and of citizen,<sup>34</sup> and that the authority to define is a major instrument of power. He said, “Every society has a dominant ideology that describes all social behavior. That dominant discourse shapes thinking about social norms and expectations, supplies the vocabulary used to describe these social relations, and reflects the image of reality held by the dominant group in society.”<sup>35</sup> The dominant discourse in this country has sent out powerful messages about women and race and class, establishing unwarranted archetypes and stereotypes.

The objectives on which we must now focus involve changing the institutional structures which have given rise and continue to sustain gender, race, and class inequalities. To do so, we must create new kinds of discourse that take these complexities into account and transcend their dimensions. We must form coalitions with other groups to promote an enlightened understanding of social welfare that recognizes, honors, and rewards human interdependence, a sense of mutual responsibilities and goals among society’s classes and groups, and of the need for common policies to realize our goals. We must sustain an acute awareness that social policies that are created must be put to the test, critically analyzed not only in terms of their rhetorical commitment to equality but in terms of the outcomes they produce. We must work hard to buck the conservative trend to distribute aid, assistance, and support based solely on some value-laden definition of “rightness” rather than as a matter of right.

Social policies freed from moralistic premises that demonize gender, race, and class can begin to undo the structural elements in society that block the opportunity of all for maximum participation. Such policies would make a difference not only in the lives of individuals but in the health and well-being of the society. For social policies “to cease supporting the dependency of women, it is necessary for society to cease depending on women as women; that is, it is necessary that we do not define women in terms of what have up to now been considered women’s unique roles and propensities toward caring. This also requires that we no longer depend on men as men or, in other words, on the man’s exclusive role as provider.”<sup>36</sup> Ruth Lister argues that “full interdependence is possible only when involuntary economic dependence is absent.”<sup>37</sup> It is to these ends that we must devote our efforts. It is up to us to make this change happen.

#### NOTES

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3. Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, “A Genealogy of ‘Dependency’: Tracing a

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4. Eva Feder Kittay, “Welfare Dependency and a Public Ethic of Care,” *Social Justice*, v.25, no.1 (Spring 1998), pp. 125-6.

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6. Patricia Tulloch, “Gender and Dependency” in *Unfinished Business: Social Justice for Women in Australia*, ed. Dorothy H. Broom (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1984), p. 27.

7. Kittay, “Welfare Dependency....,” p. 130.

8. Sapiro, pp. 44-45.

9. Barbara L. Marshall, *Engendering Modernity: Feminism, Social Theory and Social Change* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1994), p. 55. See also Rayna Rapp, “Household and Family,” *Feminist Studies*, v.5, no.1 (1979), pp. 175-81.

10. Sapiro, p. 43.

11. Charles Murray, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy 1950-1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

12. Luisa S. Deprez, *The Illusion of Change: A Case Study of the Family Support Act of 1988* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Dissertation Services, 1995).

13. Sapiro, p. 49.

14. Brigitte and Peter Berger, *The War Over the Family: Capturing the Middle Ground* (New York: Anchor Books, 1983), p. 205.

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22. Ann Shola Orloff, “Gender and the Social Rights of Citizenship: The Comparative Analysis of Gender Relations and Welfare States,” *American Sociological Review*, v.58 (June 1993), p. 322.

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27. Jennifer L. Hochschild, *Facing Up to the American Dream* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 252.

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30. George Will, "Thwarting Culture of Dependency," *Portland Press Herald* (June 29, 1994), p. 7A.

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32. Allison, p. 95.

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34. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Q. Hoare and G. Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1929-35/1971).

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# Response to Judith Stacey's Keynote Address

Ellen Messer-Davidow  
University of Minnesota

Judith Stacey, Streisand Professor of Gender Studies and Professor of Sociology at the University of Southern California, delivered the luncheon keynote at the “Speaking Out: Women, Poverty, and Public Policy” conference. It was my pleasure to introduce her and comment briefly on her presentation. Though I cannot fully summarize her talk here, nor do justice to her wit and learning, I want to note that she was analyzing the conservative movement’s new family-values campaign. What made this campaign “new” was its recourse, as she put, to “virtual social science.” Conservatives were simulating social-science methods to bestow legitimacy on their old argument that the heterosexual, marriage-sanctified, nuclear family structure was the best environment for child-rearing. By using movement organizations to feed a barrage of misleading statistics and alarmist conclusions to the mainstream media, which in turn obligingly gave them repeated coverage, conservatives managed to elevate their claims to the status of “fact” in the minds of the large audiences and, not incidentally, the policy-makers they reached.

What follows is my response to her fascinating, if chilling, account.

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From Professor Stacey’s talk and my own work on the conservative movement, I add two points about the conservative movement’s family values campaign.

## What Were Conservatives Doing?

What they were doing was the work of diffusing a discourse. Family values discourse, initially championed by the Christian Right, was diffused to other factions of the conservative movement and from there to moderate politicians of both parties and publics of all political leanings. Another way to put the point is that what started as a minority-group sense of family structure, activities, and values has now become national common sense.

I want to give you a cameo shot of that diffusion—of how family values discourse infused and mingled with the conservative movement’s discourse of free-market economics. In 1992, I observed the two centerpiece events sponsored every year by the Heritage Foundation: the Resource Bank Meeting, held that year in Chicago and attended by representatives from hundreds of conservative organizations in the U.S. and abroad; and the Lecture Series, held at Heritage headquarters in Washington, DC and attended by metro-area conservatives. Heritage President Edwin Fuelner and others had been concerned about the split between social and economic conservatives and the rancorous debates it engendered over issues and action. Fuelner used these two events to float a conservative battleplan for the 1990s that would rejoin the factions and mesh their discourses.

Of the five panels at the Resource Bank meeting, one was titled “Building New Grassroots Coalitions: Family Policy and Economic Growth” and another was “Conservatives and Congress: Can We Prevail?” The panelists advised the audience:

“Repackage the economic agenda into pro-family terms.”

“Instead of arguing that automobiles’ pollution controls disrupt free-market dynamics, tell people that the controls, by increasing prices, force mothers to go to work to help their families afford cars.”

“Don’t tell people the federal debt is \$40 trillion; tell them your family’s share this year is \$40,000.”<sup>1</sup>

The same integrative and instrumentalist approach characterized the 1992-93 Heritage Lecture Series.

The series, said Feulner in a press release, would “define the principles that should guide and unify a vigorous conservative movement” and would “outline concrete strategies needed to recapture American culture from the death grip of the liberal establishment.”<sup>2</sup> It was no coincidence that the series was titled “Defining Conservatism” and the invited speakers represented the diverse strains of conservatism. Sharing the platform with such public figures as international guru Jeane Kirkpatrick, strict-interpretationist Constitutional expert Edwin Meese, born-again public moralist William Bennett, and higher-education gadfly Dinesh D’Souza were the heads of conservative organizations: Free Congress Association President Paul Weyrich, Intercollegiate Studies Association President T. Kenneth Cribb, National Association of Scholars President Stephen H. Balch, Madison Center for Educational Affairs Executive Vice President Charles Horner, Center for the Study of Popular Culture President David Horowitz, and Bradley Foundation President Michael Joyce. The speakers presented the overflow audiences with a holistic view of socioeconomic strategies in the areas of foreign relations, taxes, healthcare, families, school vouchers, religion, philanthropy, drugs, crime, campus PC, and feminism (masterminding the latter was neoconservative Midge Decter).<sup>3</sup>

In soldering family values to free-market economics, conservatives intend to do more than heal the splits within their movement. By inciting the public’s nostalgia for family and anxiety about economics, they intend to consolidate a voting majority that will keep them in political office and thereby entrench the existing economy of distributive injustice that is fast turning us into a nation of haves and have-nots. That is the work they hope discursive diffusion will do.

### **How Did They Diffuse the Discourse?**

That diffusion was made possible by the conservative movement’s apparatus of think tanks, issue-advocacy organizations, citizen-action groups, media, foundations, and elected officials. The think tanks, masquerading as scientific research institutes, are the mechanism for bestowing intellectual legitimacy on propaganda. They, together with the rest of the apparatus, are the machinery that translates scientized propaganda into political action and from there into new retrograde public policies and programs. For example, the two keynote

speakers at the Resource Bank Meeting were Fuelner, who presented the overall battleplan for the 1990s, and Governor Tommy Thompson, who described Wisconsin's W-2 (workfare-welfare) program as a model that conservatives could introduce and implement in other states. Heritage circulated the W-2 model through the movement's nationwide communications technologies: namely, Town Hall, the Heritage Internet system; National Empowerment Television, the Free Congress Foundation cable network; and the usual press releases, publications, and legislator briefings.

The wide diffusion of the family values-free market discourse is not an aberration. The same apparatus can be used to spin any issue and blast any set of public policies geared toward alleviating injustices, leaving the bodies of have-nots bleeding in the war zones. What lessons might feminists and other progressives draw from these small examples? We need to work on linking the academic and social apparatuses we have. We need to orient at least some academic research to policy formation and social change. And, instead of generating ever more particularized issues in our own little provinces, we need to get to work on building coalitions that can work across the sectors of the academy and society. If we don't make common cause, we will be helping the conservative movement bring the nation closer to that hegemonic moment where a single powerful force controls the institutions of the State and civil society.

#### NOTES

1. "Building New Grassroots Coalitions: Family Policy and Economic Growth," panel at "Ideas Have Consequences: A Conservative Battleplan for the 1990s," Fifteenth Annual Resource Bank Meeting, Chicago IL, April 23, 1992 (first and second quotations); and "Conservatives and Congress: Can We Prevail?," *ibid*, April 24, 1992 (third quotation).

2. "Heritage Foundation to Host Lecture Series on 'Defining Conservatism'" (2-page press release), Heritage Foundation, Washington, DC, October 15, 1992, p. 1.

3. Information from "Defining Conservatism" (1-page, double-sided flier); "Shaping America's Values Debate" (1-page, single-sided flier), Heritage Foundation, Washington, DC, [1992]; and author's notes, "Ideas and Strategies to Unite the Conservative Majority," lecture by Paul Weyrich (President, Free Congress Foundation), Heritage Foundation, Washington, DC, November 24, 1992.

# Reararticulating Academic Feminist Studies: For Conference Session “Last Words! Teaching and Learning at the Century’s End”

Ellen Messer-Davidow  
University of Minnesota

The title of this session invites us to consider how feminist studies is positioned today by looking back at how it was formed and looking ahead to how it might be re-formed. The notion of positioning also reminds me of a movement genre that faded as feminist studies was institutionalized in the academy, the position papers that women wrote in the late 1960s to proclaim their issues and agendas. In that spirit, I present my position on feminist studies.

In 1968-1969, unbeknownst to most faculty, the first dozen courses on women were taught at the free schools sponsored by the New Left and at mainstream universities—Seattle’s Free School, Chicago’s Liberation School, San Diego State, Cornell, SUNY Buffalo, Rutgers, and Barnard. Then in the late spring of 1970, an obscure press called KNOW published a curious item. Photocopied on a stack of unbound pages with three holes punched along the left margin were the syllabi for seventeen courses that editor Sheila Tobias situated “in a field that may eventually be called Female Studies” (front matter).<sup>1</sup> From its looseleaf format and word-of-mouth marketing, no one would have surmised that *Female Studies* would inaugurate a widely read series of curricular materials that would fuel the development of feminist research and teaching in a resistant academy.

But fuel it did. When *Female Studies* appeared that December, editor Florence Howe included the syllabi for sixty-six courses and noted that she knew of thirty-seven more. When the still looseleaf *Female Studies III* was published in December 1971, editors Howe and Carol Ahlum mentioned receiving syllabi for three hundred courses and knowing of three hundred more.<sup>2</sup> By 1973-74, 2,500 courses were taught that year alone and 4,600 courses had been taught in the first five years.<sup>3</sup> Today we would never guess that the teachers of these rapidly proliferating courses did not have the basic forms of support. Most were adjunct instructors or new assistant professors who lacked job security, relevant library collections, and even appropriate course designators. As for encouragement, their campus colleagues were skeptical at best: “‘A course on *what?*,’” they exclaimed to Barbara White when she first taught “The Woman Myth” to Northwestern freshman in fall 1970.<sup>4</sup> Usually, they quashed such initiatives. In 1972, when Jean O’Barr proposed teaching a course on Third World women, her department chair “looked at me as if I were from another planet and announced that the only way new courses entered the curriculum was when a distinguished research literature on the subject existed.”<sup>5</sup> The early female-studies practitioners lacked not

merely a distinguished research literature to cite as intellectual justification for their course proposals, but also a properly academic description to persuade colleagues that this venture had prospects of becoming a distinctive, if not distinguished, field of inquiry.

How did they envision female studies? Though they generally agreed that female studies should be the intellectual arm of the movement, the early feminists found themselves facing and debating several dilemmas. They would have to collaborate across the differences—in political ideology, race and class, movement or academic orientation, skills and resources—that were already fracturing them. They would have to weigh the trade-offs of locating female studies in left-sponsored freedom schools, community-based feminist centers, or mainstream academic institutions. And, if they chose the latter route, they would somehow have to bridge the radically divergent objectives of the women's movement and the academy. Two of the early feminists, Roberta Salper and Marilyn Salzman-Webb, had a complex vision of female studies' form and objectives based on the left's idea of insurgent projects. They described university-based programs as hybrids that would cut across the disciplines, mesh intellectual and activist practices, and fuse knowledge to social change. The programs would use academic resources to train cadres for the movement, thereby fueling its activism, and would link the university to other sectors of society, thereby weakening the traditional divisions of students and workers, women and men, blacks and whites that shored up the system of oppression.<sup>6</sup>

To clarify what was institutionalized, I want to contrast the infrastructures, knowledges, and objectives of female studies in 1971 and feminist studies in 1998. Then, female studies consisted of six hundred courses taught by marginal faculty, a half-dozen emerging women's studies programs, women's caucuses in a few disciplinary associations, and mimeographed "publications." Today, it has a nationwide infrastructure of 630 women's studies programs, feminist subfields in every discipline, some 80 feminist research centers, associations of feminist scholars, and thousands of feminist journals, presses, and book series. Then, the knowledge base consisted of skimpy accounts of women's lives and declamations against traditional scholarship. Today, it is an extensive body of data, scholarship, and theory in, across, and about disciplines and professions, social groups and nations. Then, feminists vowed to liberate the classroom; today, feminist pedagogy, such as turn-taking and integration of everyday experience, is dispersed widely to teachers at universities, high schools, and grade schools. Then, feminists spoke of transforming the disciplines; today, some are reconfigured and others modified. Then, most of the women who had academic aspirations were filtered out of graduate school and professorial careers by the entrenched system of sex discrimination; today, the masses of women who have secured places in the academy prod their institutions to observe equal-opportunity policies and diversity goals. In short, what was little more than a euphoric vision twenty-seven years ago has been realized as a vast academic-feminist enterprise.

But along the arduous and winding route that I trace in my forthcoming book, *Disciplining Feminism*, the relay between institutionalizing feminist studies and intellectualizing it also transformed this venture. What had been launched as a project that

would produce knowledge for academic and social change became a cross-discipline contained by the academy it had set out to transform. Today, our field's activities of producing and circulating scholarly knowledge, teaching students, and training future scholars/teachers resemble those of every other academic field with a critical-historical mission. The forces that formed feminist studies were the same ones that work on any field in an expanding knowledge economy. As feminist studies attracted more practitioners, they proliferated its discourse along several axes: disciplines, political ideologies, identity/oppression categories, and epistemic assumptions. Specialisms set in, contradictions appeared, debates flamed, theories were retheorized. This dynamic transformed our objective of political struggle and social change into an object of disciplinary study. Whereas the early visionaries regarded the making of social change as a praxis that could be enhanced by linking the production of academic-feminist knowledges to the movement's collective-action projects, later scholars regard it as an interesting academic subject to be pondered and analyzed. Though we continue to profess our concern with political, social, and cultural problems, our practices have recast them as scholarly artifacts. Most of the "problems" we address today get fabricated at the sites where methods refract, theories clash, conceptual categories rupture, and knowledges avalanche. In short, social change has been internalized to esoteric academic discourse.

In 1992, I surveyed thirty women's studies programs and found that they were disciplined in form and content. First, most of the courses were cross-listed with departments and reflected their disciplinary interests and methods. Additionally, many programs offered their own disciplinary courses, sometimes in fields that have resisted feminist studies (e.g., biology of women, feminist philosophy) and sometimes in fields that have welcomed it (e.g., feminist literary theory). Tugging against disciplinarity were the courses crosslisted with ethnic, area, and cultural studies. Second, though I had expected the undergraduate and graduate introductions to be unabashedly crossdisciplinary, they were divided by specialisms. Some offered units of work in the humanities and social sciences (often team-taught by a scholar from each group of disciplines). Others devoted units of work to the specialisms within feminist studies: theories (liberal, socialist, radical, lesbian); issues (work, family, reproduction, representation); or identities (race, class, sexuality, gender). The same pattern organized the concentrations in women's studies: students could major in disciplinary clusters (e.g., art/literature/music versus law/politics/economics) more often than they could major in multidisciplinary approaches to, for instance, the dynamics of subjects, institutions, and societies.

Third, I wanted to know what these programs were doing with social change. Most included the subject of change in courses on women's movements or women and economic development, most provided students with the opportunity to intern in community organizations, and most had sponsored curriculum transformation projects on campus. But very few were teaching social-change practice. I located only two. The University of Michigan taught a trio of action courses that exercised students in group process, decision-making, conflict resolution, leadership skills, and change strategies, and Midwestern State

(a fictitious name) offered an MS program that trained students in collective action and social change.<sup>7</sup> Finally, what did I conclude from my research on feminist studies' forms, practices, and knowledges? The academy's disciplinary-institutional structure was the template that formatted this venture as a conventional, if critical-historical, field.

Looking back at the feminists and radicals of the 1960s, it is pertinent to recall the question they raised when they took their activism into the American Sociological Association and the Modern Language Association: "knowledge for what?" That question, it turns out, was recently asked by Marilyn Boxer in her new history of feminist studies, *When Women Ask the Questions*.<sup>8</sup> Boxer's answer is a positive one that recounts the changes feminists have made in the academy and popular opinion. My answer is less sanguine. By positioning feminist studies in the forcefield of struggle outside, as well as within, the academy, it seems to me that the changes made by academic feminists, even including the changes made by nonacademic feminists, pale beside those wrought by the conservative movement.

Starting in the mid-1970s, conservatives built a movement infrastructure that crisscrosses the sectors of society. Today this infrastructure consists of religious organizations (churches, interdenominational councils), social-movement organizations (mass membership groups, activist training institutes), traditional media and powerful new technologies (direct mail, interactive cable networks), funding sources (foundations, big donors), academic associations, and nongovernmental organizations (think tanks, advocacy groups, legal centers). Using the infrastructure to work the channels of official politics, conservatives not only mobilized voters, won elections, and secured control of the Republican Party, but also translated their complaints into public-policy initiatives. Their shrill rhetoric about welfare queens, secular-humanist public schools, McCarthyism on campuses, and so on now takes the more tangible form of lawsuits, voter referenda, and legislation geared to dismantling the programs that attempt to provide citizens with only minimal rights, opportunities, and services: welfare, childcare and Head Start, healthcare for the unemployed and underemployed, and equal opportunity in education and employment. They have turned these programs into political flashpoints that blind leaders and citizens to the fundamental problem: our system of distributive injustice. By that phrase, I mean that the nation's social goods—rights, responsibilities, and respect; housing, education, and employment; wages, wealth, and consumption—are still unjustly apportioned by gender, race, ethnicity, and class and, moreover, apportioned from the moment of birth forward.

If we position feminist studies in this larger context, we might ask: How is its knowledge useful? Does it influence public discourse and policy formation? Does it fuel the activist agendas of nonacademic organizations—for example, the Women and Poverty Project or the National Abortion Rights Action League, the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition or the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights? In 1992, the Heritage Foundation used its annual Resource Bank Meeting to showcase a conservative battleplan for the 1990s; the participants, who represented hundreds of conservative organizations in the U.S. and abroad, learned how to act on economic, social, and cultural issues. That same year, the Ford

Foundation sponsored a meeting of 35 feminists to discuss overlaps between academic feminist studies and nonacademic feminist policy institutes. Commenting on the meeting, Betty Parsons Dooley, Executive Director of the Women's Research and Education Institute, told me: "There wasn't a declarative sentence available during the whole day; the discussion was framed in impenetrable ways."<sup>9</sup>

The problem, as I see it, is that while the conservative movement was making plans to attack our ideas and roll back our gains, we in effect were disconnecting academic feminism from national and local community feminism. We became too engrossed in academic projects, too devoted to generating erudition, too driven by the academic imperative to criticize every formulation, and too busy trying to sustain our academic enterprise on scant resources to keep the shifting conditions of social change in view. The gritty routine of doing what we did absorbed our attention, exhausted our energies, and eclipsed our vision.

The answer is not to abandon the academic enterprise we built but to retool it for greater political effectivity, so that we can act through the wherewithal we have to build the cross-sector infrastructure we need. Here are my recommendations:

- form hard networks—with coordinating councils, recurrent meetings, and communications technologies—that link up feminist and progressive organizations across the sectors: the academy, politics, policy-formation, the media, and the grassroots.
- learn how to deploy cross-sector problem-solving teams to do research on public issues, how to design that research for use in public arenas, and how to translate research findings into forms accessible to policymakers, the media, and nonacademic publics.
- teach students how to combine what the academy put asunder: the quantitative and qualitative methods of social science, the critical-historical and discursive methods of the humanities—and to deploy these methods on real-world economic, social, and cultural problems.

To exemplify this praxis, I would mention two Wisconsin projects. The first is W-2, Governor Thompson's workfare-welfare program; touted by national conservative leaders as a model for other states, it represents public policy at its worst, imposing onerous requirements and penalties on the so-called beneficiaries while neglecting to document the effects on their lives. The other project is the Women and Poverty Public Education Initiative (WPPEI); responding to W-2, women's studies scholars at the University of Wisconsin are not only studying the effects of W-2 on women's and children's lives, but building coalitions with extracademic groups in order to make policy interventions.

Such efforts will require us to relearn a form of work we seem to have forgotten how to do. For the past two decades, academic feminists and progressives have busied themselves with the task of proliferating intellectualized differences. While difference functions positively to produce situated knowledges, it also functions negatively to sabotage coalitional action. The work of coalition-building does not consist of forming a union of groups that have identical beliefs, issues, and agendas; rather, it consists of producing the mutual commitment of groups that have different beliefs, issues, and agendas. The key to functioning in that mode is flexibility: coalition member groups will have to work together

across sectors, in shifting combinations, on some but not all issues, variously leading an initiative or lending it support.

Looking ahead, my position is this: we will have to do the work of making common cause between knowing and doing, academe and society, among ourselves and with others, if we intend to participate in scripting the twenty-first century drama of living our lives together.

#### NOTES

1. Sheila Tobias, "Introduction," in *Female Studies I*, ed. Sheila Tobias (Pittsburgh: KNOW Press, 1970), front matter, n.p.

2. Florence Howe, "Preface," in *Female Studies II*, ed. Florence Howe (Pittsburgh: KNOW Press, 1970), n.p.; and "Acknowledgments," in *Female Studies III*, ed. Florence Howe and Carol Ahlum (Pittsburgh: KNOW Press, 1971), p. 1.

3. Florence Howe, "Women and the Power to Change," in *Women and the Power to Change*, ed. Florence Howe (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975), p. 154.

4. Barbara A. White, "Up from the Podium: Feminist Revolution in the Classroom," in *Female Studies IV: Teaching about Women*, ed. Elaine Showalter and Carol Ohmann (Pittsburgh: KNOW Press, 1971), p. 28.

5. Jean O'Barr, *Feminism in Action* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), p. 95.

6. See Roberta Salper, "Women's Studies," in *Female Studies V*, ed. Rae Lee Siporin (Pittsburgh: KNOW Press, 1972), pp. 64-76; and Marilyn Salzman-Webb, "Feminist Studies: Frill or Necessity?," *ibid.*, pp. 100-05.

7. For full discussion, see Chapters 5 and 7 in Ellen Messer-Davidow, *Disciplining Feminism: Episodes in the Discursive Production of Social Change* (Durham: Duke University Press, forthcoming).

8. Marilyn Jacoby Boxer, *When Women Ask the Questions: Creating Women's Studies in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

9. Author's notes, "Ideas Have Consequences: A Conservative Battleplan for the 1990s," The Heritage Foundation's Fifteenth Annual Resource Bank Meeting, Chicago, IL, April 23-24, 1992; and author's notes, interview of Betty Parsons Dooley (Executive Director, Women's Research and Education Institute), Washington, DC, November 23, 1992. The Ford meeting was held on November 12, 1992.

# The Ideological Foundations of the TANF Welfare Rules<sup>1</sup>

Heather McCallum, Stanford University

In 1996, welfare policy in the United States was fundamentally reformed. Welfare “as we knew it” was gone. The Aid to Families with Dependent Children program (AFDC), which had been in existence for over sixty years, was eliminated and replaced with a new block grant, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). This reform not only affects the millions of people who receive welfare, but also has implications for society generally.

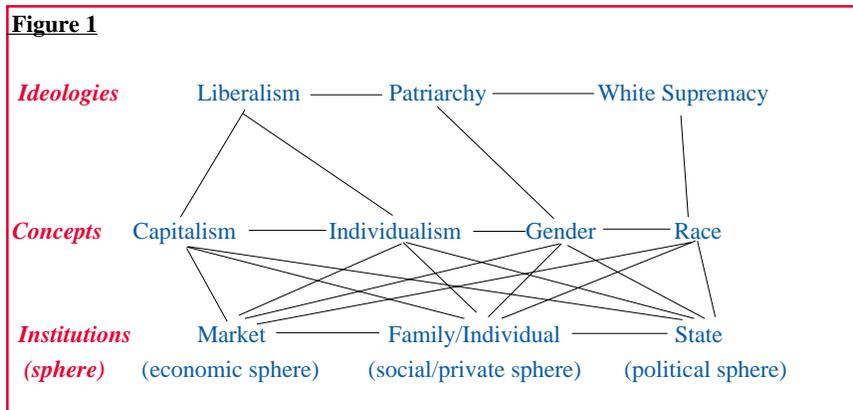
My main thesis is that welfare reform was not designed simply to address the economic problems of the poor, but was designed primarily to correct what the general public perceived as moral and social problems with welfare. Social welfare policies have always reflected our society’s fundamental moral and cultural beliefs. My goal in this paper is to illuminate the fundamental beliefs embedded in our latest welfare reform. I analyze the ways in which the new federal legislation and the subsequent state welfare laws embody our long-standing fundamental ideologies as they are perceived through the dominant discourse on poverty.

The public in general perceived welfare as a social program riddled with serious problems. Welfare was said to promote big government, drain the economy, and foster dependency, family breakdown, and immorality. The response was the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), the law that created TANF. However, the welfare reform of 1996 was not a straightforward matter of matching policy solutions to social problems. Both the perceptions of the problems and the supposed solutions reproduce and reinforce the complexities and contradictions inherent in our national ideologies, concepts, and institutions.

The fundamental ideologies dominant in the welfare debate include liberalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy.<sup>2</sup> I use the term “liberalism” to refer to a focus on the individual, including the individual’s free choices in a market economy. “Patriarchy” refers to a system of gendered norms and gender privilege. “White supremacy” refers to a system of racial privilege. These fundamental ideologies thus are expressed through the concepts of individualism, capitalism, gender, and race. The ideologies and concepts, in turn, are filtered through the state, market, and family institutions which themselves are shaped by the ideologies and concepts. Figure 1 graphically displays these relationships.

In the context of poverty and welfare, our fundamental ideologies, concepts, and institutions shape perceptions of the causes of poverty but do not lead to a unified understanding of the problem. Instead, multiple understandings of the causes of

poverty are consistent with our cultural ideas and institutions. Nonetheless, only particular



explanations dominated the national discourse on welfare reform and its outcome. Specifically, the dominant perception was that poverty results from a failure of the state to insist upon the economic independence of individuals, a failure of the family to be a self-supporting unit, and the moral failure of individuals, especially women.

The goals of the new TANF welfare programs are to devolve welfare to the states, encourage labor force participation, reduce dependency, promote individual responsibility, encourage two-parent families, and enforce morality. The goals are pursued through a combination of federal guidelines and new state regulations. In this paper I will focus on the goals of encouraging labor force participation and promoting individual responsibility. These are the goals highlighted in the title of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. I will elaborate on each of these policy aims, describing the reforms designed to achieve them and discussing how these reforms reinforce underlying cultural ideologies.

### Encouraging Labor Force Participation

The goal of encouraging labor force participation among TANF recipients arose in part from a false perception that AFDC recipients were lazy and lacked a work ethic. To encourage labor force participation, the new TANF programs require more of their adult recipients to participate in work activities. The law establishing the TANF program requires all non-exempt recipients to participate in work activities within two years of receiving benefits. Also, the federal government has given states financial incentives to maximize the proportion of their caseloads that are working. States risk losing federal funding unless a certain percentage of all recipients are working. That percentage was twenty-five percent of single-parent families and seventy-five percent of two-parent families in 1997, increasing to fifty percent and ninety percent by 2002, respectively.<sup>3</sup>

Recipients are considered “working” if they spend at least twenty hours per week in any of the following activities: unsubsidized or subsidized private or public employment, work experience, on-the-job training, job search and job readiness for up to six weeks, community service, vocational education for up to twelve months, and provision of child care to TANF

recipients. The minimum hours per week required in these activities will increase to twenty-five in 1999 and thirty in 2000. Hours beyond the first twenty hours may be filled with job skills training, education directly related to employment, and high school education or its equivalent.<sup>4</sup> Note that these requirements specifically rule out full-time education activities, including two-year and four-year degrees. TANF emphasizes immediate work participation at the expense of more extensive education that could improve long-term employment and earnings prospects.

Not only does TANF require more recipients to participate in more narrowly defined work activities, but fewer recipients are exempted from work requirements due to the presence of young children in the household. While recipients of AFDC were usually exempt from work requirements if their children were under age three, TANF recipients typically must return to work by the time their children are one year old, and in many states the exemption age is six months or less. Five states offer no exemption, thus requiring even the mothers of newborns to work. TANF programs further encourage labor force participation by imposing sanctions on families who do not comply with work requirements. Sanctions typically involve an initial reduction in benefits for non-compliance and lead to termination of benefits in cases of continued non-compliance. Through more stringent work requirements, fewer exemptions, and more severe consequences for non-compliance, TANF programs aim to increase the labor force participation of women on welfare.

The emphasis that TANF places on labor force participation reinforces a liberal capitalist ideology and serves the interests of the market. However, TANF work requirements do not simply move recipients into paid labor and self-sufficiency. Rather, tighter eligibility requirements, increased work requirements, restrictions on educational opportunities, and limited child care exemptions all collude to push recipients toward low-wage or unpaid labor. The work activities that satisfy the work requirements emphasize “activity,” not earnings. “Work experience” and “community service” activities satisfy the work requirements, but these activities are distinct from “employment,” suggesting that the latter implies paid work, the former unpaid. The low-wage and unpaid labor of TANF recipients not only fills a market need, but also maintains gendered and racial market norms in which the labor of women and people of color is undervalued. In other words, the liberal ideology is tempered by patriarchal and white supremacist ideologies.

TANF’s approach to encouraging labor force participation reveals conflicts and ambiguity among our fundamental ideologies. For example, work requirements in TANF reinforce the patriarchal idea that the provider role is superior to the nurturer role—that traditional male roles are superior to traditional female roles. Taking the traditional roles of fathers as providers and mothers as nurturers, work requirements for welfare recipients prioritize provision. Women on welfare are expected to act as fathers, providing economically for their families.<sup>5</sup>

However, the type of work that women on welfare are required to do, and the fact that they are *required* to do so, illustrates that women on welfare are not taking over male roles in a straightforward manner. When recipients are required to participate in unpaid work

activities, they essentially are being forced to provide charity. Charity has historically been “women’s work,” so it is consistent with our gendered work roles for welfare mothers to perform such work. But poor women, and particularly poor women of color, providing charity for the general public is a warped role reversal from the history of white middle-class women performing charity work for poor immigrants and women of color.

If the liberal goal of individual financial self-sufficiency prevailed in TANF, one would expect to see greater emphasis placed on educational activities that enhance future employment and earnings potential. Instead, work activities specifically exclude long-sighted education. This policy choice not only provides the market with cheap labor, but it also continues a racial and gendered history of denying education and providing minimal financial compensation for women, especially women of color. In 1996, the median weekly earnings for all white men employed full time was \$580, while the figures for white women and black women, respectively, were only \$428 and \$362.<sup>6</sup>

While TANF rules limit recipients’ opportunities to provide adequate financial support for their families, they also deny recipients the opportunity to provide full-time nurturance for their families. Despite the stated goal of TANF that poor children be “cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives,”<sup>7</sup> TANF rules consider child care to be valuable work only if one cares for someone else’s children. Caring for the children of other TANF recipients is an allowable work activity; caring for one’s own children is not.<sup>8</sup> This rule further illuminates several areas of ambiguity in our national ideologies.

First, it highlights the contradiction between our patriarchal ideology, which holds that women should stay home and nurture their children, and our liberal work ethic, which holds that responsible citizens are those who engage in labor outside the home. The rule allowing TANF recipients to provide child care only for other women’s children indicates that in this case the liberal work ethic prevails.

Second, this ordering of priorities highlights the general ambivalence in this country regarding mothers’ labor force participation. While the TANF legislation prioritizes women’s labor force participation above their mothering, these priorities are less clear in the general population. The majority of mothers of young children in this country do work outside the home at least part-time. In 1996, seventy percent of married women with children under age eighteen participated in the labor force. Among those with children under age one, fifty-nine percent were employed.<sup>9</sup> Yet when a mother is financially able to stay home with her children and instead chooses to work, this choice is still suspect. Numerous *New York Times* articles in the past year addressed the ambivalence mothers feel about combining work and motherhood. One article notes “a tide of books” published on this subject in the last year.<sup>10</sup> As evidence that our society “is still deeply suspicious of mothers who wish to work, need to work, or, God help them, love to work,” another article cites “the speed with which the trial of Louise Woodward, the au pair found guilty of the death of Matthew Eappen, was transformed into a trial of the baby’s mother.” She also cites the fact that “[j]udges routinely reward fathers who take any part in child rearing, and they routinely punish mothers who aren’t home with the kids full time.”<sup>11</sup>

Third, the fact that TANF requires poor mothers to work outside the home, when doing so is a matter of ambivalence among non-poor mothers, illuminates a double-standard for mothers of different classes. For example, one of the many issues facing mothers of infants is how to combine employment with breast-feeding. Breast-feeding is strongly encouraged for the health of the baby and the mother-child bond it creates. It is also economical: breast-milk is free; formula costs several dollars per can. However, even with flexible work schedules, accommodating workplaces, private offices, and nannies who can bring the infants to the workplace at feeding time—resources unavailable to most women in low-wage jobs—women find it nearly impossible to combine regular breast-feeding with regular employment.<sup>12</sup> TANF work requirements do not take even this basic issue into account. Again, TANF allows a mother to be exempted from work requirements for only one year in her lifetime and only while she has a child under age one. Many states exempt mothers for even shorter periods of time, some not at all.

Requiring people to “earn” their welfare benefits through work appears on the surface to be a simple and reasonable proposition, consistent with fundamental American values. However, when we consider the implications of TANF work requirements for the realities of women’s lives, we illuminate the complexity and contradictions inherent in our fundamental liberal, patriarchal, and white supremacist ideologies.

### **Promoting Individual Responsibility**

Promoting individual responsibility is another goal of TANF that appears on the surface to be sensible and consistent with American ideals. However, as we examine in more detail the means to and implications of this end, we again reveal the complex interplay of our fundamental ideologies. Individual responsibility is promoted in TANF through the imposition of time limits, the elimination of an entitlement to assistance, and through rules that govern recipients’ personal behavior.

The elimination of the entitlement to assistance was perhaps the most fundamental change that came with welfare reform. Under AFDC, all sufficiently needy families with children under age eighteen lacking support from one or both parents were entitled to benefits. While the law establishing TANF requires that states ensure equitable treatment of applicants and recipients, it provides no individual guarantee that even persons meeting the eligibility criteria will receive assistance. This fundamental change in approach shifts the ultimate responsibility for an individual’s well-being away from the state and toward the individual.

The shift of responsibility becomes permanent when recipient families reach the end of their time limits. While there were no time limits on AFDC benefits, time limits are a major part of TANF. Federal law prohibits the use of federal funds to provide benefits for families beyond a cumulative lifetime total of five years and allows states to impose even shorter time limits.<sup>13</sup> While two states, Michigan and Vermont, have chosen to continue to provide benefits through state funds beyond five years, nineteen states have set time limits even shorter than five years. Connecticut has the most severe time limits, terminating benefits

after twenty-one months.

The impact of each state's time limit is tempered by its policies for extending time limits and exempting recipients in certain circumstances. Federal law allows states to exempt up to twenty percent of their caseloads from the five-year time limit. Some state TANF laws allow exemptions in a variety of circumstances, while up to fourteen states allow no exemptions at all.<sup>14</sup> Exemptions may be allowed due to age, disability or illness, caring for a disabled person or young child, general hardship or personal barriers to employment, lack of available jobs, and domestic violence.

Time limits and the lack of an entitlement couple with work requirements to serve the market interest in maintaining a reserve force of low-wage workers, and at the same time reinforcing the liberal notion of individual self-sufficiency. While recipients are required to engage in work activities within two years of receiving assistance, they are denied assistance after five years. At that point, these individuals become dependent upon the market or other individuals for their livelihoods.

Although recipients in most states can be exempted from time limits under certain circumstances, including most commonly the recipient's own disability or need to care for another disabled person, states are least likely to exempt recipients from time limits for reason of a poor economy and high local unemployment.<sup>15</sup> A poor economy or high local unemployment are apparently not acceptable excuses for a recipient's failure to find a job and leave welfare. This irony highlights the way time limits further shift attention away from social and political causes of poverty and emphasize the role of individuals' shortcomings. The imposition of time limits implies that the state has "done its part" to support individuals and that if one is still dependent after five years, the individual must not have been doing her or his part to become financially self-sufficient. Time limits thus reinforce liberal ideological values of individualism and independence.

Time limits also serve patriarchal and white supremacist interests by attempting to limit births to single mothers and to women of color, since they may act as an incentive for reducing the birth rate among poor women. If women know they can receive assistance for only a limited period of time, they may make an extra effort to avoid bearing additional children.

In addition to promoting recipients' individual responsibility through time limits and the elimination of the entitlement to welfare, many states have imposed specific behavioral requirements on recipients. Typical behavioral requirements include submission to drug testing, cooperation with child support enforcement,<sup>16</sup> participation in parenting and money management classes, active involvement in children's education, and verification that children are immunized, receiving regular health check-ups, attending school consistently and maintaining certain grades.<sup>17</sup> In at least two states, Utah and North Dakota, recipients could be required to attend weight reduction classes if caseworkers believed weight problems were a barrier to the recipients' self-sufficiency.<sup>18</sup>

Behavioral requirements are often formalized in the form of contracts or agreements. Through AFDC waivers, at least ten states required welfare recipients to enter agreements

with names such as “personal responsibility agreement,” “contract of mutual responsibility,” “social contract,” and “individual self-sufficiency plan.”<sup>19</sup> The TANF legislation calls for caseworkers to develop “individual responsibility plans” for recipients.<sup>20</sup> These plans may include behavioral requirements. Failure to meet the conditions of the agreement usually results in suspension, reduction, or termination of benefits.

Behavioral requirements and personal responsibility agreements, like the elimination of entitlements and the introduction of time limits, draw on the liberal ideological values of independence and individualism and shift attention from social, political, and economic causes of poverty to individual causes of poverty. No matter how laudable the listed responsibilities may be, when personal responsibilities are put in the form of a written contract, an individual’s failure to achieve self-sufficiency appears more than ever to result from her failure to live up to the responsibilities listed in the contract. Other factors that may have hindered her ability to achieve self-sufficiency, but which were not named in the contract, become invisible.

The liberal ideological values, however, are again tempered by patriarchal and white supremacist ideologies, leading to anti-individualist policies and double standards based on race, class, and gender. Although behavioral requirements focus attention on individuals’ independence, the relationship between these requirements and the liberal values of individualism and independence is self-contradictory. Behavioral requirements are supposed to force recipients to be responsible for themselves and their families, yet the act of requiring personal and family activities takes away a recipient’s ability to make personal decisions about her life.

The most perverse government encroachment on individual decision-making comes in the form of family caps. Twenty-two states punish recipients financially if they conceive while they are receiving welfare benefits. Of these, seventeen states provide no increase in benefits for children born to recipients.

The family cap policy is one policy that does not even masquerade as a defender of individual liberalism. The patriarchal and white supremacist foundations of this policy are readily apparent. Given the public’s false perception that women on welfare are predominantly African-American, the history of racism and sterilization abuse, and the devaluation of African-American motherhood, family cap policies appear to perpetuate white supremacist goals of limiting childbearing among women of color.<sup>21</sup> Patriarchal ideology declares that children born to unwed women, especially if they are poor women of color, are not legitimate children. Unwed women who bear children are morally suspect.

While most Americans would not stand for the degree of government involvement in their personal and family lives that TANF behavioral requirements entail, it is believed that welfare recipients are in need of this kind of paternalistic guidance. This belief is consistent with welfare’s long history of training poor women, particularly immigrant women and women of color, in the personal and family behaviors of white, middle-class women. Gwendolyn Mink writes of mothers’ pensions of the last century, “In exchange for a meager stipend, a recipient had to be certified ‘a proper person, physically, mentally, and morally fit

to bring up her children.”<sup>22</sup> Caseworker discretion in evaluating recipients’ “fitness” resulted in the denial of benefits to many women of color.

In the name of promoting individual responsibility and independence, TANF requirements, like the mothers’ pensions before them, entail a heightened degree of state involvement in one’s personal and family decisions. While the aims of reducing substance abuse, enforcing child support, ensuring that children are healthy and educated, and giving parents guidance on how to promote their children’s development are worthy, it seems suspect that the state is given license to intervene pro-actively based solely on one’s financial status.

TANF programs imply that if one is unable to be financially independent, one also cannot be trusted to be—or does not deserve to be—independent in other aspects of one’s life. If one is poor, one must have gone astray morally as well as financially. Although programs for the poor have been based on moral arguments since their inception, TANF programs make this moral underpinning more explicit than it has been in many years.

Behavioral requirements not only entail government interference with personal decision-making and interference within families, but at their extreme, behavioral requirements entail government interference with recipients’ own bodies. Behavioral requirements disguise patriarchal and white supremacist ideology as the more palatable liberal ideology, spotlighting individual responsibility.

### **Conclusions**

The welfare reform of 1996 was a response to the perceived moral and social shortcomings of welfare “as we knew it.” The resulting welfare program, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), aimed to encourage labor force participation through more stringent work requirements, fewer exemptions, and more severe consequences for non-compliance. TANF also aimed to promote personal responsibility both indirectly, through the imposition of time limits and the elimination of an entitlement to assistance, and directly, through rules governing recipients’ personal behavior and creating disincentives for childbearing.

However, the welfare reform of 1996 was not a straightforward matter of matching policy solutions to social problems. Both the perceptions of the problems and the supposed solutions reproduce and reinforce the complexities and contradictions inherent in our national ideologies, concepts, and institutions. The ideologies that dominated welfare reform include: liberalism, as manifested through market capitalism as well as through the concepts of individualism, independence, and self-sufficiency; patriarchy, which supports traditional (white) gender roles and the maintenance of women’s inferiority and dependent status; and white supremacy, which perpetuates the idea of the inferiority of people of color.

The emphasis that TANF places on labor force participation appears on the surface to promote the liberal concept of individual self-sufficiency. However, rather than moving recipients into paid labor and self-sufficiency, TANF work requirements, including restrictions on educational opportunities and limited child care exemptions, push recipients

toward low-wage or unpaid labor. These policies thus reinforce a liberal capitalist ideology and serve market interests. The liberal ideology is tempered by patriarchal and white supremacist ideologies in that the low wage and unpaid labor of TANF recipients not only fills a market need, but also maintains gendered and racial market norms in which the labor of women and people of color is undervalued.

Liberal, patriarchal, and white supremacist ideologies are also apparent in TANF's promotion of personal responsibility. Liberal ideology is revealed in time-limited assistance, which shifts the ultimate responsibility for an individual's well-being away from the state and toward the individual. Behavioral requirements and personal responsibility agreements, like the elimination of entitlements and the introduction of time limits, draw on the liberal ideological values of independence and individualism and shift attention from social, political, and economic causes of poverty to individual causes of poverty. Patriarchal and white supremacist ideologies are apparent in behavioral requirements that entail government interference with personal decisionmaking and interference within families. At their extreme, behavioral requirements entail government interference with recipients' own bodies. By emphasizing the goal of promoting individual responsibility, behavioral requirements disguise patriarchal and white supremacist ideology as the more palatable liberal ideology.

TANF rules not only reinforce our fundamental ideologies, but they reveal ambiguity and conflict among our values as well. Particularly in conflict are liberalism and patriarchy, as liberal work requirements run counter to the patriarchal ideal of women as nurturing homemakers. However, TANF policies do not seem to conflict with white supremacist ideology if we accept the common, but false, assumption that welfare recipients are predominantly women of color. Work requirements that run counter to the ideal of white, middle-class women as full-time homemakers are nonetheless consistent with the history of African-American women working full-time outside the home. Behavioral requirements that entail government intrusion into the most intimate details of personal lives and run directly counter to the liberal ideal of personal autonomy are, likewise, consistent with the history of disregarding the personal autonomy of African-Americans.

Welfare reform was enacted and is celebrated in the rhetoric of liberalism. It is touted as a new opportunity for individuals to achieve self-sufficiency and financial independence—a hand up, not a handout. Upon closer examination, however, it becomes apparent that this new opportunity is in many ways the re-entrenchment of an ugly, racist past.

#### NOTES

1. This paper is a condensed version of one chapter from my dissertation, "The Political and Ideological Foundations of Welfare Reform," written for the Department of Political Science at Stanford University (1999).

2. Dorothy C. Miller, *Women and Social Welfare: A Feminist Analysis* (New York: Praeger, 1990).

3. U.S. Congress. Public Law 104-193. Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. (42 USC 1305). Sec. 401.
4. U.S. Congress. Public Law 104-193. Sec. 407.
5. The expectation that women on welfare provide economically for their families also has the unintended effect of illuminating the economic value of the tasks traditionally expected of women. When women must pay others to provide child care, the monetary value of the child care they had been providing free of charge becomes apparent.
6. U.S. Bureau of the Census. *Statistical Abstract of the United States*. 1997. p.431.
7. U.S. Congress. Public Law 104-193. Sec. 401.
8. L. Jerome Gallagher, Megan Gallagher, Kevin Perese, Susan Schreiber, and Keith Watson, "One Year After Federal Welfare Reform: A Description of State Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Decisions as of October 1997" (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, May 1998), p.V-1, footnote 21.
9. U.S. Bureau of the Census, Table no. 632, p.104.
10. Jane Gross, "Life Inundates Art: Why Moms Cringe at the Mommy Books," *New York Times* (August 23, 1998), Money & Business, p.1.
11. Carol Tavis, "Goodbye to Momism: A Study of Working Moms Reopens an Old Debate for a New Generation," *New York Times Book Review* (May 3, 1998).
12. Margot Slade, "Have Pump, Will Travel: Combining Breastfeeding and a Career," *New York Times* (December 14, 1997), Money.
13. Assistance received as a minor child does not count later against the time limit of that individual as an adult. (Gallagher et al., pp.IV-2)
14. Up to fourteen states allow for no exemptions or extensions. This figure includes states which specified neither specific exemptions nor a lack of exemptions, but which did specify that no extensions were allowed. (Gallagher et al., Table VI-1, p. VI-2)
15. Gallagher et al., Table IV-1, p. IV-5 - IV-11.
16. Cooperation with child support enforcement can include cooperation "in establishing paternity or in establishing, modifying, or enforcing a child support order." (U.S. Congress. Public Law 104-193. Sec. 408, [a][2])
17. The terms and conditions of waivers document the behavioral requirements in effect before TANF. Public Law 104-193 lists the types of obligations state TANF programs may require.
18. These provisions were specifically included in the terms and conditions of the waivers implemented in these states before TANF.
19. Despite being called contracts, these agreements were not contracts in the legal sense.
20. U.S. Congress, Public Law 104-193, Sec. 408(b).
21. Susan L. Thomas, "Women, Welfare, Reform and the Preservation of a Myth," *The Social Science Journal*, v.34, no.3 (1997), p.364.
22. Gwendolyn Mink, "The Lady and the Tramp: Gender, Race, and the Origins of the American Welfare State" in *Women, the State, and Welfare*, ed. Linda Gordon (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), p.110.

## **W-2 Welfare Reforms: Undoing the Wisconsin Idea?**

**Sarah Harder, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire**

Forty years ago I dropped out of college to marry and live happily ever after. Three years and two children later, I was a single parent with no child support and no college degree. It was my improbable good fortune to receive help with the basic life support and childcare required to complete my baccalaureate at a good low-tuition Wisconsin state college. For me, that second chance was my happy ending which led to graduate school, a strong family, a profession and a life of civic activism. But today in Wisconsin under W-2, there is no second chance for postsecondary education open to mothers like me seeking to build a better future for themselves and their kids.

I ask you to consider the consequences of Wisconsin's welfare reforms in terms of foreclosed personal opportunities for thousands of today's low-income single parents and their children. But I also want to examine W-2 more centrally as an emerging model in higher education and social policy which presents serious limitations to class mobility, access to leadership, and the democratic process.

For women, who now comprise the majority of U.S. undergraduates, these issues are connected in curious ways. One measure of remaining barriers to access to leadership for women is the proportion of women who become CEO's in the academy or in corporations. We know that the pool of women qualified by credentials for such posts has grown significantly. In U.S. colleges and universities in 1975, women held five percent of the presidencies. In 1995 women held sixteen percent of presidencies.<sup>1</sup> In the corporate world, twenty years after a flood of women into MBA programs, women hold only three percent of the various executive positions in Fortune 500 companies.<sup>2</sup>

In U.S. colleges the needs of reentry adults (the majority female) are reshaping traditional higher education schedules and content, particularly at the undergraduate level. That second-chance opportunity so valued in our society is an option that more adults are choosing to accept. At my fine public university, sixty percent of the students are either first-generation college students or from low-income families or both. The University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, my academic base for thirty years, is a highly ranked public teaching university of ten thousand students. Its primary focus is undergraduate teaching within a liberal arts-based curriculum. We operate from the WISCONSIN IDEA, which promises access to all citizens through its motto, "The borders of the university are the borders of the state." However, I know that we neither recruit nor admit many second-chance students from our region, those citizens whose latent talents and potential for leadership might find new opportunity through higher education. A disproportionate number of those potentially successful students, who are neither identified nor recruited, are from low-income families.

In this great wave of American prosperity, we would prefer not to be distracted by discouraging evidence of a persistent U.S. class system. But a twenty-year American study by the Census Bureau looked at prospects for a college degree related to economic class. Between 1973-93, the proportion of young people from affluent families (earning over \$61,000 per year) holding bachelors degrees increased from thirty-four percent to over sixty percent. During that same twenty years the chance of achieving a bachelor's degree by age twenty-four remained under five percent for young people from U.S. families classified as poor (earning under \$15,000).<sup>3</sup> It is clear that twenty years of equal opportunity policy have not yet resulted in equal access or a great deal of class mobility.

As Americans have evolved a more inclusive definition of democratic participation, the educational credentials required for entry into leadership positions in our society have also increased. At the end of World War II, the "GI Bill" extended access to higher education degrees to social groups previously excluded by tradition or income. During the second half of this century, an expanded generation of new leaders (principally male) shaped American institutions at every level. As America struggles to retain the promise of equal opportunity, can we really afford to lose the insights of those citizens now trapped in poverty?

By excluding the option of postsecondary degrees for those on W-2, Wisconsin has now overtly excluded a twenty-first century equivalent of the WWII veteran who was able to open his door to education, economic security, and leadership through the GI Bill. Wisconsin's welfare reform law has eliminated (along with the safety net) the opportunity of college training for the low-income mothers who are pushed from welfare into low-paying jobs that will barely sustain their families in poverty. I would argue that Wisconsin is also eliminating an important second-chance leadership pool by applying a strictly punitive social policy to low-income mothers. The Census Bureau data show that educational prospects for their low-income children will be almost as bleak.<sup>4</sup> And unfortunately, other states are following Wisconsin's bad example.

So Wisconsin's leadership as a higher education policy-setter is as important in this examination as our role as a pacesetter in social policy change. The two are linked. The Wisconsin Idea has also empowered our state to evolve a unique statewide laboratory for the development of social policy. Indeed, Wisconsin has a worldwide reputation as a twentieth-century laboratory for the development of progressive social policy through a collaborative process among academics, government officials, and citizens that has produced social reforms in America. Unemployment compensation and the Social Security systems are only two products of the Wisconsin Idea that have contributed to constructing a national economic safety net. Because of our historical role, new social policy experiments in Wisconsin receive not only a national spotlight but often global interest and attention as well. Wisconsin Works (W-2) has just received this kind of attention, with many states rushing to replicate it. (In November 1997, the Indiana-based Hudson Institute, which crafted the W-2 law, sponsored a Madison conference to promote the initiative as a national model. Wisconsin could be inventing a twenty-first century alternative to the Wisconsin Idea's rational merging of theory, data, and collective experi-

ence into the democratic development of social policy. Under the twelve-year administration of our popular socially conservative governor, Wisconsin now leads the nation in what Americans euphemistically call “welfare reform.” Through this reform process America has, in effect, eliminated the social safety net for poor children whose mothers cannot or will not work for pay and has “devolved” any remaining responsibility over to the states. Under the legal provisions of W-2, Wisconsin has also formally terminated its social contact with these children and the poor female-headed families on whom they rely.

But the collaborative democratic process used in the past to create innovative social programs did not operate in this case. W-2, our state’s radical legislation to eliminate welfare, came not from the University of Wisconsin Institute on Poverty Research, known worldwide for objective analysis and progressive models aimed at decreasing economic dependency. It did not come from citizens concerned about improving effectiveness in government programs nor from experienced civil servants who understood their strengths and weaknesses. Instead, this legislative package was purchased whole from an out-of-state, right-wing think tank (the Hudson Institute) and was funded by a right-leaning foundation in our state (The Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation). Both are parts of an intricate and sophisticated national alliance of reactionary politicians, activists, thinkers, and media strategists which emerged in the early 1980s. Along with a host of media activists, these groups have cooperated to mobilize the Republican Party social agenda now being implemented nationwide through both federal and state legislation.

I am concerned that without assertive reentry by academic progressives into the arena of social policy, our democratic processes in America will increasingly be used by the economically privileged to narrow the options for others. Under new demographic, economic, and social pressures, reactionary ideologies could easily merge with political expedience and persuasive media messages to manipulate even MORE undemocratic consequences from our nation’s democratic processes. During this period of millennial global economic and technological change, every nation is vulnerable to creating social scapegoats for people’s frustrations and fears. Some have explained America’s war on poor women as a convenient substitute for the external enemy that our nation has lost.

In these times, I believe that academics must engage social issues energetically and with deep humility. Like all institutions, higher education is using the millennium as an excuse to reassess and predict. In October 1998, for example, the United Nations Economic Social & Cultural Organization (UNESCO) hosted the World Conference on Higher Education in Paris to consider global priorities for the next century. The International Federation of University Women (IFUW), which I serve as vice president, carried our concerns to that conference as the only organization representing women. I was invited to contribute to a preparatory seminar in Paris called “Higher Education and its Role in European and American Society at the Beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>

Century.” The theme I was asked to address was “Higher Education and the Leaders of Tomorrow.” The title I chose was “Leadership: Whose Responsibility? Or Higher Education and the Social Contract.”

In his seminar keynote, Professor Jonathan Cole (Provost, Columbia University) predicted a bright future for academic partnerships and focused admiringly on two Cold War byproducts for which higher education was a contributor and beneficiary. The first was the massive data collection and technological information system initiated by U.S. “Intelligence” and security needs before perestroika. The second Cold War asset was a whole new field of academic specialization, the legion of experts across the U.S. and Europe trained in the field of Soviet and Eastern Studies to help us to understand the enemy. Professor Cole also spoke of amazing new intersections of science, technology, and media in applications such as the uncanny 1998 predictions of El Niño global weather patterns. In calling upon academe to engage the “great issues,” he spoke of expanding partnerships among researchers, government, and business to engage such possibilities. I was surprised, however, to hear only peripheral references to social policy or institutions within priorities named by Cole or other seminar speakers.

Perhaps I am particularly conscious of this omission because of five years’ intensive work with women in Russia, where the collapse of social institutions exacts the largest cost on women and children, who operate without basic support systems that we take for granted. But I am also aware of parallels among all of our post-Cold War societies. And I am conscious of a desperate need to reinvent American social institutions (like our former welfare system) whose deficiencies have trapped segments of our society and failed many citizens, particularly those on our economic margins.

My own academic career as a university administrator and teacher has more narrowly focused on change-making within a university and its programs. However, my twenty years experience in the U.S. women’s movement has combined social activism with these more traditional academic concerns. It has been my working conviction that academe has a primary responsibility to engage what this seminar had termed “the great issues” of society, the world, and the future.

Therefore I agree that academics must extend our partnerships, must reach out and test our expertise in policy creation and analysis. The invention of new more functional institutions depends upon it. However, we must engage the unknown with both deep humility and suspicion about the applications of knowledge we carry. The stunning successes of El Niño predictions might cause us to overestimate the results of space-age technology, science, and communication. Let us also remember the most remarkable Cold War failure. Despite the imposing expertise of Sovietologists, and despite the massive database on the Soviet Union and the world’s most elaborate technological intelligence infrastructure, why is it that no one managed to predict the collapse of the USSR? Does that glaring failure not suggest too great a faith in academic expertise, even when combined with cutting-edge technology? How could this collective Western knowledge enterprise manage to *miss* the impending social, economic, and political implosion of one of the world’s two great superpowers?

Clearly the experts were not analyzing the right things.

A key question for our future is how to account for unpredictable social and human factors in order to better deal with the uncertainties of our world. How can we transform institutions in order to empower human abilities rather than trapping potential? How can we pool human knowledge with new technologies to better predict, and, if possible, to forestall or respond to the social, political, or economic disasters that are inevitable in human history? How can we invent social policy models that are democratic, practical, and fair? In a period of unprecedented prosperity for a portion of the population, how can we provide a leg up to those caught in the poverty trap? I believe that these are among the most serious leadership questions facing the academy in the decade ahead.

But there is a second set of questions. What responsibility does higher education have to expand access to roles of leadership in our society? How can we avoid the mere replication of existing closed leadership elites? How and where should training for leadership happen in a democratic society focused on its future?

Overt training for leadership has not been a traditional emphasis within higher education in the United States. As the GI experience showed, however, the undergraduate bachelor's degree remains a basic requisite for entry to the ranks of leadership in America. For access to professional, business, political, or educational leadership, of course, even more educational credentials are often required. Over the past twenty-five years we have recognized other barriers to leadership faced by women and minorities in the informal but exclusionary networks existing in our nation's corporations and institutions. One result of those barriers has been a proliferation of mid-career leadership training institutes, fellowships, and internships now offered to women and minorities through universities, professional organizations, and for-profit companies.

For me, however, commitment to expanding the pool of leaders available to our nation provokes a series of questions relating leadership to higher education. Among these are "Leadership for what?" and "Leadership by whom?" And if the qualifying credential for leadership in our country is the four-year university degree, who will be invited into that circle of potential, and who have we now excluded? If we exclude low-income single parents, thereby also handicapping their children, where is the promise of American's opportunity?

Let us remember the post-World War II breakthrough to both economic security and leadership provided by the GI Bill. Let us recognize the new and democratic mix of educated voices that transformed a new mix of cultures and classes into creative energy that fueled post-war America. Why can we not see that same potential in today's low-income parents and the children we have made their sole responsibility? The peculiar genius of America is rooted in our ability to assimilate and tap into talents that might never surface in more rigid cultures. Today's survival skills of low-income single parents could well be transformed through education into tomorrow's leadership and policy breakthroughs for the next century.

As is always the case, the right questions are more important than perfect answers to shape our future work as progressive academic activists. In building the twenty-first century knowledge enterprise so revered by higher education, we must assure that human potential, equal opportunity, and commitment to the social contract continue as priorities. Without reasserting humane concern for social policy, academe risks being dazzled and then distracted by global technology, science, and economics. Spurred by forces of media and globalization, these could comprise the next century's real Malthusian threat.

As the model of Wisconsin's W-2 is copied across the United States and transplanted across the seas, progressive academics must assert oversight to assure that increased progress and opportunity actually result. If, as we suspect, they do not, we must use facts and principles to engage others in our efforts to secure more humane and practical change. Those of us in Women's Studies have a special responsibility to raise this challenge with colleagues inside the academy and beyond. In an increasingly diverse and contentious democracy (and the higher education that reflects it), this may offer our only hope for progress toward the goals that Women's Studies has professed.

#### NOTES

1. American Council on Education pamphlet, 1996.
2. Kirsten Grimsley, "Corporate Ladder Stays Tough Climb for Women," *International Herald Tribune* (March 25, 1998), p.2.
3. "Disparities in Higher Education Opportunity . . . Huge and Growing," *The Mortenson Report on Public Policy Analysis for Post-Secondary Education* (Iowa City: March 1993).
4. "Disparities," 1993.
5. "The World Watches. . ." *St. Paul Pioneer Press* (November 23, 1997), p. C1.

## **Part II:**

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### **Welfare Reform Happening in Different U.S. States**

# A Look at Family Life Under W-2<sup>1</sup>

**Barbara Barnard**  
Consultant, Madison, Wisconsin

## **Introduction and Background**

After arduous debate during the 1980s, a national consensus emerged about the need for fundamental reform of the existing welfare system. This consensus rested on the belief that welfare undermined the work ethic of recipients and created dependence in ways that were ultimately more harmful than beneficial to parents and children. Within a few years, a long-standing income support program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), was transformed from a system of payments to support parents in their task of caring for children into a program to prepare and assist parents to enter the workforce. Well-documented barriers to work, such as unavailable and/or unaffordable childcare, lack of transportation, loss of medical insurance, and lack of job skills and experience in the paid workforce were considered in the redesign discussions. Wisconsin has been a leader in implementing this significant change in social policy through its Wisconsin Works (W-2) program.

Policy makers, advocates, and researchers are now critically interested in whether or not W-2 can move and sustain welfare recipients in the labor market. Several state and national research studies have been constructed to evaluate long-term outcomes. These outcomes include labor market attachment using measures of job entry, job retention, and type of work; economic well-being as measured by wages, benefits, and promotions; and welfare dependency, which is defined by exits and re-entries into the welfare system and the utilization of government programs and benefits. Attention is also focused on specific programs such as day care and foster care that will be affected by the growing numbers of working parents.

So far, the topic of parents and children has received little attention in the national conversation on welfare reform. While the prevailing majority view seems to support the belief that all who are able to work should do so, the ability of parents, especially single parents, to provide sufficient nurturing, guidance, and supervision to their children has not been fully considered.

A 1997 content study commissioned by Children Now examined the extent to which the media reporting on welfare reform addressed children. The study found that only about sixteen percent of articles contained a primary focus or significant discussion of children; two-thirds of all reform articles contained no mention of children even though they comprise sixty-nine percent of all welfare recipients. In releasing these findings, the press statement noted that:

Poor children are among the most vulnerable people in this country and welfare reform has the potential to impact their lives in deep and permanent ways. Welfare policies affect children's housing, nutrition, health, childcare arrangements and parental time available. The new welfare policy environment will impact nearly 1 in 8 American children and therefore, bears tremendous consequences for the future of this nation.<sup>2</sup>

Tom Weisner of the MacArthur Foundation notes that the reason for funding family studies is that:

All families have a common project familiar to all of us—to try to organize a routine of life that fits with their resources and supports; that is reasonably stable, balanced and consistent with the always conflicting pressures in life; and which is meaningful and helps to achieve some of the goals and values of families.<sup>3</sup>

This statement captures the challenge of understanding the issues for children and parents as they negotiate the transition from AFDC to W-2 and into the open labor market. The impact of an external stress such as this on parenting and the parent-child relationship is an area ripe for exploration. Recent reports by the Women and Poverty Public Education Initiative<sup>4</sup> and by social scientists Kathryn Edin and Laura Lein<sup>5</sup> highlight the distress and anxiety felt by women who now need to get jobs, and provide evidence that many of these women already work off the books to provide for their families. How they will satisfy the requirements of welfare reform, continue to generate enough income for their families, and nurture, supervise and guide their children is an open question.

While this group of low-income parents has unique and difficult issues related to poverty, they also share the concerns and challenges of all working parents—adults who both work in the paid labor force and who provide care for family members. The Work and Families Institute—which conducts national policy and worksite research on the changing workforce and changing family/personal lives—lists child care, flexible hours, and employer support for family life as critical issues in the decade. The essential issue is how adults combine their personal capacity, their human capital (aspirations, education and training), and their financial and social capital to successfully seek paid employment. Thus, it seemed both compelling and timely to take a look at some of these parents who were just entering the workforce.

### **The Study Concept and Design**

The objective of this research project was to create systematic and descriptive information about life as it is lived by parents and children during the parents' participation in the W-2 program. The information will be used by Catholic Charities to understand the unmet needs of W-2 participants, as well as to evaluate the services being provided, and by

the Wisconsin Catholic Conference in its policy advocacy on welfare reform and social issues.

The primary research question was: How is the capacity of parents in poor families to protect and nurture socially, psychologically, and cognitively healthy children shaped by participation in W-2?

The survey dealt with the two critical functions of parenthood: protection and nurturance. Part of the parents' job must be dedicated to meeting their children's needs for protection and safety. Parents are expected, as part of their responsibilities, to ensure that their children have their basic needs met. These needs include food, health care, shelter, and the identification of trustworthy, alternate caregivers. In addition to providing for the basic needs of their children, all parents are expected to provide a nurturing environment that supports the successful accomplishment of the developmental tasks of childhood. In order to do this, the parents must themselves have emotional strengths and resources, and be able to identify and mobilize a broad system of care within which their children can flourish. The study also looked at the background of the parents and their experiences in the W-2 program.

The design of the study was to interview mothers in their home setting using a questionnaire to gather information. A total of seventy-six women with at least one child between the ages of one and six were interviewed in Milwaukee, Dane, Brown, LaCrosse, and Douglas counties. Volunteer participants were recruited through local W-2 or social service agencies. Individuals self-selected and were not screened according to any criteria other than their W-2 program status. Local interviewers were identified and trained in the use of the survey instrument. The participants were paid \$50 and interviewers were paid \$75. All data used in the survey are self-reported.

As a group, these mothers were primarily never married (79.2 percent) and had a mean number of 2.55 children. Fifty-four percent of the mothers had either a high school diploma or a GED and 43.4 percent had additional training. Slightly more than eighty-one percent of the mothers interviewed were on AFDC prior to participation in the W-2 program. Their mean age at first receipt of AFDC was 20.6, the mean number of years on AFDC was 5.43, and the percent continuously on AFDC since first receipt was 36.8.

It is important to note here that the study is not an evaluation of the effectiveness of W-2. Participants were interviewed at only one point in time. The study does not make a comparison between how these parents were doing before participating in the W-2 program and how they are doing at the time of the study (as W-2 participants). In addition, the study does not compare this group of parents with a similar group who is not participating in the W-2 program.

### **Key Findings**

*Health Care:* Nearly all mothers were able to use the same provider for all their children and were able to access advice by phone from someone who was knowledgeable about their child(ren)'s health history. However, thirty percent responded "yes" when asked if there had

been at least one time in the past six months when they wanted to take a child to a health professional and did not go. Reasons for this included “too tired,” “transportation problems,” and “insufficient insurance.”

*Health and Well-Being:* Over one-half of the mothers in the study were rated as depressed on the CES-D<sup>6</sup> scale. Mothers who had more economic worries had a higher incidence of depression. Mothers with more economic worries were also less hopeful about their future, and felt less competent as parents.

*Housing:* Over half the parents, 56.6 percent, worried “some” or “a lot” that they wouldn’t be able to afford adequate housing. Fully 45.4 percent rated their neighborhoods either “not so good” or “awful.”

*Transportation:* Most of the women in the study did not own a car and relied on public transportation to reach child care and work locations. Of these, seventy percent spent more than two hours a day getting to and from child care and work, resulting in a further reduction in time at home with young children.

*Child Care:* Though most of the women in the study were comfortable with their child care providers, a number of mothers cited issues which challenge the stability of their child care arrangements.

Fully 81.4 percent of mothers identified only one alternate provider if their child was ill. Nearly forty percent responded that they had changed providers between one and four times in the past year. Most frequently cited reasons were that the provider was no longer available (22.6 percent), too expensive (19.4 percent), and location not convenient (19.4 percent).

*Economic Stress:* When asked to rate their level of worry over six areas, a) being unable to pay bills, b) being unable to get a job, c) being unable to afford medical care, d) being unable to buy food, e) being able to afford housing, and f) being able to afford child care, two-thirds of the mothers said they worried “a lot” about at least three of the six areas and almost thirty-seven percent worried about five of the topics.

*Child-Parent Relationship:* Mothers with more economic worries experienced somewhat more child-specific stress than the mothers with fewer worries. Also, mothers who were satisfied with more aspects of their lives had higher parental warmth scores and perceived parenting as less stressful than mothers who were satisfied with fewer aspects of their lives.

*Father Involvement and Child Support:* There was a significant difference between mothers in Milwaukee and those outside Milwaukee in terms of child support received. Only 7.7 percent of Milwaukee mothers reported that they always receive the full amount of child support, as compared to 23.8 percent of non-Milwaukee mothers.

Of fathers who saw their children at least once a week, twenty-one percent paid all their child support, while for those fathers who did not see their children that regularly, only ten percent paid full support. Only 5.6 percent of fathers who saw their children less than once a month paid the full child support amount.

*Parents as Workers – Perceptions of Services:* Just over half of the mothers agreed or

strongly agreed with the statement “I believe that I am getting skills and experience that will help me get a job that will support my family.” Of these, nearly two-thirds felt they had gotten practical advice, emotional support, or both from the W-2 program.

At the same time, nearly half of the respondents felt they were not getting the necessary skills and experience. Of this segment, only twenty-two percent felt they were getting practical or emotional support from the W-2 agency.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

This study sought to identify insights into the reality of the lives of working women to guide decisions by social service providers in Catholic Charities agencies and inform policy advocacy by interested Catholics and others. It was expected that this research would raise as many questions as it would provide answers.

The study concludes that the experience of transitioning from being a full-time parent of preschool children to being a full-time worker varies for mothers. While the causal relationships are not clear, the study found that some of the women appear to have the ability and resources to construct routines that support or at least do not significantly hinder their parenting responsibilities. Despite the existence of certain issues, they are, as a group, fairly satisfied and hopeful about their success in the job market. This sense of satisfaction and hopefulness is also seen in their relationship with their children. The mothers who scored as more satisfied with their lives had higher parental warmth scores and perceived parenting as less stressful than mothers who were satisfied with fewer aspects of their lives.

The study also found that a significant number of women are experiencing high levels of worry about basic economic issues such as paying for housing, food, health, and childcare. Over half of the women are rated as depressed, with women without family support also ranking as more depressed. The more worried mothers also experience parenting as stressful and feel less optimistic about their success in the labor market.

The results of this study remind us of the importance of recognizing that W-2 participants are not a homogeneous group. They each bring a unique history and set of circumstances to the task of achieving economic self-sufficiency. And, they do not manage the dual roles of worker and parent in simple ways.

The challenge to both public institutions and community organizations is to find ways to respond to the needs of those in poverty and to address the existing injustices of the current economic system that limit the opportunities for individuals attempting to transition to a life of self sufficiency. As we do so, it is vital to remember that, in a world of work not welfare, the distinction between the working poor and the non-working poor has all but disappeared. Thus, while one should be prudent in generalizing about the experiences of the women in this study, it seems reasonable to suggest that their trials and successes, their worries and hopes are mirrored in the lives of other poor families across Wisconsin.

Accordingly, private sector responses and public policies that are supportive of parents like those who participated in this study can be expected to touch the lives of many parents and children who may never be a part of the Wisconsin Works program. Thus, additional research and reflection on these issues is especially important.

## NOTES

1. This research, titled "Raising Children in a World of Work not Welfare," by Barbara Barnard, was commissioned by Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, Inc. in cooperation with the Wisconsin Catholic Conference. The study was funded by a grant from the Archdiocese of Milwaukee Supporting Fund. Copies of the report are available from the Wisconsin Catholic Conference, 30 W. Mifflin Street, Madison, WI 53703.

2. "Children and Welfare Reform: High Stakes, Low Coverage," Children Now, <http://www.childrennow.org>, February 1998.

3. Thomas Weisner, (MacArthur Foundation), Personal Correspondence to the New Hope Project, Milwaukee, 1996.

4. Anne Statham, Laura Wittmann, and Katherine Rhoades, Women and Poverty Public Education Initiative, *In Their Own Words* (Kenosha, WI: University of Wisconsin-Parkside, 1996).

5. Kathryn Edin and Laura Lein, *Making Ends Meet: How Single Mothers Survive Welfare and Low-Wage Work* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1997).

6. Lenore S. Radloff, "The CES-D (Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression) Scale: A Self-Report Depression Scale for Research in the General Population," *Applied Psychological Measurement*, v.1, no.3 (Summer 1977), pp. 385-401.

# Stated and Unstated Needs: Low-Income Parents and Child Care

**Diane Michalski Turner**  
**University of Wisconsin-Madison**

## **Introduction**

In the past many welfare recipients failed to find employment because they had problems securing child care. When the State of Wisconsin prepared to end the welfare program “Aid to Families of Dependent Children” in September 1997 and begin a work-centered program, “Wisconsin Works” (W-2), it became apparent that these persons’ difficulties in obtaining child care would have to be overcome: The goal of the W-2 program would be the employment of every capable person. Every W-2 participant would be limited to a five-year lifetime maximum of program benefits. There would be no alternative support system to which an individual could turn for assistance. Finding, keeping, and paying for child care would be one linchpin to employment, and employment would be the only means for families’ survival.

Understanding these facts, in March of 1997 I began a study of the child care issues of low-income persons in Madison, the state capital. I chose not to limit my sample to AFDC and W-2 participants because all low-income persons are predisposed to face similar child care problems, and I assumed that W-2 participants would quickly enter low-wage jobs. Additionally, I formulated my research design knowing that W-2 policy writers anticipated that, “Low-wage working families are the most realistic gauge of whether the expectations for W-2 participants are realistic (p.4).”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, if I included low-income employed individuals in the research, I could use the descriptions of their child care experience to suggest what W-2 participants would encounter and need.

In this paper, I will first review the respondents’ child care preferences. Then I will discuss the problems they have had with child care. Next I will report their child care needs, both those that they declared and those that emerged from analysis of their statements. I include under the category of unstated needs respondents’ failure to acknowledge a) the times when their children should have been in the care of other responsible adults but were not, and b) their evaluations of their child care providers’ behavior that rely heavily on reports from their children. Last, I suggest implications of these findings for public policy.

## **The Research Project**

I designed an open-ended questionnaire to obtain information on respondents’ child care preferences, experiences, and needs. Previous studies have indicated that meeting

individuals' needs and satisfying their preferences for child care facilitates their employment.<sup>2</sup> I inquired if they had lost jobs, quit school or training programs because of difficulties with child care. Also, I asked how many children they had and what were the children's ages and genders. In addition, I requested information about their household budget, education, and marital status. Then, I asked about their ethnicity or race and other demographics. Each topic of inquiry was suggested by previous research as important for the connection between child care and low-income persons' successful employment. For instance, while there are similarities between members of ethnic groups who are the working poor, there are differences among them in terms of assets: More Hispanics lack health insurance than non-Hispanic white or non-Hispanic blacks.<sup>3</sup> My last questions were about respondents' understanding of the policy and procedure for obtaining W-2 agency-subsidized child care, and if they had additional comments to make about child care programs and needs.

To find low-income persons for the study, I initially went to two food pantries. From March until September 1997, I interviewed twenty eight persons at the pantries. I then did 113 interviews at the county employment center, which is the local W-2 agency, until April 1998. Interviews were completed in approximately fifteen minutes, in fact, had to be finished in this time frame because respondents were met and interviewed while they were completing other activities, such as obtaining food or applying for other services. I guaranteed interviewees' confidentiality and anonymity; I did not even ask for their names or other personal information.

### **Preferred Child Care**

The first question I asked these parents was about the kind of child care they preferred; I did so for two reasons. First, other studies have documented the connection between parents' satisfaction with their child care providers and other parts of their lives, especially their ability to work without anxiety about their children's welfare.<sup>4</sup> Therefore contentment with child care arrangements is going to be very important for those participating in the W-2 program.<sup>5</sup> Second, I wanted to learn why they had these preferences.

I anticipated that parents would say that they preferred a particular type of provider when I asked what kind of child care they would like for their youngsters. Instead, their answers revealed that their primary concerns were with the *quality* of child care: safety, trust, and their children's developmental needs (Table 1).<sup>6</sup> Fifty respondents reiterated their apprehension about providers' trustworthiness in their spontaneous comments about not trusting others with their children. (See Table 1.) And interviewees were sometimes very clear about how their children's socialization in child care would influence the remainder of their lives. For instance, one claimed that, "The child that has been ignored will have problems in school and it will go on and on."

**Table 1**  
**Valued Attributes of**  
**Preferred Child Care Providers**

	<b>Percent of Responses</b>
<b>Quality</b>	19.8
<b>Center</b>	19.2
<b>Trustworthy</b>	18.1
<b>Promotes Development</b>	15.8
<b>Home/Family Provider</b>	12.4
<b>Care by Parent</b>	5.15
<b>Affordable</b>	2.58
<b>Other</b>	6.95
<b>Do not Know</b>	.02
<b>N</b>	141
<b>Total</b>	100.00

Some interviewees did choose centers over in-home/family providers, based on their perceptions that children’s developmental needs are met better in centers and that their safety is more assured there. For example, one interviewee stated, “I’d love to have him in a classroom situation with six to eight children. He needs the social interaction. I don’t want him with just a sitter.” Another said, “the providers have patience. You don’t have to worry about someone smacking them around. Mine are big enough to tell.” Other researchers have also found that low-income parents do not have much trust in family/in-home providers.<sup>7</sup>

Some respondents stated that their children were safer in centers because providers would prevent each other from harming them. Interviewees also believed that they would receive more accurate accounts of how their children were treated and how they were behaving if they got reports from more than one provider.

Interviewees who favored home care selected the consistency of one provider and the assumed greater personal attention to the children as two of the reasons why they preferred this kind of care. As one respondent said, “In centers sometimes people [staff] are in and out and don’t last long. Sometimes when I go in the room, there’s a shift change and they don’t know what he’s done. I ask questions and they’re puzzled.”

These interviewees also seemed to want child care comparable to parents’ care of their own children: “It’s more like home . . . More like being at home with Mom.” One respondent preferred in-home care because her “kids are more attached to the home environment than others their age.” Such parents probably would not agree with the perspective that “young children live in worlds that take them outside their own homes and into interactions with

other individuals. . . . Perhaps we need to view day care and home care as complementary. . . .”<sup>8</sup>

Nine respondents wanted to care for their children themselves. Four interviewees expressed concern about payments. One parent described what happens to children when their parents cannot afford child care, and the repercussions it can have on the family:

I’d like less expensive care, at \$180 week per child, and I had three kids in care, that’s more than my rent. Now the eight- and nine-year-olds are home an hour before the fifteen-year-old gets home. The eight- and nine-year-olds lock the house after themselves [when they leave for school]. They’ve done this since they were five and six. The manager refused to sign a lease because of noise complaints, because the kids were unattended.

The remaining eleven respondents gave answers that were not repeated more than once, therefore I placed them in the category marked “Other.” This category contained responses such as the interviewee wishes to have a provider who will act as surrogate parents, to secure child care at certain times of the day, and to have only women providers. Only three respondents did not know what kind of child care they preferred.

After learning about their child care preferences, I wanted to know if their experiences with child care providers indicated that they had secured such providers, were content with their services, and were able to work without concern for their children’s well being. Table 2 (Current Child Care) indicates that almost twenty-four percent had no child care, twenty percent had relatives and friends as caregivers, and nineteen percent used child care centers. Eighteen interviewees rated their current child care satisfaction as very satisfactory, two rated it as satisfactory, twenty-one rated it as fairly satisfactory, and twelve said they were not satisfied with their child care providers.<sup>9</sup>

**Table 2**  
**Current Child Care**

	<b>Percent of Responses</b>
<b>Home/Family Provider</b>	16.2
<b>Center</b>	19.7
<b>Relative/Friend</b>	20.4
<b>Parent</b>	6.3
<b>After School Program</b>	6.3
<b>Other: Head Start, etc.</b>	7.0
<b>None</b>	23.9
<b>N</b>	127
<b>Total</b>	100.0

### Problems with Child Care

Two groups of respondents are particularly interesting in this study (Table 3): The first is composed of the twenty percent who never had child care, and the second is the twenty-six percent who had problems with their providers. It is impossible to say anything about the group's ability to select among providers or how this will affect their employment success. However, the second group provides information on the most common kinds of child care problem these women have had and what impacts such problems have had on their employment.

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**Table 3**  
**Problems Experienced with Child Care**

	<b>Percent of Response</b>
<b>No problems</b>	19.9
<b>Finding Provider</b>	14.9
<b>Cost of Care</b>	9.2
<b>Provider problems</b>	26.2
<b>Never had Child Care</b>	16.3
<b>Other</b>	9.2
<b>Missing</b>	4.3
<b>N</b>	141
<hr/>	
<b>Total</b>	100.0

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Some interviewees complained that their providers had more children than they could care for properly. They mentioned situations such as a provider not having the time to clean the children, their clothing being soiled and their bottles dirty when these parents come to pick up the children. Or children suffer from insensitive treatment: "She cries her eyes out when I drop her off. Her teacher was like, 'oh, my God . . . I guess I'll have to deal with her.' . . . She needs someone to calm her down. More teachers per room."

Other respondents reported child care experiences that involved either some measure of abuse or the potential for it. For instance, one woman said that she came unannounced to see her child at noontime and found him sitting in a swing, asleep with food in his mouth, and in wet diapers. She learned that the toddler had been kept in the swing for most of the time that he was in the provider's care. Another interviewee recalled how her provider phoned her at work to come and retrieve her children because the youngsters allegedly were ill. "They didn't seem sick. Then I read [several days later that] she was charged with child abuse."

Securing a provider was troublesome for nearly fifteen percent of the sample. Some respondents had to find a provider for a short period of time, e.g., before and after school or

when there were no classes because of teachers' conferences. Other interviewees had more difficulty getting child care because they had to locate a provider who could take all of their children. Licensed centers and licensed or certified in-home/family providers can care for only a certain number of children of particular ages. Therefore, a set of siblings may not be able to be cared for by one provider because there is no match between their respective number and ages and the available "places" in the provider's facility. Infants are especially difficult to place in child care because some providers will not take such young children. The demand for such a provider is high. Parents whose lives are complicated by job searches, arranging for child care payments, etc., are at risk of losing such a provider. One respondent described how she lost a provider: "I called ten providers through 4-Cs (Community Coordinated Child Care; they list licensed and certified providers) and [they] didn't have room because my child is four months old. I lined up a provider, but her father had her that day, and the provider got another child." Providers who do care for infants, and abide by regulations governing the lower ratio of infants to providers, may take fewer older children. Thus, the result for a family may be that not all siblings can be cared for by the same provider. It is ironic that parents who want to minimize the amount of time they spend going to and from providers and jobs on public transportation are confounded by licensing and certification regulations aimed at protecting their children—regulations that often necessitate the use of several providers.

The respondents who experienced the most problems finding child care were those whose children had special needs. One of these parents explained how she organized the day for her adolescent son who was unable to care for himself and required providers trained to meet his physical and treatment needs when he was not in school or with his mother. Two interviewees described younger children with severe behavioral problems. One child was "kicked out of two places because she was about a year or so and she was biting other kids," and the other's mother was worried that a provider would not be able to cope with her child and would "beat him to death."

Only nine percent of the respondents mentioned difficulties paying as their primary child care problem. A few respondents complained that they wanted to pay for child care only when they needed it and not according to a fixed schedule. Providers, however, must be assured that they will receive an income from caring for a certain number of children each week.

Fifty-three percent of all interviewees said that presently they paid nothing for child care. Thirty-nine respondents claimed not to pay for child care, not to have earnings, and not to have grants.

Some individuals said that their co-payments for subsidized child care were too expensive. For example, one respondent noted that when "W-2 just started, the co-pay was \$29 a week and it was too expensive. I had \$13 left after paying all my bills. 'Children Come First' paid my co-pay." The description of child care as unaffordable is based on the fact that some of these interviewees earn \$5.75 an hour. They claim that they are unable to exist on this amount, so they quit their jobs, and sought reinstatement in the W-2 program, which had

repercussions for their child care. As one woman remarked, “So now I’m looking for a job . . . I got a ten-day notice that my child care would end because I quit. . . . You’re bouncing your kid around [taking child from provider to provider to avoid paying child care fees].”

One way of defraying the costs of child care is receiving child support from the non-custodial parent. Sixty-seven percent of the respondents claimed no child support payments and ten percent offered no information about this. Lack of child support from low-income noncustodial parents is a common problem.<sup>10</sup> Sometimes mothers, who are typically the custodial parents, prefer to receive help in-kind from their children’s fathers. For instance, clothes, diapers, and so forth are taken as support, rather than pressing the men to pay through family courts. The men can fall behind in their support payments, be incarcerated, and then mothers and children have no assistance.<sup>11</sup> It is worth noting that the mothers in this study also weigh the social and emotional benefits or liabilities of their children’s involvement with their respective fathers.<sup>12</sup>

About twenty percent of the sample reported having had no problems with child care; their explanations for this often hinged on having a particular provider, for example, a grandmother or a provider with unique characteristics, “She let parents walk in unannounced. . . . She was involved even when she wasn’t working. . . .” A curious fact associated with these respondents is that a number of them did not explain why they have not had problems with child care, suggesting among other things that relatives and friends whom they did not want to identify cared for their children. The percent of these respondents is very similar to those professing not to pay rent and to sharing accommodations, i.e., seventeen and eighteen percent, respectively. Close to half of the individuals who claimed that they did not pay rent shared accommodations. The remainder of those who indicated that they shared a household said that they paid rent.

### **Correlations between Child Care and Employment**

Of the 141 respondents in this study, 74 answered the question whether problems with child care contributed to their losing a job, schooling, or training. Fifty-five individuals replied that they were terminated or quit jobs/training programs or withdrew from school owing to difficulties with child care. Their adversities included having providers who did not want to care for their children on weekends, having children with health problems who required medically trained providers, and not earning enough to pay for unsubsidized child care. One woman described the connection between unaffordable, unavailable, and unreliable child care that led her to AFDC receipt:

I worked at [a hotel] for two years. They were understanding. But I was calling every other day to say I didn’t have child care because I could only pay \$50 every other week. Nobody was willing to do child care for this. Then I just quit and I went on AFDC because they were not willing to pay for child care. I cycled through AFDC and work three or four times because I had no child care.

What she will do in the W-2 system is unclear.

While this woman is a classic example of the need for subsidized child care for workers earning low wages, individuals who are paid more also have this need. For instance, another interviewee was a divorced man with a middle-class income who had custody of his children. If he had no child care subsidy, he would have to pay \$400 a week, or \$20,800 per year, for child care for his children with special needs. If one subtracted his child care payments from his annual salary, this man became the equivalent of a low-wage earner. This man was not, however, a typical low-wage earner. He had job security, medical and pension benefits. Because of these, he was not like the previously described woman and most other low-income earners who are W-2 participants.

### **Child Care Needs**

I learned about respondents' jobs when I asked them when they needed child care. Most interviewees said that they needed child care during the hours when they were at work, mainly from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Some respondents had only part-time jobs because they were in W-2 training programs. Others were employed full-time but not during regular shifts. A few interviewees listed work hours that indicated they had more than one job. Others noted that because of the kind of employment they had or because of their employers' wishes, they had work schedules that changed over time. I heard statements such as: "I work six days a week, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., but it varies" [i.e., one week the person will begin the weekly shift on a Monday and work until Saturday and have Sunday and Monday off; then start the next six-day week on Tuesday through Sunday], and "[I have a] flexible schedule, including weekends that makes it more difficult, usually afternoon, often 11 a.m. to 4 p.m." The changes in their work schedules and the hours when they were at work made it hard for them to obtain child care.

Centers usually do not have evening and weekend hours. In-home/family providers, while frequently having more flexible hours than centers, also have limits on their hours of service. As one interviewee noted, "There's no care for CNA's [certified nursing assistant] working second shifts [4:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m.]."

Not only did a number of respondents need child care for jobs whose hours and schedules made finding this care difficult, but they had to receive subsidies for it within the parameters of W-2 regulations. One interviewee described the connections among these issues:

I got a job today. I have to see my worker and see if she'll up my hours [certify more hours of subsidized child care]. I'm to start tomorrow, and all the paperwork...When I talk with my worker there will be problems because she needs so much stuff and the center hasn't been informed that the kids will be coming more. But I got the job and have to start tomorrow. Everything stops when you get a job. They [the W-2 agency] see no reason to lose a job, but you don't know if you'll have child care, if you'll get there to the job on time.

I asked interviewees if they needed child care for any time other than work. Almost fifty percent answered that they did not need child care for any other reason, and eighteen percent gave no answer to this question. The thirty-two percent who claimed that they needed child care when they were not working required it for respite, appointments, time to find a job, housework, school, community involvement, and for activities that they did not specify.

I was puzzled why all interviewees did not list the non-work reasons for child care, because one would expect all parents to benefit from time to relax or do tasks without having to attend to their children. Did only some respondents have these needs for child care, or did some of them not recognize and thus not state these needs?

### **Unstated Child Care Needs**

I think the answer to this question lies in interviewees' responses to my inquiry as to "when" they needed child care. Eighty-six individuals replied with the hours during which they needed child care, and of these, fifty-two gave *the exact hours of their jobs*—not including the time needed for transportation. This same pattern is seen in the responses of thirty-eight respondents who could not tell me when they needed child care because they either had no job, their job schedules were changing, or they were not certain when their work hours would be. Interviewees' answers to my questions and their extemporaneous comments seemed to indicate that they perceived child care as needed essentially for work; these individuals are not unique in this perception. W-2's policy makers knew that "welfare recipients share society's view of the importance of the role of work."<sup>13</sup>

The respondents, especially those who correlated the times at which they needed child care with the start and stop time of their jobs and did not add transportation to these hours, appeared to share the W-2 agency's assessment of when they needed subsidized child care. At the beginning of the W-2 program, participants received *no bus fare to take their children to and from child care providers*. W-2 paid only for the participants' bus fare, not their children's. The cost of transporting children to child care providers was not included in child care payments because, one assumes, the need for child care began not in terms of when the children were out of the parental home, but when the parents clocked in at their jobs.

This equation of child care needed with parents' work times may explain why the overwhelming majority of these respondents did not say that their children required child care during school vacations, when teachers had conferences and the children would not be in classes, and during holidays. Only 4 of the 141 interviewees expressed a need for child care during these times and when school-aged children were sick. And a majority of respondents with children between the ages of five and twelve did not indicate that they needed child care before and after school when these respondents were not at home. I think that these interviewees have unstated needs for child care during all the times mentioned above when they are not with their children.

I believe they have another unstated need regarding their children's competence to monitor their own child care providers and report this to their parents. At the beginning of

this paper I quoted a respondent as saying, “You don’t have to worry about some-one smacking them around. Mine are big enough to tell.” Fifteen individuals made similar claims about their children. For example, one woman assured me that her five-year-old would tell her how his provider treated his younger siblings. The social science literature contains few studies of how well children assess their child care situations. One of the few studies that solicited children’s evaluations of social services found that the children reported more reliably on restrictive and intrusive services than on those given in “their natural environment.”<sup>14</sup> My respondents’ confidence in their children’s capacity to tell them about their child care experience may be undermined by the fact that their child care situations may be considered “their natural environment” and that some of the children whose reporting capacities they trust are younger than the children in the other study. Parents may need another means of evaluating their child care providers.

### **Discussion**

Most respondents wanted quality child care, and most of their complaints about child care providers were about the lack of such care. A few interviewees tied the dearth of quality child care to the W-2 program. They thought that the program propelled single parents into the work force, creating a greater demand for child care, but before quality care could be created. They believed also that the W-2 agency, in its eagerness to encourage everyone who could work to work, pushed individuals into becoming child care providers for two reasons. First, these persons could meet the demand for child care providers. Second, individuals who could not find other employment were channeled into doing child care. W-2 staff allegedly expedited these persons’ registration as child care providers by shortening their training program and modifying certification regulations. These respondents also believed that such child care providers had health problems, which partly explained why they were not employed in other sectors. Because these providers are in poor health, they frequently cancel their child care services, respondents maintained.

While interviewees valued quality child care, they associated the need for child care with the times when they had to be at their jobs. Their association may be a result of my question, “When do you need child care?” If I had inquired, “Why do you need child care?” I might have received answers addressing the need for quality care of a child in its parent’s absence. The respondents’ frame of reference, however, seemed to be their work because, for example, they did not include times when the children were not in school as times they needed child care. Their hours at work were the exclusive focus of their attention.

Respondents did not agree whether their “work” was the same as the work that their child care providers did. Some interviewees claimed that child care was the “hardest job in the world” because providers had to nurture, educate, and keep children safe. Other individuals said that it was the “easiest job.” And there were respondents who referred to child care as work in one place in the interview, but in another place equated it with merely watching children, playing with children, or being in their presence. There seems to be some sense that “real work” requires one to leave one’s house. If child care is performed in one’s

house, then for some individuals, it does not constitute “work.” As one respondent said, “[Providers will] be bold enough to say, ‘I’m stressed out. I need some time to myself.’ Well, have some toys around, you’re at home. Be relaxed. I have to go to work.”

In these interviews, both notions of child care and work seem to be defined as involving transactions of money between persons not related by friendship or kinship. For example, one person said in response to my question about when she needed child care, “I don’t need child care because he’ll go to a friend or to my mother.” I did ask respondents if they exchanged services or child care with those who were their unpaid child care providers. Most interviewees said that they did not do this. Their denial of such reciprocity may be a matter of semantics—child care is something for which one pays money, whereas the same behavior may be called other things when no money payment is involved, for example, “babysitting,” “watching kids,” and so forth.

Perhaps these individuals do not need anyone to care for their children except when they are at work. One wonders, however, why they do not have a need for relaxation, a change of activity, and an opportunity to do tasks without also having to supervise their children. I suggest that these respondents really have *unstated needs* for child care for all of these times and during school vacations, sick days, holidays, and before and after school when they are not with their children.

The other unstated need that I believe these individuals have is a mechanism for evaluating the safety of their children when they are with child care providers. Prompting children to report on their providers or warning them about certain behavior may convey to children that their parents are placing them in the care of someone untrustworthy. What does that do to the children?

### **Conclusions**

These findings are similar to those of other research: Child care problems are associated with the demands and limitations of the parents’ low-income jobs.<sup>15</sup> Parents are concerned about the safety and trustworthiness of their child care providers.

However, one result may well be unique to this study: These respondents *underrepresented* their child care needs. This became apparent after analyzing two sets of questions. First, it emerged from respondents’ answers to the questions about when they needed child care, if they needed child care for work, and if they needed child care for other reasons. Second, it came from interviewees’ statements about the ages of their children and which of their children needed child care. Interviewees’ association of the primary need for child care with their jobs and their omission of child care during holidays, school vacations, and sick days appeared during analysis of the first set of questions. An understanding of how many young children were not acknowledged to need child care before and after school came from analysis of the second set of questions.

I believe that the open-ended interviews facilitated my learning about these interviewees’ underrepresentation of their child care needs. It also aided in the elicitation of respondents’ perceptions that their children could inform them about child care providers’

behavior; I would not have thought to inquire about this possibility. The lessons of this research, based on these unsolicited findings, are that respondents do not always consciously recognize all of their needs and that researchers cannot envision all of the important data they should collect.

These unexpected results provide insights for those doing public policy research: a) researchers may not know all the questions to ask about an issue, b) it cannot be assumed that people report all the needs that they have, c) researchers should analyze people's stated needs to learn if they have reported them all, and d) since researchers may not identify all the research questions to ask, so too they may not consider all important factors in their analysis. To complete their understanding, they ought to return to the people they have interviewed and solicit their feedback about the results and analysis.

#### NOTES

1. *Philosophical Overview, Program Overview, W-2 Agency Model, Employment Supports* (May 1996), p.4.

2. Gary L. Bowen and Peter A. Neenan, "Child Day Care and the Employment of AFDC Recipients with Preschool Children," *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*, v.13, no.1 (Spring 1993), p. 63.

3. *Indicators of Welfare Dependence: Annual Report to Congress* (October 1997), pp. III - 28.

4. Carol J. Erdwins, Wendy J. Casper, and Louis C. Buffardi, "Child Care Satisfaction: The Effects of Parental Gender and Type of Child Care Used," *Child and Youth Care Forum*, v.27, no.2 (1998), p.118.

5. Marcia Meyers, "Cracks in the Seams: Durability of Child Care in JOBS Welfare-to-Work Programs," *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*, v.18, no.4 (Winter 1997), p. 403.

6. Thirty-three of the 141 respondents gave more than one answer to this question, which explains why the total number of responses is more than the number of study participants.

7. Lara B. Herscovitch, "Child Care Choices: Low Income Mothers in Bridgeport, Connecticut," *Child and Youth Care Forum*, v.25, no.3 (June 1996), p. 139.

8. Florence Long and Laurie Garduque, "Continuity between Home and Family Day Care: Caregivers' and Mothers' Perceptions and Children's Social Experience" in *Continuity and Discontinuity of Experience in Child Care*, eds. Donald L. Peters and Susan Kontos (Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing, 1987), p.86.

9. I did not give respondents a scale on which to rate their satisfaction with child care providers. Consequently, the category "fairly satisfied" does not produce much discrimination along the continuum from "very satisfied" to "very not satisfied." It does inform us that parents are not going to place their children in "very not satisfied" child care situations and that the largest portion of this sample wishes for better child care.

10. Paula W. Dail and Alice A. Thieman, "Improving Parental Partnerships in Low-Income Families as a Means for Increasing Noncustodial Parental Compliance with Child Support Orders: A Research Report," *Journal of Family Issues*, v.17, no.5 (September 1996), p.688.
11. Kathryn Edin and Laura Lein, *Making Ends Meet: How Single Mothers Survive Welfare and Low-Wage Work* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1997), pp. 40 - 41.
12. J.N. Perloff and J.C. Buckner, "Fathers of Children on Welfare: Their Impact on Child Well-Being," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, v.66, no.4 (1996), p. 557.
13. *Program Narrative: Wisconsin Works W-2* (Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, Madison, WI, 1996), p.3.
14. E.M.Z. Farmer, A. Angold, B.J. Burns, and E.J. Costello, "Reliability of Self-Reported Service Use: Test-Retest Consistency of Children's Responses to the Child and Adolescent Services Assessment (CASA)," *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, v.3, no.3 (September 1994), p.307.
15. Stacey J. Oliker, "Work Commitment and Constraint among Mothers on Workfare," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, v.24, no.2 (July 1995), p.173.

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# **Work Requirements and the Care Crisis: Everyday Lives of Single Mothers Under the New Welfare Laws<sup>1</sup>**

**Peggy Kahn, University of Michigan-Flint**

**Valerie Polakow, Eastern Michigan University**

**Paula Pemberton, University of Michigan-Flint**

## **Work requirements and caregiving under the new welfare laws**

What is the impact of new work requirements under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 upon women's ability to care directly and indirectly for their children? What sorts of needs for child care do work requirements create, and what mixture of personal, market-based, public services, and "informal" child care are women on welfare forced into, as social policy creates escalating work requirements but provides few supportive child care services?

U.S. social policy has never emphasized caregiving; it has provided neither public child care services nor income support for parental care in the home, such as paid parental leave or child allowances, as do many European countries.<sup>2</sup> Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) originally made some concessions to caregiving. Since the 1960s, as women's labor force participation has increased, as women have been to some degree released from a gendered moral obligation to care, and as the fraction of women of color on the welfare rolls has increased, the emphasis of welfare policy has shifted towards pressing poor single mothers into low-wage jobs.<sup>3</sup>

The 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act carries this idea that poor single mothers are workers and not caregivers a step further, requiring nearly all single mothers to work twenty hours a week if they have children under six, and twenty-five to thirty hours if their children are older; states are free to impose more stringent requirements, and Michigan compels clients to accept jobs requiring as many as forty hours. Rather than a nationally mandated entitlement based upon need as under the old AFDC program, cash benefits are now contingent upon clients satisfying this new behavioral requirement. Strict penalties are imposed on clients who are deemed to be noncompliant, and only a narrow list of recipients are exempt.

Despite a well-documented crisis of quality, affordability, and accessibility of child care for low-income parents,<sup>4</sup> PRWORA makes it impossible for single mothers to care for their own children directly, repeals the pre-existing legal guarantee of child care assistance

for those on welfare and making a transition off, sets low subsidies for market services, and does nothing to increase the supply of high-quality child care services. The total amount of the new national child care block grant and total budget allocations in states including Michigan fall far short of estimates of need under the new act, particularly for infant care. Despite this, most states have declined to use the large TANF surpluses accumulating due to reduced caseloads to support child care services.<sup>5</sup> Although federal law permits work exemptions for mothers with infants less than one year old, Michigan's Family Independence Agency (FIA) grants work exemptions only to mothers with infants less than twelve weeks.

In Michigan, clients in compliance with work requirements receive child care subsidies up to the seventy-fifth percentile of the market cost of care in a given community. While in June 1999 the state finally increased its reimbursement rates for children under two-and-a-half years to reflect 1998 market rates, the basis for subsidies for children over two-and-a-half remains a 1994 survey. FIA reimburses providers only for hours during which the parent is working. Many parents, however, may start or end work in mid-morning or mid-afternoon, while many providers require payment for half days. Even very low-income clients on assistance may be responsible for paying these unsubsidized hours.

Michigan Child Care Coordinating Council (4Cs), a nonprofit child care resource and referral agency, estimates that only one-third of FIA-eligible children were receiving these subsidies in 1997.<sup>6</sup> No subsidy is available for children thirteen or older. To qualify for a state payment of \$1.60 per child per hour, a "legally exempt" unlicensed day care aide need only pass a police check and be over sixteen. Such unlicensed care varies greatly in safety, reliability, and quality, and is subject to no regulations or monitoring, undercutting child care standards and provider accountability.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, licensure and monitoring in Michigan mean less, as the average caseload for public child care consultants has increased dramatically. Since Michigan has a unified child care subsidy system for all low-wage workers, families can continue beyond twelve months of transitional child care subsidy to receive limited subsidies based upon their income.

Access to child care subsidies is controlled by an overloaded and inefficient social services bureaucracy, which moves slowly to authorize and send out payments. In Michigan, the Family Independence Agency has forty-five days to determine eligibility and process applications for child care subsidy, and clients routinely have to wait six weeks or longer for the subsidy to be paid directly to the provider. Sanctions for not working move quickly, but child care support subsidies move slowly. While the inability to locate child care is formally a reason a recipient can be exempted from work requirements, the Michigan Assemblies Project found only 4.9 percent of clients surveyed had ever been informed of this provision, and DHSS regulations issued in 1999 suggest widespread problems of this sort across many states.<sup>8</sup>

### **Work and child care in the lives of two Michigan women**

The stories of two women living in Genesee County, Michigan, who are among the

fifteen women we have followed for nearly two years, illustrate the painful dilemmas and strategies of single mothers attempting to cope with new work requirements. They show what arrangements mothers make for their children when they are forced to accept low-waged jobs as a condition for receiving help with food, housing, and everyday life expenses.

### **Jennifer**

Jennifer, a twenty-eight-year-old white woman, is the mother of two children, aged two and eight. The eight-year-old has been diagnosed with attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder. While she is committed to her family's economic independence and self-sufficiency, Jennifer sees her parental care responsibilities as her first priority. She has worked low-wage jobs since graduation from high school and has some training in medical recordkeeping. She resorted to assistance when she left a violent partner.

In 1997 the work requirements forced Jennifer to quickly get another job after she quit a receptionist and bookkeeping job at a muffler shop due to sexual harassment. In July 1997 she strategically got a job at the group day care home her children attended. Her caseworker at first disallowed this as work, claiming she was "just looking after her children," and only reversed her position after Jennifer lost considerable income and retained a legal services attorney.

Because she had no immediate family or close friends in the area who could look after the children, Jennifer was dependent upon a formal childcare arrangement. Her concerns about her child care arrangement grew over time. Jennifer talked about the licensed family group home her children attended and in which she worked, indicating the stress that paltry subsidies and poor quality care create for mothers on assistance.

When I [get a chance] my kids won't be there any more . . . In a home day care situation where you have 12 kids. . . I think that it works great for people who have functional homes, but when it's in a home that's dysfunctional . . . You know, she has children and her husband stays there. He doesn't work. There's no respect between the two of them, the mother and the father. Her two boys know no discipline. He tells the other kids he hates them and it's not beyond him to hurt them, hit them or knock them down. What scares me the most is (my kids) getting hurt.

The home was below the designated adult-child ratio when a licensing inspector visited and waved the home through. Chronic understaffing and poor and unsafe child care practices signal the limits of "licensure" as a guarantee of quality in an era of cuts in licensing staff and low child care subsidies for low-income families. In Michigan, licensing caseloads have risen from 182 to 265 sites per staff, and while the number of complaints has risen, the number of adverse actions has fallen.<sup>9</sup>

When Jennifer found a second-shift job as an emergency room clerk at a local hospital, she began making new child care arrangements. Now working nonstandard hours, she had

to combine formal with informal care. In the United States as a whole 7.2 million mothers, disproportionately less educated and in rapidly expanding service occupations, with 11.7 million children under fifteen, worked nonstandard hours; they had considerable difficulty arranging adequate child care.<sup>10</sup> In Genesee County, only 9 out of 235 centers were open past 6:00 PM on weeknights, while only 77 of 437 homes operated during evening hours. No centers were open on weekends, while about fifteen percent of homes were open for some weekend hours.<sup>11</sup> These figures overestimate the supply of care available to Jennifer, because they do not discriminate with respect to quality and do not address her geographical and transportation limitations.

On the whole, Jennifer was satisfied with a new family day care home she selected after a referral from 4Cs and her own visits and observations. Her oldest, then seven, could walk to the home after school. She reported that her daughter was doing well, despite the sudden decrease in hours during which Jennifer could be with her. But she went on to say:

Well, come to find out she hadn't had a car seat all along for (my child). And I was, you know, you have to let me know these things. . . . I work in the emergency room, you know; put a mother in panic thinking about things like that! Do you know how many kids we get in that emergency room, and you always think the ambulance is going to bring someone you know. . . . That two-year-old that drowned in the river! Oh, I'm like, you keep an eye on my daughter. Don't let your eyes off her.

As a nonstandard-hours worker, Jennifer needed informal care to supplement the regular hours care provided by the child care home. The younger child's father usually picked up the children, often late, and stayed with them at home. He was a good father to her little girl, according to Jennifer, but had conflicts with her son, who had particular needs for structure and nurturing.

When in late summer 1998 her licensed day care provider relocated many miles away, Jennifer faced serious new transportation problems: she would have had to transport not only the two-year-old but also find a way for the now eight-year-old to get to the home after school, though she was working a second shift. Jennifer was able to persuade her daughter's aunt to pick up and take care of both children; the aunt had two older boys of her own and was working a part-time minimum wage job at a drug store, which she was willing to quit if she could replace her wage with payment for child care. Jennifer's resort to informal care was consistent with the virtual explosion in Michigan of informal care—not subject to any regulatory process and varying greatly in safety, reliability, and quality. In 1998, relative and in-home care accounted for sixty-two percent of all child care for recipients of assistance, up from just over forty percent in 1995. Over the last three years, relative care has increased over 311 percent and non-relative in-home care has increased 230 percent.<sup>12</sup>

Jennifer's work hours, at first from 12:30 PM to 9:00 PM, were now 3:30-11:00 PM. She was initially optimistic that, though she wouldn't be able to see her son on weekday

mornings or evenings, he would do well in the positive, caring atmosphere of the aunt's well-functioning home and with the time they spent together on her regular week days off. However, when her son's behavior problems reappeared midway through the school year, Jennifer was convinced they resulted from the broken family rhythms created by her schedule.

In the course of the year and a half, Jennifer faced not only a limited supply of acceptable licensed day care at restricted hours and serious family problems as a result of her unavailability to her school-aged son, but also serious delays in FIA's payment of the child care subsidy. These delays wreaked havoc with her fragile finances and her sense of control. First, when she changed from the badly run family group home to the better, second family day care home, the FIA took nearly six weeks to pay the new provider, despite Jennifer's advance notice to the agency. The delay was typical of waiting periods in Genesee County, where they contribute to job loss, loss of day care slots, and high levels of stress for mothers. The second set of serious delays occurred when FIA failed—despite Jennifer's two-week advance notification—to pay her child's aunt, whose own fragile household economy was dependent upon the income. Jennifer was earning \$595 a pay period and paying \$400 for day care while she waited for the state to pay her new provider; so she had only \$100 a pay period after paying child care, and the \$1200 FIA owed her from an earlier error had not been repaid. She was going into debt and received an eviction notice, the second of the year due to FIA miscalculations and delays.

They had come, put a note on my door: 'As of Monday I am removing everything from this house,' — the court officer. I mean they had an eviction through the court, they had a writ, they had where they could have took my stuff out of the house. . . . I said, you know, this is ridiculous. I mean I'm treated with such ill regard; this is my life we're talking about. Here I am in a state of panic, they're gonna throw me out in the street.

These payment delays show how the rhythms of the understaffed social services bureaucracy, mainly focused on surveillance and discipline of clients according to paper-based bureaucratic procedures, conflict with the urgent, minutely timed transitions in the lives of low-income single mothers.

As Jennifer worked more hours at her unionized job, she was able to live without cash assistance, though she still required the day care subsidy. She was off the welfare rolls, though at the cost of her son's well-being.

### **Lakeisha**

Lakeisha is a twenty-six-year-old African American mother of two, a girl of seven and a boy of four, struggling to complete an undergraduate science degree, meet work requirements, and parent her two children. She was able to find a work-study job on campus, and attract child care subsidy for the interspersed work and study hours. Lakeisha was one

of a dwindling group of women on assistance in Michigan and nationally struggling to realize their educational aspirations, in the interest of their own development and their children's long-term well-being.<sup>13</sup> She went on assistance after leaving an abusive partner; she stayed in a local shelter for battered women for several months, then was rehoused with a Section 8 subsidy and began her postsecondary education.

She described the impact of the work requirements on her everyday life:

Well, the twenty-hour mandate has caused me to leave my children in the care of daycare providers for the majority of the day. I go to school full time and I have to work an additional twenty hours. . . . There's no time for quality time with my children. It's really taken a toll on me, and I think the requirement is ridiculous for college students who are taking full loads.

Like Jennifer, Lakeisha used a combination of licensed, formal care and informal care, sequencing as well as combining them. Because she had lived in a women's shelter at the agency whose child care center also served the university, she was a high priority for one of the twenty slots reserved for university students and staff. Though it was a licensed center with a good reputation, Lakeisha was still concerned about the quality of care given to her son, whose language development was slow and who had chronic but non-infectious cold-like symptoms. She told us:

I'm really having a problem (with the day care) with my son. . . . I'm beginning to feel like he's being ignored or not dealt with. I've had to have people stop in and check on him. I've picked him up and his nose is closed from not blowing, or he's coming home with diaper rashes.

She eventually insisted that her son go into another room, where she felt the staff was more attentive and her son was happy. In addition, she had problems with the day care center refusing to take her son for the day if his nose was running, though her physician had previously made clear to the center that the child was not contagious.

During the summers when she worked a well-paid internship with a local corporation, Lakeisha was disqualified from assistance and child care subsidy but couldn't herself afford to pay the child care fees. She had to send her children south to Mississippi to her busy mother, while she studied and worked. During the academic terms when she was also working, she relied upon friends and family members to supplement the formal care she had access to. Her father, an auto worker, tried to combine some care of the children with shiftwork. Her best friend was also a primary informal caregiver to her children; tragically, she died prematurely of asthma at twenty-two, just as Lakeisha's 1998-9 academic year was beginning, her child care subsidy delayed, and her work requirement rising to twenty-five hours. In 1998 she lost her son's place due to slow payment of the child care subsidy. She had to move him to what she regarded as an inferior center with poorer quality care. She

moved her daughter to the lower quality center, too, so that she could keep an eye on her younger brother, whose speech was still limited.

Lakeisha was also concerned about her daughter's attention-seeking behavior at home and her inability to spend time with her. In early 1999 her behavioral problems escalated, apparently triggered by lack of contact from her incarcerated father on her birthday. She was suspended from school, and Lakeisha enrolled them both in therapy. Her son had also been diagnosed as developmentally delayed, after an assessment appointment she wasn't able to attend because of her college class schedule; she felt uncomfortable with the diagnosis and felt she had to intensify her efforts to prevent teachers from treating him as a difficult or unteachable child. Also stressed by a demanding degree program in which she was now performing abysmally, Lakeisha was constantly overwhelmed and filled with self-doubt.

In May 1998, a year and a half away from her degree, Lakeisha told us:

I've damaged my family by spending so much time in school and work. Yesterday my daughter said, 'You don't even spend time with me.' I don't understand what kind of damage I'm doing in the long run, whether it can be repaired or not. . . . I'm sinking into depression. Now I doubt everything I do.

### **Conclusion**

Some critics of the PRWORA see it as a labor market institution coercing cheap labor from women in an expanding, low-wage, insecure service sector. Others emphasize that it is an attempt to chasten and control poor single mothers who dare to bear and raise children outside of patriarchal households. Both interpretations agree that the PRWORA impairs poor single mothers' capacity to meet their personal responsibility as parents and thus repudiates them as mothers.<sup>14</sup>

A welfare policy that respected poor mothers' parenting would compensate them for caregiving rather than drive them into low-wage jobs with little attention to their actual care dilemmas. However, if low-income mothers continue to be subject to work requirements, their parenting capacity—their ability to provide direct care or arrange satisfactory care services—could be assisted in a variety of ways.

Work requirements could begin when children reach one year, or even when they enter school at age five or six, rather than when infants are twelve weeks old. The work requirements need to accommodate parents who wish to attend to children's needs—for example, for parental attention in cases of their child's feelings of abandonment by an incarcerated parent, of attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder, developmental and learning problems, of physical illness. Single mothers should be actively assisted in locating and evaluating licensed child care provision. Increased training for providers and ongoing support services, as well as more rigorous licensing requirements and enforcement, would improve the quality of care. The subsidy should be raised at least to the going, current community market rate. The social service agency should also fully reimburse providers for half-day care when a recipient's work hours end mid-morning or mid-afternoon. Social

service agencies should pay considerable differentials for nonstandard hours care and encourage an expansion of such capacity, especially if they continue to require recipients to work at any hours. The payments process must be accelerated. State agencies should also inform clients that the welfare law prohibits penalizing families with children under six when safe and appropriate child care is not available. The public sector should directly provide high quality public child care services, though such provision does not appear politically likely.

While some feminists had hoped that requiring welfare recipients to work would reopen public policy regarding working time and child care for the sixty to seventy percent of women with children in the workforce, no such direction has emerged. Instead, the lack of enabling measures for all working mothers—only three months of unpaid, job-protected leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act, no national mandate for sick child time off, scarce and low-quality child care services—have continued to limit provision for women on assistance. Low-income single mothers and their children face a crisis at the sharp and destructive edge of what Hochschild (1995) has called the pervasive “care deficit” in U.S. society.<sup>15</sup>

#### NOTES

1. This paper draws upon a continuing research project initiated in fall 1997. The project, “Monitoring the Impact of New Welfare Laws on Low-income Single Mothers in Genesee County, Michigan,” is funded by State of Michigan Research Excellence Funds through the Project on Urban and Regional Affairs at the University of Michigan-Flint. It is a qualitative study of fifteen single-mother families and their social, economic, and emotional well-being, as they negotiate new work requirements while parenting with few public or private resources.

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# Life After TANF<sup>1</sup>: Single Mothers in Erie County, Penn- sylvania, Share Their Experiences

Laura Lewis  
Mercyhurst College, Erie, Pennsylvania

## The End To “Welfare as We Knew It” For Over 60 Years

Anti-welfare public sentiment, shaped and fueled by symbols, metaphors, numbers, and narratives, culminated in the 1980s, and continued into the 1990s, in what sociologist Herbert Gans termed a “war on the poor.”<sup>2</sup> In the early 1990s, dissatisfaction with the welfare system spread across the political spectrum, propelling the drafting of new welfare reform legislation. While finding agreement on how to “fix” the system eluded federal policy makers, there was consensus on the need for reform. Little recognition was given to the great good the “broken” federal system had allowed by assuring that some of the basic needs of children were met.

Some politicians and pundits made claims that welfare programs for women and children were wasteful *and* a cause of poverty in this country. Former California Governor Pete Wilson echoed the sentiment of many Americans with his statement that welfare has created “a system of dependency for hundreds of thousands of men, women, and most importantly children, that for too long has destroyed hopes and stifled ambitions.”<sup>3</sup>

Polls indicated that the public wanted government to control the costs of welfare and end long-term dependency. However, polls also indicated that the public believes government should assist the poor—poor children in particular.<sup>4</sup> After much debate, in mid-summer 1996, lawmakers finally agreed upon the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA, PL 104-193). Whether this legislation can effectively address the ambiguous and conflicting goals of reducing long-term dependency, supporting children, and controlling costs is not known.<sup>5</sup>

## Early Claims on The Success of Welfare Reform and Accompanying Fears

The ramifications of this legislation, which went into effect in Pennsylvania on March 3, 1997, are just beginning to play out. Some proponents of this legislation were crediting it as a “stunning success” less than six months into its implementation. In August of 1997, commenting on the large reduction in the welfare rolls (1.45 million people, or 9.7% at that point) since the enactment of the Act, President Clinton stated, “I think it’s fair to say that the debate is over, we now know that welfare reform works.”<sup>6</sup>

Proponents of the PRWORA point to the reduction of costs that welfare reform is expected to bring, a savings of more than 54.5 billion federal dollars over a five-year period. They argue that the legislation will promote responsibility and result in families being better off by removing the incentive to remain dependent on the system.

Opponents of this legislation fear that the PRWORA is resulting in increased economic hardship (and will continue to do so), as well as leading to increases in other social problems deriving in part from increased poverty, such as homelessness, hunger, and crime. Results from early findings support some of these fears.<sup>7</sup> Food pantries and homeless shelters are reporting record high numbers seeking assistance.<sup>8</sup> Further, in response to the conclusion equating reduction in the welfare rolls with success, some critiques point out that the rapid decline in the rolls actually began in late 1994, following a rapid increase in the early 1990s that peaked at over fourteen million recipients.<sup>9</sup> As of March 1999 there were approximately 7.9 million people on the TANF rolls, a 43.5% decrease since late 1994.

### **The Need For Thoughtful Assessment**

As with all social policy, there are bound to be both positive and negative consequences that result from the PRWORA's implementation. It is critical that the effects of the Act be carefully assessed in order to inform future public policy decisions. There are many studies underway that are seeking to determine whether the PRWORA is adequately addressing the perceived problems of the former welfare system and concomitantly resulting in ex-recipients being able to meet basic needs.

### **Methodology and Early Findings of the Erie County Study**

This particular research endeavor was designed to examine the economic status of a sample of Erie County, Pennsylvania, post-TANF mothers and their children. It explores the means that these women utilize to provide for their families, possible hardships and the magnitude of hardships encountered, and what the women believe to be the advantages and disadvantages of work. For this study, post-TANF mothers are defined as women who have exited the TANF caseload after securing employment. There was no time limit on how long the women had to have been on the TANF rolls, or how long they needed to have been off TANF, in order to participate in the study. They may still be receiving other in-kind government benefits.

Three central questions provide the focus for this research:

- 1) How are study participants faring economically?
- 2) How do study participants attempt to bridge the gap between monetary income from wages and their expenses, and how successful are they in doing so?
- 3) What are the advantages and disadvantages of employment as perceived by post-TANF working mothers?

This study provides documentation on the effects of the PRWORA for one segment of the ex-TANF population. The findings can be used to inform the public and lawmakers about whether or not post-TANF recipients who "play by the rules" in Erie County still live

in poverty. It indicates the type and degree of support services needed to help ensure that these women are able to remain in the work force and not return to TANF. Thus, it can serve to inform policy and program decisions. It is hoped that the findings can be added to the results of many other studies being conducted on welfare reform to serve as the impetus for a broad-based rethinking of the problem definition, and our subsequent approach to social welfare policy in this country.

### **Setting**

Erie County is located in the northwestern corner of Pennsylvania and covers 812.6 square miles. Thirty-six percent of the land area is forest and 34% is utilized for agricultural and related uses. The most populated city in this largely rural county is Erie with a population of 105,270 people. The total Erie County population is 280,270 with many people living in sparsely populated, somewhat isolated boroughs. At the time this study was undertaken there were 3,450 families (10,438 individuals) affected by TANF in Erie County.<sup>10</sup>

### **Sample**

Study participants include forty-two working, post-TANF, single mothers in Erie County. Participants were considered post-TANF if, prior to their first interview, which occurred between June 1998 and January 1999, they had ceased receiving TANF due to wages earned through full or part-time employment. They may have been receiving in-kind services such as food stamps, subsidized child care, subsidized housing, children's health insurance and/or Medicaid. Technically, they were no longer counted on the welfare rolls if cash assistance had ceased. There was no designated length of time that post-TANF recipients must have been off cash assistance to be eligible for this study.

A nonprobability sample was to be utilized for this study. Edin and Lein<sup>11</sup> found that when using a random sampling technique in a study with welfare recipients, most of the participants were unwilling to provide complete information on how they made ends meet. Edin believed that respondents feared she was "checking up" on them in some official capacity, and that what she needed was a way to gain the trust of the participants.

Participants in this study were recruited using two methods. First they were recruited through three local agencies: St. Benedict's Education Center, ERIE DAWN, and the Greater Erie Community Action Council (GECAC). St. Benedict's Education Center and GECAC are two primary social service agencies that have contracts with Erie County Public Assistance Office to provide job-readiness training. ERIE DAWN works with single mothers who are in need of housing.

The snowball method was also used. If participants knew of other people who met the criteria and might be willing to be part of the study, they were asked to contact that person(s) and obtain permission for the researcher to get in touch with them.

### **Procedures**

Interviews are being conducted in the homes of each of the participants or at a mutually agreed upon location. Each of the participants will be interviewed at six points in time over a four- to five-year time period. The length of the interviews varies, but it is estimated that anywhere from six to ten total hours will be spent with each participant.

Respondents received \$20 for the first interview session and \$20 for each subsequent interview. This payment is based on the principle that it is important that respondents receive some remuneration for their time.

### **Measure**

The survey designed for this study consists of the following sections that tap nine topics: 1) demographics 2) receipt of government assistance; 3) employment training and past and current employment; 4) participants' expenses; 5) participants' total family monetary income deriving from employment earnings, child support that is paid on a regular basis, interest/dividends, social security, and SSI; 6) total monetary income *plus* cash value of food stamps and child care subsidy (in-kind and periodic cash assistance from family and friends will not be included, nor will Medicaid, WIC, free/reduced meals at school, housing subsidy, or earned income credit); 7) an index of material hardship; 8) an index that assesses means used to bridge the gap between income and expenses; and 9) open-ended questions aimed at exploring the participants' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of work.

### **Initial Findings**

*Demographics.* Usable data for forty-two interviews has been collected. Following the descriptive data is a brief summary of information gathered from the open-ended questions that dealt with the perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of work.

The age range of the 42 participants is 19-51. Seventy-eight percent (33) of the participants live in the city of Erie and 21.4% (9) lived outside the city limits. Whites made up 59.5% (25) of the sample and nonwhites 40.5% (17). Sixty-seven percent (28) of the participants did not receive cash assistance while they were growing up. Almost 93% (39) have at least a GED or high school diploma and 64.3% (27) have had post high school vocational, technical, or other educational experience. Six-two percent (26) worked while they were on cash assistance. Of those who worked, 53.8% (14) did not report all earned income to their caseworker. The mean number of children participants have is 2.2. The amount of time participants had been off of cash assistance ranged from less than one month to 18 months, with the mean being 5.9 months. The range of time that participants had received cash assistance also varied greatly from just a few months to ten years.

*Employment.* The mean income of participants was \$6.45 per hour, the median \$6.24 per hour, and the range was \$5.15 - \$10.75 per hour. (See Table 1.)

Table I: Employment Information

N = 42

Pay per Hour	<u>Range</u>	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mean</u>
	\$5.15 - \$10.75	\$6.24	\$6.45

Type of Job Found	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>%</u>
service sector (office support staff, store clerks, food service)	26	61.9
health care aide	10	23.8
health care/professional	2	4.8
manual labor	3	7.1
trade	1	2.4

How Job was Found	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>%</u>
self (paper, walk-in)	16	38.1
social service agency help	16	38.1
OJT or internship	3	7.1
temp agency	1	2.4
friend/relative	6	14.3

Shift Worked	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>%</u>
day	23	54.8
second shift	9	21.4
graveyard	3	7.0
shift worked changes	7	16.7

Length of Time Expected To Stay at Current Job	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>%</u>
unstable or don't know	5	11.9
until I find a better job	14	33.3
1-3 years	7	16.7
3+ years	16	38.1

All participants were working but not all had full-time jobs. Of the 42 participants, 85% (36) held service sector positions such as clerical or office support staff, waitress, front-line employees at stores, and health care aides. Two were professional health care staff and four were in blue collar positions.

Thirty eight percent (16) of the participants reported finding their jobs by themselves and another 38% reported obtaining help from a social service agency. The

remaining 36% (10) secured their jobs through on-the-job training or an internship, a temporary agency, or leads from friends or relatives.

The number of hours worked per week ranged from 24 to 60 with a mean of 39. Fourteen percent (6) reported working more than one job. Approximately 55% (23) of participants worked the day shift, and the remaining 45.2% (19) worked either graveyard, second shift, or their shifts varied each week.

Participants reported how long they expected to stay at their current job. Approximately 38% (16) indicated they thought they would be in their current position for more than three years, close to 17% (7) said they expected to stay for one to three years, and the remaining 45.2% (19) reported that they really had no idea, their position was unstable, or they would stay in their current position only until they found a better job.

Table 2: Income, Poverty Status, and Expenses N = 42

*Gross Monthly Income	<u>Range</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Median</u>
	\$670 - \$2,575	\$1,172	\$1,084
Net Monthly Income	<u>Range</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Median</u>
	\$520 - \$2,100	\$982	\$905
Net Monthly Income W/Food Stamps and Child Care Subsidy	<u>Range</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Median</u>
	\$660 - \$2,700	\$1,368	\$1,226
Poverty Status	<u>Above Poverty Threshold</u>	<u>Below Poverty Threshold</u>	
	42.9% (18)	57.1% (24)	
Monthly Expenses	<u>Range</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Median</u>
	\$625 - \$2,700	\$1,527	\$1,478

\*Includes income from work, child support, SSI, and Social Security. Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is not calculated into the monthly gross income. Only one participant received EITC on a monthly basis.

*Income, Poverty Status, and Expenses.* The mean gross income of participants was \$1,172 per month. (See Table 2.) The mean net income of participants was \$982 per month. Note that the range of income varied greatly among participants. Still the

majority (57.1%) had incomes below the poverty level and some were just above the poverty level. By adding food stamp allotments and money paid by the government for subsidized child care, the mean income for participants increased on average \$386

dollars per month. This does not include the in-kind benefits of medical assistance and subsidized housing. Ninety five percent (40) of participants received Medicaid and 40% (17) of the participants received subsidized housing.

Just as the range of monthly incomes was great, so was the range of monthly living expenses accrued by participants. Some participants lived with relatives or shared the rent and utilities with a nonrelative. Many (86%) saved on expenses because they either received cash or in-kind help from family and friends.

*Changes in in-kind benefits.* After securing employment and ceasing to receive cash assistance, many of the participants experienced changes in the in-kind government subsidies received. (See Table 3). These included, but were not limited to a reduction in or the elimination of food stamps for 90% (38) of participants. Of the 38% (17) of participants who received a housing subsidy, 70% (12) had their subsidy reduced or eliminated. Nineteen percent (8) of the participants no longer received Medicaid. Five of the women began receiving health insurance through their employer for themselves, and one woman received it for herself and her children.

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Table 3: Changes in food stamp allotments, housing subsidy, and Medicaid N = 42

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>%</u>
<b>Food Stamps</b>		
Reduced	29	69.0
Eliminated	9	21.4
Increased	1	2.4
Stayed same	2	4.8
Did not know yet	1	2.4
<b>Housing Subsidy</b>		
Never received	25	61.9
If had received		
Reduced	10	58.8
Eliminated	2	11.7
Increased	3	17.6
Stayed same	2	11.7
<b>Medicaid</b>		
Eliminated for mom	5	11.9
Eliminated for family	2	4.8
Entire family still receives	35	83.4
Child(ren) still receives	40	95.0

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*Bridging the Gap between Income and Expenses.* Participants experienced reductions in government in-kind assistance but still relied heavily on such support in order to make ends meet. Approximately 71% (30) received food stamps, 54.8% (23) received subsidized child care, 38% (16) received subsidized housing, and 95% (40) of the mothers' children received Medicaid. While on TANF many had received help with transportation costs but this was no longer the case. They were eligible for a one-time grant of less than \$1,000 to purchase a car. Fourteen percent (6) of the participants received either SSI or Social Security.

Family and/or friends of participants were also relied upon for help. As noted earlier, 86% (36) received either cash and/or in-kind help from family and/or friends, such as free child care, food, and clothes (see Table 4).

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**Table 4: Bridging the Gap Between Income and Expenses N=42**

FORMAL CHANNELS

<u>Subsidies Received</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>%</u>
Food Stamps	30	71.4
Child Care	23	54.8
Housing	16	38.1
Medicaid	40	95.2

Cash Benefit

SSI	3	7.1
Social Security	3	7.1

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INFORMAL CHANNELS ACCESSED

<u>Source</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>%</u>
family/friend		
in-kind* (excluding partner)	36	85.7
family/friend - cash		
(excluding partner)	18	42.9
cash or in-kind from partner	14	33.3
periodic cash from child's father	6	14.3
in-kind from child's father	9	21.4
food pantries	14	33.3
social service agencies	9	21.4
(clothes, glasses, etc.)		
churches	4	9.5

\*in-kind from family/friends includes things such as providing rides to work, child care, food, non-food items, clothes, housing, help with utilities.

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*Difficulty Faced in Paying Bills, Securing Basic Needs.* Table 5 indicates that a total of 61.8% (26) of participants reported that they faced either about the same level of or greater difficulty in providing for their families and paying bills since leaving cash assistance. The remaining 38.8% (16) indicated that it was easier to secure the basic needs for their family and pay their bills than it was while they were on cash assistance.

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**Table 5: Overall Level of Difficulty\* Faced Since Exiting TANF**      N = 42

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>%</u>
Faced Greater Difficulty	17	40.4
Faced Less Difficulty	16	38.1
About the Same	9	21.4

\*Difficulty faced paying bills and accessing basic needs to provide for their family

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*Material Hardships Encountered Since Existing TANF.* Even after combining income, formal, and informal channels of assistance, 21.4% (12) of participants reported they had skipped meals due to lack of money since exiting cash assistance. Other hardships encountered due to their financial situation included: lack of nutritious food for themselves (19%); having to rely on family or friends to watch their children while they worked (54.8%); having to leave children in inadequate child care situations in order to work (26.2%); being threatened with eviction (11.9%); being threatened that telephone (31%) or utilities (28.6%) would be shut off. Seven percent of participants have had their phones shut off and 7% have had utilities shut off. (See Table 6, next page.)

**Compilation of Open-Ended Questions (N = 42)**

*Child Care Issues.* Sixty-nine percent (29) of the participants indicated that their child care arrangements ranged from okay to good. A problem with lack of available child care for people working night shifts or past midnight was noted. Two people said they had to turn down better jobs due to lack of available day care after midnight. A major concern was whether or not subsidized child care would be available after one year, since many of the women were on a program that lasted only one year.

One woman who could not get subsidized care had to send two of her children out of the state to live with relatives. This woman had four children and stated that there was just no way she could afford child care for all of them. One woman stated that she was repeatedly refused subsidized child care for her son, age eleven, and was told that her 15-year-old daughter should watch him. The son had behavioral problems and the mother believed he needed adult supervision. The boy has since been removed from the home due to the problems he was having.

Table 6: Hardships Encountered Since Exiting Cash Assistance N = 42

<u>Hardship</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>%</u>
Skipped Meals		
self only	12	21.4
self and children	1	2.4
Skipped buying fruits, veg.	7	16.7
Lack nutritious food		
self only	8	19.0
self and children	4	9.5
Had to rely on family/ friends for child care	23	54.8
Had to leave children in inadequate situation in order to work	11	26.2
Threatened w/eviction	5	11.9
Threatened w/phone disconnection	13	31.0
Threatened w/utilities disconnection	12	28.6
Had phone disconnected	3	7.1
Had utilities disconnected	3	7.1

*Transportation issues:* Transportation was stated as a problem by 35% (14) of the participants. A few are totally dependent on friends and relatives to get to and from work. Problems mentioned were not having money for the bus, for gas, and/ or for car repairs. Three participants stated that they were just waiting for their cars to fall apart, or to not pass an inspection. Those who relied on public transportation spoke of long waits for the bus since it may be a half-hour to an hour between buses on a specific route. Buses also run limited routes, so public transportation to some places where there are jobs is impossible. On weekends buses run even less frequently than during the week on some routes.

*Making Ends Meet without Formal and Informal Support.* The following statements are representative of the responses given when participants were asked what would happen if they had to rely on their paychecks alone to cover all expenses. The most common answer was: “I just couldn’t do it.” Others responded with: “I’d go crazy”; “God only knows”; “I’d go back on welfare”; “I’d get another full-time job and never see my kids”; “find a different job”; “try to work more hours”; “go to food pantries”; “we’d starve”; “it would not be worth it to work”; “have to move in with family”; “we just have to have it”; “I would beg, borrow and steal”; “I’d die”; “I don’t know”; “You do what you have to do”; “I don’t think we could survive.” Two participants stated that they could make it without formal and informal support.

*Self-Esteem Issues.* Forty of the 42 participants (95%) indicated that they felt better about themselves since leaving cash assistance. They stated that either their self-esteem had improved or that their confidence had improved. The women said work gave them courage, made them feel proud, gave them a sense of independence, gave them incentive to do more, and that they loved being out in the world and working.

*Overall Are You Better Off, or Worse Off, Since Exiting TANF?* Only one person said that she was worse off overall. The remaining 41 said better off, despite 61.8% (26) also indicating that they faced greater or the same amount of material difficulty. Most of those who said yes qualified their answer. They said they felt they were better off overall because they felt so much better about themselves, work had given them more hope, or because they had more cash to spend as they wished.

## **Discussion**

The information provided by participants in the first round of interviews clearly indicates that these women want to work even though it has not meant escaping poverty and material hardship for the majority of them. All of the women stated they would rather be working than collecting cash assistance. They reported feeling better about themselves, feeling more independent, and having a sense of pride.

While the women certainly indicated advantages to work, these findings suggest that the “work-first approach” will not ensure that women on TANF have an opportunity to become self-sufficient. Those who received training under the “old” (AFDC) system are the ones with the higher paying jobs. The Self-Sufficiency standard, developed by Diana Pearce and Wider Opportunities for Women,<sup>12</sup> indicates that a woman with one preschool child in Erie County must make at least \$8.63 per hour to become self-sufficient. Only 4 of the 42 participants made at least \$8.63 per hour. The overall mean for the 42 participants was \$6.45 an hour. One of the key concerns voiced was that in-kind support such as food stamps and Medicaid was not provided for a long enough period of time. They were not confident that after one year of being off cash assistance they would receive subsidized child care. Few of them knew about all of the benefits available to them. None had heard of the Child Care Works program, which is the new child care program that is mainstreaming the existing child care subsidy programs. Few knew about Pennsylvania’s Children’s Health Insurance Program, and the majority expressed concern about losing Medicaid.

It is evident that continued, and in some cases increased, government subsidies are needed in order to ensure that these women are able to provide for the basic needs of their families. Increasing co-payments for Child Care Works, which went into effect February 1, 1999, is going to be a financial hardship for these families, as is decreasing food stamps for every slight increase in salary.

Participants in this sample are very likely the “cream of the crop.” They are the individuals who exited the TANF rolls early on, before the two-year deadline hit. Women who face greater barriers to employment were not included in this study. They are either still on TANF without a job, have secured a job that is part-time or so low-paying that they

continue to receive TANF, or have exited TANF for failure to comply with the Agreement of Mutual Responsibility.

The participants in the study had only been off cash assistance an average of six months at the time of the first interview. The second, third, and fourth round of interviews will provide a clearer answer to such questions as: whether participants avoid returning to TANF; if participants are moving any closer to self-sufficiency; if participants switch from one low-paying job to another; and if participants' perceptions regarding the advantages and disadvantages of work change over time.

The economy remains strong and the rolls are down, so some claim welfare reform is working, but the jury is still out. The increased hardship experienced by many who leave TANF does not paint a picture of success, if our definition of success encompasses economic justice.

#### NOTES

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2. Herbert Gans, *The War Against the Poor: The Underclass and Antipoverty Policy* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995).

3. "Welfare bill signed by California Governor," *The New York Times* (Tuesday, August 12, 1997), p. A9.

4. Dan Bloom, *After AFDC: Welfare-to-Work Choices and Challenges For States* (New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, 1997), pp. 8-9.

5. Bloom, p. 9.

6. John Harris and Judith Havemann, "Is Welfare Reform Working," *The Washington Post National Weekly* (August, 1997), p. 34.

7. Children's Defense Fund and National Coalition for the Homeless, "Welfare To What: Early Findings on Family Hardship and Well-Being," (Washington DC: Children's Defense Fund, 1999), pp. 1-20.

8. A. Revkin, "Lines at Food Banks Growing," *Erie Daily Times* (Feb. 27, 1999), p. A1.

9. Bloom, p. 7.

10. Larry Cannarozzi, Unpublished statistical information (Erie: Erie County Department of Public Welfare, April 1, 1998), p. 1.

11. Kathryn Edin and Laura Lein, *Making Ends Meet: How Single Mothers Survive Welfare and Low-Wage Work* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1997), pp. 9-15.

12. Diana Pearce and Jennifer Brooks, *The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Pennsylvania: Selected Family Types* (Washington DC: Wider Opportunities for Women, Inc.), p. 27.

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- Welfare Information Network at [www.welfareinfo.org](http://www.welfareinfo.org).

# Excerpts from *Education as Emancipation: Women on Welfare Speak Out*<sup>1</sup>

Frances Paine Adler, Carol Lasquade, Adrian Andrade  
California State University, Monterey Bay  
Monterey Peninsula College

## Introduction

Frances Payne Adler

Welfare reform was born in Wisconsin, and I was there. Prior to coming to California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB), I taught at the University of Wisconsin, La Crosse. In the Fall of 1995, I attended a Senate hearing on Governor Tommy Thompson's then-proposed "Wisconsin Works" plan to eliminate existing welfare programs on January 1, 1997. The plan was to replace these programs with a set of punitive regulations aimed at forcing recipients—many of whom were my students—to quit school and take sub-minimum wage jobs. After listening to the testimony, I read a poem that I wrote during the "hearing." The legislation passed.

I left Wisconsin shortly after that to teach creative writing at California State University, Monterey Bay, and the concern about welfare reform stayed with me. When CalWorks, California's new welfare reform legislation, came into effect on January 1, 1998, I decided to focus my "Social Action Writing" class around a particular aspect of this issue. Students would research and write poems and stories about how CalWorks was affecting the lives of students.

I went to a meeting late one afternoon, at CSUMB's Service Learning Institute, and there I met Carol Lasquade, Coordinator of Monterey Peninsula College's CARE<sup>2</sup> Program. I still picture her talking about her students, and waving a book, saying, "I want a book about my students, so that people will know who they *really* are." It was a match. We became community partners, our students collaborating to produce *Education As Emancipation: Women On Welfare Speak Out*.

As a teacher, as a woman, as a citizen, I'm concerned. Welfare reform is the biggest change in social policy since the de-institutionalization of mental hospitals in the 1960s, spilling people onto the streets. I have only to look at what's happening in Wisconsin to see what might happen here in California. In the twelve months since Wisconsin eliminated welfare reform, the number of homeless people in Milwaukee (Wisconsin's largest city), has increased by thirty percent, according to a *Los Angeles Times* study.

Most of the adults on welfare are women. Many of all people on welfare are children. Welfare reform is everyone's business. As Marie Glavins, Director of Monterey County's Department of Social Services said, "Be involved, because welfare reform will affect

everyone in America.” In these selections, you’ll meet the women, hear their stories, enter their lives. Many have surmounted great hardships to get to community college. They are tenacious, committed. And they have a vision: to break out of welfare, and stay out. *After* they finish their education.

### **Wisconsin Works**

*read as testimony before Wisconsin Senate hearings  
on “Wisconsin Works” welfare reform bill, 1995*

we’re here to talk about poor women and work, poor women and work, as if they don’t work, but that’s another story, we’re here to talk about poor women, so let’s talk, shall we? not in the polite mid-western way, the smile on our face, how nice we are to find work for women, the dignity of work for women, how American we are to find work for women, a way out of welfare, how nice we are, let’s talk, shall we? what’s the plan here, work for women, what work? young people with three college degrees are out of work, people in their fifties with thirty years experience are out of work, what jobs, what work is there for women with no skills, outside of mothering that is, and we’ll make sure it stays that way, we’ll cut them off from college, and we’ll build in a little provision here, all welfare moms who can’t find a job, well we’ll just find them a job, won’t we, we’ll get into bed with industry, and provide a slave labor force, did I say that? did I say, a drone class, a drudge class, dignity, what dignity, let’s talk, shall we? and once these women, these poor women get a job, and the working conditions get worse, as they will, and if these women dare speak out, well, industry will just fire them, won’t they, and then we’ll build in another little provision here, case workers will, and I quote, remove children from the home if they’re not adequately financially supported, remove them from the home, and aren’t we nice, we’ll build orphanages for these children, and the women, the women, the poor women, they’ll be out on the streets, dignity? do I hear dignity? do I hear work? work? let’s talk straight here:

I believe you’re selling an illusion, it’s been done before,

it's been done to my people, brought to a concentration  
camp, the words above the door, *arbeit macht frei*,  
*work makes you free*, it's been done before

in our country, in this state, we do it differently, we do it  
politely, we smile and say aren't we nice Americans

- Frances Payne Adler

## **Preface**

Carol Amelia Lasquade

As CARE Coordinator and EOPS<sup>3</sup> Counselor at Monterey Peninsula College (MPC), I am blessed to work daily with the amazing women you will meet in this text. CARE is a collaboration between MPC EOPS and the Monterey County Department of Social Services, and is a program designed to assist single parent students receiving TANF benefits (formerly AFDC, see box, next page) in reaching their educational goals in college. CARE offers assistance with child care and transportation costs, a personal development class, academic and personal counseling, transfer assistance, workshops relevant to single parents and a number of other services.

As you will discover, our students are motivated, intelligent, dedicated to their families, and full of potential. Many have overcome extreme hardship to be where they are today. Their personal stories will be revealing, enlightening, sometimes shocking, and always inspirational.

I have been greatly disturbed by the restrictions imposed by welfare reform on this population. In order to ignite a spark of hope in others who are in similar situations, I wanted our students' personal stories told and I expressed the idea to former colleague Michelle Slade, Project Coordinator at the CSUMB Service Learning Institute (SLI). In January of 1998, Michelle arranged a meeting for a possible collaboration with Professor Frances Payne Adler. Fran and I clicked instantly, and I realized that she was the woman who could actually make this project a reality. The collaboration has both inspired and humbled me.

These are the facts. On January 1, 1998, California redesigned its welfare system in response to federal welfare reform, creating CalWORKs (California Work Opportunities and Responsibility to Kids) program. To continue to receive benefits, single parent students will be subject to time limits on aid and work requirements. These restrictions will adversely affect them because many will not have sufficient time to develop the skills necessary to earn a living wage for themselves and their children. With a limit of two years or less, many single parent students will obtain only minimal education and training.

The dilemma is that in addition to work and school, these students remain the primary caregivers to their children. Many receive little or no support from the children's noncustodial parent, leaving one parent with virtually all parental responsibilities. They must rely on themselves, their own survival skills and their resiliency to make it when so many obstacles block the way.

I have a bias here in that I am from a working-class background myself. My roots are Italian. My father and brothers work as truck drivers and construction workers. I was a single mom on AFDC for six years from 1979-1985 while living in Massachusetts. At age 26, I started at Northern Essex Community College in Haverhill, and at the time, my son, Matt, was age four. As the first in my family to go to college, I learned the “ropes” by trial and error. I was fortunate in that I had a solid foundation of support from my parents who encouraged me in every way, and I found highly supportive faculty and staff who took the time to help me develop the skills necessary for academic success. As Valedictorian of my class in 1981, I proved to myself and my family that I was intelligent enough to not only make it in college but excel in this very different world.

Some Welfare Reform Facts:

- \* The welfare reform bill signed in 1997 eliminated the federal entitlement program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). The new program is Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), a federally funded block grant program for states that provides time-limited cash assistance.
- \* Presently there are 140,000 welfare recipients attending California Community Colleges. Approximately 2,000 of these students are attending colleges in Monterey County.
- \* Current welfare recipients have a 24-month cumulative limit on aid. New recipients are limited to 18 cumulative months on aid. There is an overall lifetime limit of 60 cumulative months of benefits.
- \* To remain in school, CalWORKS participants must meet strict requirements that include 32 hours per week including hours in class and employment. All programs of study must be pre-approved by the County.
- \* Once students complete their community college programs, they will be expected to find employment and leave welfare.
- \* Students will not be able to transfer to a four-year college while they are in CalWORKS.

After receiving my Associate Degree, I received a full scholarship from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation to Smith College, where I graduated Magna Cum Laude with a Bachelor’s Degree in Psychology. From there I went on to receive my Master’s Degree in Psychology at Mount Holyoke College. Throughout my professional career, I have been committed to assisting others in reaching their potential because I know that *if I could do it, so could they*.

As you read through these pages and come to know the personal stories of these inspiring women, you will begin to understand that their intelligence, creativity, and life force must not be suppressed. They must be allowed to move forward with hope for a brighter future for themselves and their children.

### **It Feels Like Glory**

Rhonda Manada’s Story As Told Through an Interview by Adrian Andrade

*Rhonda Manada was born into the culture of welfare in the inner city of Los Angeles, California. Early childhood daydreams were shrouded in boulevards of boarded up crack houses, defunct churches and liquor stores. As a young adult she had many plans of escaping her bleak circumstances, but there were obstacles in her life keeping dreams just slightly out of reach. "Welfare reform is going to force me into a position where I will basically have to quit school and take on a low-paying job, keeping me locked in the cycle of poverty."*

*- Rhonda Manada*

"Feeling a tiny heart beat against my chest brought my dreams back to life," Rhonda recalls. "The birth of my son Levon compelled me to start thinking beyond just day to day existence." For the young couple with a new baby, leaving behind the hazy avenues of Watts was the first major step. Her arms swing out wide to illustrate the distance of the three-hundred-mile move north to the Monterey Bay. She laments, "The pressure of supporting a family began to manifest itself in our relationship. This guy really put me down. Not hit me physically, but mentally and emotionally beat me up." Rhonda overlooked the abuse and kept a positive attitude. "In spite of my troubles, I felt like I was still moving forward," she said. "I had managed to elude the trappings of a vicious family cycle."

Her sacrificed emotions bought the relationship more time, but eventually her significant other decided to return to L.A. Rhonda winces and says, "That's what was hard. My mom and six sisters were all down there. I made the decision to stay here. I just felt that I needed to stay. It was for me and for my son."

Only weeks later she was unable to pay rent. Home became the local shelter filled with men with worn leather faces, and women with tired dreamless eyes. Using her fingers like pliers, Rhonda pinches her nose recalling the stale odor of alcohol, tobacco, and dirty clothes. She says, "Although the shelter itself was clean, I knew I just couldn't stay there for very long. I needed some sort of money, like immediately, to get things going again. And welfare was the only thing I knew at the time." She sighs, and says, "The old trap was sprung and I was caught up in it."

"It wasn't like I hadn't tried to get work, but I was considered underskilled." She stood in lines for hours on end and signed miles of paperwork. This produced only minimum-pay dead-end jobs. "I still didn't have any better skills. I still didn't have any better education. So here I'd be on this \$5.00 an hour job working long hours and still not making any money. I was considered to be living in poverty."

*The stay at the shelter led Rhonda back to the welfare existence she had escaped in LA. but ironically it also turned out to be the passageway to her present day success.*

"It was humiliating but a real eye opener," she says, clasping her hands together. "The shelter ended up being kind of a blessing, because I met people there who steered me back

to college. That was where I discovered women's programs and EOPS. People were very willing to help." She reaches down and pulls out a few stapled slips of gray paper from her purse and excitedly waves them back and forth like victory banners. "I was on the honor roll three times," she says. "I've gotten all A's in my classes. School has been just wonderful for me. I keep discovering more and more about who I am. When my relationship ended, my self esteem was really low, then I come up here and start getting A's in all my work. It feels like glory."

The current welfare reform issues are jeopardizing Rhonda's recent success. "My biggest fear," she says, "is getting cut off and side-tracked before I can attain my goals of a higher education degree. It would steer me off course. I have come to realize that college is the only way to empower myself and take some control back over my life, especially with my son depending on me for support. No matter what," she says, banging both hands on the pile of books in front of her, "I plan on totally going the whole nine yards with my education. A Masters degree, you know, and ultimately a Doctorate. I've found something here that I can feel good about, something constructive and positive. I'm not about to let that go."

### **Were You There**

Antoinette "Toni" Fernandez' Story As Told by Erin Silvas

*Antoinette "Toni" Fernandez is the mother of Michael, 7, and Danny, 4. Michael likes to play soccer and Danny likes his kitten named Squeaky. Toni is studying to become a nurse. She would like to work in Delivery.*

*"I'd like to have something in the bank to where I don't have \$17 for two weeks. I'd like to have at least two, three, four hundred in the bank in a special account which is for emergencies only. I mean, God, what if my house burns down? I am going to have nothing. And that's the way they want you."*

*-Toni Fernandez*

Were you there when Freddy left me alone  
with a son swimming in my womb, his heart beating, his limbs kicking  
Were you there when I brought Michael to this cold gray apartment with a  
white tile floor  
Or when his father planted another seed inside me  
Were you there when 'the doctor' said *30 minutes* but meant three hours  
Or when Danny turned blue like veins before 'the doctor' would release  
him from my womb  
Were you there when my sons mumbled *mama* through their baby teeth  
Or when they needed new sneakers, jeans without holes, and decent t-shirts  
Were you there to see the hollow eyes of my four-year-old when his father  
landed a fist on my freckled face  
Were you there when I stood at the sink putting wood-handled knives in the drawer

Or when I pointed the steel blade to my chest  
Were you there when I put the knife back in the drawer,  
    envisioning my son walking down the wooden stairs  
Were you there mumbling *welfare bitch* while I paid for milk and bread with food stamps  
Were you there in the pediatrician's office staring at the corrugated glass  
    reading *We do not serve MediCal patients*

Are you there now when my sons lie at my sides,  
    watching the rain against my bedroom window  
Or when my oldest son asks, *Mom why are we on welfare?*

Are you there to explain why Michael can't join the soccer team  
Are you there at the end of the month when there is no money for PG&E or peanut butter  
Are you there to snicker when I ask my family for money to eat  
    Do you ask where does it all go?  
    To liquor or drugs?  
    To McDonald's or Burger King?

No  
I am there  
    alone with my two sons  
    sitting at the pine kitchen table doing homework  
I am there doing A,B,C's and Arithmetic  
I am there on the mauve carpet that covers the tile floor  
    studying my medical books  
I am there  
    a mother, a teacher, a student

-Erin Silvas

#### NOTES

1. Frances Payne Adler, ed., *Education As Emancipation: Women on Welfare Speak Out* (Monterey, CA: Creative Writing and Social Action Program with Extended Opportunity Programs and Services [EOPS]/Cooperative Agencies Resources for Education [CARE], 1998. (Creative Writing and Social Action Program address: c/o Institute for Human Communication, California State University Monterey Bay, 100 Campus Center, Seaside, CA 93955-8001; EOPS/CARE address: Monterey Peninsula College, 980 Fremont St., Monterey, CA 93940-4799.)

2. Cooperative Agencies Resources for Education (CARE).

3. Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS).

## **Part III:**

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### **International Perspectives and Policies**

# The Future of Social Welfare in Denmark

Lynn Walter

University of Wisconsin-Green Bay

Dismantling the U.S. welfare system has been defended as a response to public complaints about its high cost and popular perceptions of widespread fraud and intergenerational welfare dependency. In contrast, no one in Denmark proposed to “end welfare as *they* know it,” even though the Danish welfare system is far more comprehensive and costly than the American one is. Although the Danish welfare system does face potential threats to its sustainability—including the concentration of capital and power in transnational corporations, the globalization of the marketplace, Europeanization and the concomitant weakening of national sovereignty—public approval of it remains high. This study focuses on why most Danes continue to support their welfare system. The answers may also shed comparative light on the question of why so many Americans see the end of welfare as a good thing.

To reflect the fact that the Danish and U.S. conceptions of welfare are grounded in different institutional, political, economic and cultural practices, the term “social welfare” is applied to the Danish system to distinguish it from the current American notion of “welfare.” One key distinction is that “welfare” in the American sense is defined as government programs to help the poor. “Social welfare,” on the other hand, is about the well-being of the whole society. Social welfare is similar in this respect to the idea of welfare represented in the preamble to the U.S. constitution, established, as it states, “to promote the general welfare.” Publicly-funded programs as diverse as old-age pensions, disability support, unemployment compensation, health care, home care for the elderly, education, day care, child allowance and parental leave are all facets of social welfare; the beneficiaries are more often middle-income than poor.

## **Welfare Regimes: The U.S. and Denmark**

The Danish political economist Gøsta Esping-Andersen<sup>1</sup> has developed a comparative framework for the study of “welfare regimes.” Focusing on Western societies, he identifies three types of welfare regimes: *liberal*, *conservative-corporatist*, and *social democratic*. The *conservative-corporatist* regime is one in which the idea that social rights should differ by class and status is supported by state programs, and one that favors the preservation of traditionally gendered family forms. Esping-Andersen identifies Germany, France, Italy, and Austria with this type. This study focuses on Denmark, a clear-cut example of the *social democratic* type, and draws some comparisons to the U.S., which is just as clearly an example of the *liberal* type. He uses the term “liberal” in the nineteenth-century and

European sense of supporters of “free” market or private sector solutions to human needs. One of the most significant differences between the social democratic and liberal types is reflected in the sense in which social welfare programs are seen as universal. In Denmark, most welfare programs are conceptualized as universal, that is, available to everybody, irrespective of their income, while this is not true in the U.S. For example, health care in Denmark is universal through the tax-financed national health care system. Likewise, child allowance is a fixed, per-child sum granted to every household with dependent children without regard to their parents’ income. The universal availability of such programs leads most Danish citizens to believe that they have a stake in the quality of welfare services.

The universality of the Danish welfare regime is in clear contrast to the liberal type of the U.S., in which “welfare” is constructed as programs to help the needy. On this basis, welfare programs in the U.S. are designed to be selective and means-tested. So constructed, welfare is something middle-class taxpayers provide to other, less fortunate, Americans. From this perspective, paying taxes for welfare is an act of selfless generosity for which the recipients should be grateful.

It must be emphasized that the universal vs. selective dimension is to some degree a *conceptual* distinction, since the U.S. also has middle-income social welfare programs in the Danish sense, e.g., unemployment compensation, medicare, social security, and tax deductions for dependent children. However, rather than being conceptualized as “welfare,” these programs are considered to be services paid for by the taxpayer who receives them.

Another difference between the two systems is both conceptual and substantial; that is, the social democratic welfare regime is publicly funded, administered, and provisioned, with minimal involvement of the private market. The U.S. system is a mixed public and private one. Important examples are medicare and medicaid, where public funds pay private providers. In the U.S. the ideology of the marketplace is much stronger than it is in Denmark. Danes, on the whole, like the fact that their welfare system is publicly funded, administered, and provisioned, and justifiably believe that their government’s administration of welfare is efficient. As shown in Table 1, the administrative costs for social expenditures in 1987 were only 2.8 percent of the total expenditures.

Modern Danish culture promotes the values of solidarity and security to a much greater extent than does the dominant American form. American values of individualism and self-reliance reinforce the belief that every individual should be able to make it on her own. The belief that they have been providers, but not recipients, of welfare, bolsters a sense of themselves as morally superior to others, who cannot make it without their help. Most Danes, on the other hand, assume that all citizens are interdependent and see that they themselves need and receive government help. They have come to claim social welfare an entitlement of Danish citizenship.

Although the U.S. and Denmark clearly have quite different welfare regimes, both countries are Western, postindustrial, and capitalist, with democratic political institutions and Protestant majorities. The existence of such significant structural parallels invites a closer examination of the processes that constructed their divergent welfare regimes.

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Table 1: Social Expenditure by Main Groups in Percent, 1987.<sup>2</sup>

Sickness	20.9%
Industrial injury, etc.	0.8
Unemployment	12.7
Old age, invalidity, etc.	47.1
Families & children	11.7
General social assistance	3.7
Personal injuries in military & war	0.3
Administrative costs	2.8
<hr/>	
Total	100.0

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### The Development of Social Welfare in Denmark

In the Danish case, the organization of men and women in the labor movement and the Social Democratic party, as well as the entry of Danish women into the labor force and the activities of the women's movement, shaped the country's universal, solidaristic, and public-sector version of social welfare. The Danish social welfare system began in the 1920s and 1930s when working-class people and their organizations first gained political power in the form of labor union organizations and, in 1929, a Social Democratic government. They instituted the social welfare programs that were to take care of the working man and *his* family when his own efforts and the economy failed him. The most important of these programs were old-age and disability pensions and unemployment compensation. Working-class values of solidarity, which developed within fraternal organizations and labor unions, and the economic realities of the depression made it clear to them that honest, hardworking people needed the security that came from social welfare programs. However, at that time the social programs were not for everyone, but only for people, *like themselves*, who really needed them.

The experience of German occupation during WWII reinforced national identity and the values of solidarity and security. After the war, an unprecedented period of economic growth made economic conditions ripe for the realization of solidarity and security through the expansion of universal social welfare programs. The Social Democratic government, allied with the centralized labor movement, made old-age pensions universal; turned a mixed private and public health insurance system into a universal national health care system; and changed child allowances from tax deductions to universal grants. They considered the well-being of the elderly, the sick, and the children to be citizens' collective responsibility through the functions of good government. Furthermore, the benefit structures were designed in ways that did not stigmatize the recipients, since everyone would draw upon these benefits over the course of her or his lifetime.

The expanding economy needed more workers. A significant number of these new

employees were women, many of whom were married with dependent children. Bringing more women into the labor force meant addressing the conflicts between paid work and domestic work. Key programs that expanded during the 1960s and 1970s were day care, after-school programs, and parental leave.<sup>3</sup> By the time a new women's movement arose in Denmark in 1970, such programs had already given Danish women a level of equality with Danish men that American women are still trying to achieve.

In the early 1970s, women from the Danish women's movement were urging Danes to vote against Denmark's membership in the European Community because, they feared, Denmark's social welfare system would be brought down to the level of the rest of Europe. But, in 1972, in a very close referendum, a majority of Danes decided that because their economic prosperity relied heavily on exports, they could not afford to face the competitive disadvantage that would follow from opting out of the European Community.

In the mid-1970s, the economy was hit hard by the Arab oil embargo. Unemployment skyrocketed, and along with it, the need for more social welfare spending to aid the unemployed. Real growth dramatically declined, starting in 1973.<sup>4</sup> A large budget deficit, an unfavorable balance of trade, and rising unemployment were all results of the economic downturn of the 1970s and 1980s, and, by 1982, the Social Democratic government fell to the Conservatives, who were able to form a coalition government. One of the Conservative party's goals was to lower the budget deficit, and, to this end, they proposed to cut social welfare spending. Their proposals raised the question of the future of social welfare in Denmark.

### The Future of Social Welfare in Denmark

One approach to this question is to ask what the effects were of the Conservative governments in the 1980s and whether their legislative agenda seriously challenged the universalistic and solidaristic ideals of social welfare. As is clear from Table 2, there were only modest sustained decreases in public spending over the period from the late 1970s through the 1980s.

There was some decline in real social spending during the period of 1984 and 1985 which does not show up as clearly in Table 2 as in Table 3 because Table 2 does not show the decline in GDP in those years.<sup>6</sup>

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Table 2: Public Sector Growth and the Economy, 1973-1989. Percentages of GDP (in factor prices)/Percentages.<sup>5</sup>

Year	'73	'80	'82	'83	'84	'85	'86	'87	'88	'89
Public Expenditures	49.0	65.8	70.4	71.0	69.9	69.2	66.0	67.8	69.3	68.2

(Figures are calculated as percentages of GDP in factor prices, as high indirect taxes artificially increase GDP.)

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Table 3: Social Security\* Expenditure in Denmark 1971-1988 at Fixed Prices  
Proportional to 1983 Costs (1983=100)<sup>7</sup>

1971/72	56
1972/73	61
1973/74	65
1974/75	71
1975/76	78
1976	81
1977	82
1978	85
1979	90
1980	91
1981	94
1982	99
1983	100
1984	98
1985	99
1986	100
1987	103
1988	106

\*The term “social security” means social expenditures, in this case, not including education.

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The fact that the costs of national health care did not rise during the 1980s also represents some decline in the level of services. However, other social welfare cuts were modest.<sup>8</sup>

While there is general agreement that the period of economic slowdown and the years of more conservative governments did not substantially decrease social spending, disagreement exists about whether the changes initiated by the Conservative regime represented important challenges to the Danish ideals of social welfare. Cox argues that the significant changes have been not so much fiscal as conceptual. He asserts that there is more discussion than ever before about the duties of welfare state citizenship. This change, he claims, represents a shift from thinking of social welfare programs as entitlements to thinking of them as something negotiable. In his survey of Danish public opinion, Goul Andersen<sup>9</sup> finds that public support of the social welfare state did decline briefly in the mid-1970s but then rose again, even during the period from 1977 to 1985, when real wages were declining. He argues that Danish support for the welfare state is a “responsible” type of support. By that he means that Danes are pragmatic in their approach to economic problems, while maintaining their fundamental cultural support for the social welfare state. For example, he mentions that the Conservatives lost the 1990 election despite their promise to

cut taxes. He attributes their defeat to the fact that 53 percent of the population thought it was better to reduce the debt rather than lower their taxes.<sup>10</sup>

The economic recession of the 1970s and 1980s and the election of conservative governments did lead to some changes in the social welfare system in Denmark, some cuts in services (under the guise of improving the efficiency of the welfare bureaucracies), and some effort at means-testing. It also led to more decentralized service provisioning and administration, moving some services from the state to the county level. However, it did not result in significant loss of public support for the universal, solidaristic, and publicly-funded social welfare system, and in 1993, the Conservative government was ousted in favor of returning to a Social Democratic government.

This continued, enhanced public support for social welfare was made possible by an alliance between the middle strata and the working class in support of social welfare.<sup>11</sup> Since white-collar, middle-income people benefit from the entitlements of the welfare state, they resisted any major cuts or reductions in the quality of their benefits. Marklund<sup>12</sup> notes that the public-employee unions were especially important support-ers of the social welfare state; and, by the late 1980s, public employees in health, education, and other social services made up fully 25 percent of the Danish labor force.<sup>13</sup>

Women also strongly favored developments in the social welfare programs that supported their ability to combine paid work and family. From a 1970 labor force participation rate of 58 percent, Danish women's rate rose to just under 80 percent in 1995. By the late 1980s almost 80 percent of women with preschoolers were employed with more than 80 percent of day care costs covered by municipalities. Paid maternity leave is now fourteen weeks plus four weeks pregnancy leave that must be taken before the birth. Paternity leave is two weeks. The additional ten weeks of parental leave may be taken by either parent.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the fact that the social welfare system generally withstood threats to its future, the cutbacks disproportionately affected women. Those employed in the public sector faced more job cuts and more wage restrictions than did employees in the male-dominated private sector. This was especially worrisome to women workers, since over fifty percent of them are public sector employees.<sup>15</sup> Also, employed mothers rely on public services like subsidized child care to make their employment more feasible and are generally more vulnerable than men to cuts in social welfare services. Furthermore, the Conservative government was not able to address the rising levels of unemployment that affected women more than men. Thus, women in Denmark tend to be more in favor of the social welfare state than are men.<sup>16</sup>

Women's double connection to the welfare state as its employees and its clients is one reason that the Danish women's movement opposed Denmark's entry into the European Community in 1972. They feared descending to the level of the social welfare practices found in the much of Europe, which, they maintained, were not as supportive of employed mothers. Also, as Ostner and Lewis<sup>17</sup> note, EU social policies regarding women have an equal-rights orientation, focused primarily on employment issues. They argue that unless EU employment policies take women's unpaid work into consideration, equal rights will not

address the real inequalities that confront women who try to combine paid and unpaid work. Furthermore, Danish feminists feared that the centralized administration of the European Union would be less responsive than the Danish political system to their interests. This reduction in the power of the national government also meant that the significance of the gains Danish women had made in attaining political power at the national level would be diminished. Historically, it has been the case that the more distant the central government, the more patriarchal it is, and the EU bureaucracy is no exception. Lastly, they saw Europeanization as an economic process involving not only loss of sovereign control over their national economy but also over national priorities, which could mean an emphasis on lowering inflation as opposed to reducing unemployment.<sup>18</sup>

As yet, the effects of Europeanization on the women in the Danish social welfare system are more potential than actual. Esping-Andersen<sup>19</sup> advocates “positive-sum solutions” for the future of welfare regimes in Europe, which, he argues must include guarantees that women can be employed and have children without being penalized relative to men. If the European Union is concerned about low fertility, then, he argues, it must address women’s employment issues.<sup>20</sup>

Lewis, Siim, and Togeby all see reasons to hope that Danish women will continue to make progress toward equality in the labor force and at home.<sup>21</sup> They note that women’s political and economic progress, their increasing confidence, and their political activism are all directed toward making it increasingly possible for women to combine paid work and family into satisfying lives. However, they also foresee continuing forms of gender and class inequality within the Danish social welfare state and threats to its expansion. I have discussed three of these threats—globalization of the economy, political centralization, and cultural shifts toward more liberal welfare regime values. Countering these threats to the future of social welfare in Denmark depends upon finding new strategies for claiming a just share of economic resources and political power from institutions far from the nation state and beyond the borders of the historic agreements between labor unions and employers. For now, most Danes are committed to preventing globalization and centralization from undermining the ability of their social welfare state “to promote the general welfare.”

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# Maternity Leave Policy in the U.S.: How Do We Compare?

Anne Banda, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

*My son was born on September 4, 1995. He was a typical baby who often awoke three to five times per night. I stayed home with him until he was three months old. I also had a two-year-old daughter at that time, who was more than eager to “help” with the baby. When I returned to work after three months of maternity leave and after many, many sleepless nights, my boss asked me, in all seriousness, “How was your vacation?”*

*But I was lucky. I had a job to which I could return. While I was on leave, I was able to claim my unused sick leave and vacation time so that I could still collect a paycheck. This is not the case, however, for the vast majority of women in the United States.*

The United States is often perceived to be a leader in world affairs. The U.S. aggressively promotes democratization worldwide, which would lead one to believe that the United States is on the cutting-edge of ideas and practices that promote human rights, equality, and nondiscriminatory policies across the board. As we all know, however, this is not the case. The United States is one of only a handful of nations which has not yet ratified two important United Nations Conventions: a) the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; and b) the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. The United States is one of only 6 countries in the world, out of 152 countries with a national maternity leave policy, that does not mandate paid maternity leave benefits for employees. Why? Why have most other countries managed to develop and pay for a program of paid maternity benefits? And why has the United States been unable or unwilling to implement such a worthwhile policy?

I would argue that the lack of development of a paid maternity leave policy in the United States is due, in part, to the following issues:

- 1) Women’s condition during pregnancy is often portrayed as unique, different, disadvantageous, or generally debilitating. This terminology has been used in court cases, public policy, as well as in other arenas, and greatly clouds the maternity leave issue.
- 2) Studies have shown that the majority of men, across cultures, define time spent with children as “play”<sup>1</sup> (as my boss does). Because men in the U.S. have historically been and continue to comprise the majority of legislators and CEOs, it comes as no surprise that they do not think it necessary to pay women who take time off of work to “play” with their newborn children.
- 3) While in many parts of Europe a standard four-week vacation is part of many workers’

annual activities, no such norm exists in the United States. Lengthy amounts of time spent away from work are the exception, not the rule, in the U.S.

- 4) While many other parts of the world have governments that have been influenced by Socialist tendencies, the U.S. has been and remains a bastion of capitalism. Paid maternity leave is often viewed in the U.S. as a drain on an organization's bottom line, the profit margin.
- 5) The majority of women and families most negatively affected by the lack of a paid maternity leave policy in the United States have little political clout.

### **The ILO**

In 1919, the International Labor Organization (ILO) developed the first international standard to address issues related to childbirth and maternity. The 1919 Maternity Protection Convention recommended for working women a standard leave of six weeks after childbirth. The Convention applied to public or private commercial or industrial settings, other than family enterprises. It stipulated that, while on leave, the worker be paid benefits sufficient for the full and healthy maintenance of herself and her child, and that medical care and income replacement be paid out of public funds or through a system of insurance. A worker who was absent from work for maternity leave should not be dismissed by her employer. Once a woman returned to her job, she ought to be allowed to interrupt her work twice daily in order to nurse the infant. The Convention stated that women had a right to stop work up to six weeks before confinement.<sup>2</sup>

In 1952, the International Labor Organization (ILO) amended and expanded the Maternity Protection Convention. The ILO's Maternity Leave Standard now calls for a minimum twelve-week leave, although a fourteen-week leave is recommended. The Convention now extends to women in agricultural and domestic work. Six weeks of the twelve-week leave must be taken as a compulsory postnatal leave, with the rest distributed before or after childbirth as determined by the woman's needs. Additional leave is to be available for the woman worker should a pregnancy- or childbirth-related medical condition require it. Income replacement and medical benefits must be sufficient for the full and healthy maintenance of a woman and her child in accordance with a suitable standard of living. In countries that provide cash benefits through social security, the ILO recommended that income be replaced at not less than two-thirds the worker's earnings. Medical care is to be free and comprehensive. Nursing mothers are to have breaks during normal working hours to nurse their children, and these breaks are to be counted as paid working hours.<sup>3</sup> The United States has not yet ratified the ILO's Maternity Protection Convention.

In 1998, the International Labor Organization surveyed 152 countries and documented national maternity leave policies in those countries. Of the 152 countries surveyed, 119 meet the ILO's twelve-week leave standard, and sixty-two of them provide leave of fourteen weeks or more. Fully 146 countries surveyed offer paid benefits to employees while on maternity leave, which is paid for by employers, social security programs, or both. The ILO found that women are the chief income providers in thirty percent of all households

worldwide.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the ILO estimates that within ten years, eighty percent of all women in industrialized countries, and seventy percent globally, will be working outside the home throughout their childbearing years. Today, in India alone, sixty million people live in households maintained by women.<sup>5</sup>

Are women in the United States perhaps more likely to work outside the home, in which case a paid maternity leave program may be cost-prohibitive? This is certainly not the case. According to the ILO, fifty-nine percent of European working women supply half or more of their family's household income. Only fifty-five percent of U.S. working women do so.

ILO standards have been met and exceeded by nearly all European countries, with the exception of Liechtenstein, Iceland, and Switzerland, which allow an eight-week paid leave. Even the countries of Eastern Europe, which have gone through extensive economic restructuring in recent years, including cutbacks in government entitlements, continue to provide paid maternity leave benefits.

The impact of the ILO Maternity Protection Convention has been enormous on a global level. In 1919, when the first Convention was recommended, only nine countries provided maternity leave benefits in accordance with ILO guidelines. By 1952, at the time the Convention was amended, forty countries met or exceeded ILO guidelines. By 1998, nearly 120 countries met or exceeded the ILO guidelines for maternity leave. The United States is conspicuously absent from the list of countries that have ratified the ILO Convention and even exceeded the guidelines.

### **The Development of Maternity Leave Policy in the United States**

In 1867, Wisconsin passed the first statewide protective legislation for working women. This piece of legislation was part of a larger movement to restrict the hours of employment for women. Hours were generally limited to no more than ten hours per day and sixty hours per week, the reasons for which were "based on the prevailing opinion, supported by medical testimony, that continuous standing, stretching, or repetitive motions weaken the childbearing abilities of young women and should therefore be limited."<sup>6</sup>

The first federal action regarding protective legislation for women was a ruling by the Supreme Court in 1908 in the case of *Muller v. Oregon*. In this case, "justices declared that because a woman is differentiated by physical structure, maternal function, and her dependency on men, she is properly placed in a class by herself for legislative purposes. The court added that since healthy mothers are essential for healthy offspring, certain basic physical protection is essential for working women. Thus for example, pregnant women should be excused from working long hours, especially if these involve much standing."<sup>7</sup>

One of the justices wrote in an opinion in 1910, "it is known to all men . . . that women's physical structure and the performance of maternal functions place her at a great disadvantage in life; that while a man can work for more than ten hours a day without injury to himself, a woman, especially when the burdens of motherhood are upon her, cannot."<sup>8</sup> The case of *Muller v. Oregon* substantiated the authority of states to pass legislation limiting the hours of work for women as a class. By 1912, thirty-four states had passed legislation that pertained to hours of labor for women.

In addition to legislation that classified women as a separate disadvantaged class, the social mores of the early twentieth century contributed to stereotypes about women workers. It was often viewed as inappropriate for wives to work, to put it mildly. The following quote depicts a common attitude: “The American family standard has always been a bread-winning father, and a mother occupying herself with care of her children. Any deviation from this custom is cause for comment. Pride on the part of our native workmen serves to keep their wives out of the ranks of wage-earners.”<sup>9</sup> Sentiments from the burgeoning labor organizations offered an equally bleak picture for women who chose to work outside of the home. Samuel Gompers, the forefather of the American Federation of Labor and a staunch supporter of equal pay for equal work, “remained convinced that the place of married women, especially mothers, was in the home.”<sup>10</sup>

The notion that a woman’s place was indeed “in the home” pervaded the beliefs of many Americans. Women were often viewed as merely temporary employees, who would remain in the labor force for a few years, only to leave when they married or became pregnant. Married women were often barred from employment altogether or dismissed when they got married. And single women were described as a “menace to the race . . . accountable for the falling birthrate, declining parental responsibility and decadence in home and family life.”<sup>11</sup> Obviously, benefits of any sort for female employees were extremely limited or nonexistent.

With the downturn in the economy in the 1930s, societal resistance against working women increased. Women were thought to be taking jobs from men, and whole cities campaigned against working wives. During the depression, most state legislatures considered bills to restrict the employment of married women. In cases where women did continue working despite marriage, they generally left work upon becoming pregnant, knowing that they would be discharged otherwise.

Even in occupations traditionally considered female jobs, strong biases existed against working wives and mothers. For example, the National Education Association conducted a survey of school systems in 1930 that revealed that seventy-seven per cent of all school systems refused to hire wives and sixty-three percent dismissed women teachers if they subsequently married.<sup>12</sup>

The situation for women workers changed dramatically during World War II, when over 4.5 million women entered the workforce. This prompted a reassessment of employer policies and practices. To provide some national guidelines for employers, the Women’s Bureau, in cooperation with the Children’s Bureau, issued a set of “Standards for Maternity Care and Employment of Mothers in Industry” in 1942. The Standards noted that “a woman who is expecting a child should give first consideration to her own health and to plans for safeguarding the health and care of the child. Nevertheless, some women who are pregnant or who have young children may find it necessary to work.”<sup>13</sup> The Standards recommended that opportunities be provided for mothers to obtain prenatal care; the workday be limited to eight hours; and rest periods be accommodated. Six weeks of prenatal leave and two months of postnatal leave were suggested. The Standards suggested that maternity leave arrangements should not jeopardize employment or seniority. The Standards did not, however, propose that an employee continue to collect wages during maternity leave.

While the Standards were merely suggestions, a limited number of employers did adopt them. Common practice, however, continued to require women to take an unpaid leave of absence, with no guarantee that their job would be waiting for them upon their return from maternity leave. The required leave was generally forced upon women when they began to “show” their pregnancy.

The Children’s Bureau, one of the coauthors of the “Standards for Maternity Care and Employment of Mothers in Industry,” conducted a national study in 1942 to document how employer practices affected female employees, especially the practice of firing women when they became pregnant, or requiring them to take an unpaid leave of absence. The author of the study noted that “while the reason often given for the practice was the protection of the mother and the fetus, and fear of liability for miscarriage, aesthetic and moral qualms were often at the root of such practices. Employers expressed the view that it was not nice for obviously pregnant women to be working in a factory and that it had a bad effect on male workers.”<sup>14</sup>

The lack of development of a paid maternity leave policy continued to be influenced by the “discomfort” caused by the sight of a pregnant woman as late as 1974. In that year, the Supreme Court noted that the mandatory leave rule was “inspired by a school district’s desire to save pregnant teachers from embarrassment at the hands of giggling school children and to protect the children from the sight of conspicuously pregnant women.”<sup>15</sup> It seems the idea that others should be spared from the sight of a pregnant woman hindered the development of a policy to protect a pregnant woman’s job.

In 1946, the first federal legislation was passed that provided maternity protection. The Federal Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act entitled pregnant women employees to temporary disability insurance, during which time they received weekly cash and sickness benefits for maternity. Employee contributions and payroll taxes financed the program. The maternity benefit duration was approximately sixteen and one-half weeks. While paid maternity leave was indeed an enormous benefit to working mothers to whom the Act applied, the classification of maternity leave as a disability later created stumbling blocks in the development of a comprehensive national policy.

In the 1950s and 1960s, pregnant women were often placed on mandatory unpaid leave, and those placed on leave were little better off than those who were fired. When women returned from leave, it was common for them to be reinstated at a lower level job, with lower pay, and with loss of benefits. For some women,

returning to work after childbirth was the equivalent of beginning again, as if a new worker, regardless of the number of years on the job before. For many, loss of benefits meant loss of accrued entitlements to pensions, or it meant that at the time of childbirth, when it was especially important, they had no health insurance coverage, or, if because of complications they became severely disabled, no disability coverage. Loss of seniority could mean loss of entitlements to vacation, to sick leave, and perhaps most important, to promotions and job opportunities.<sup>16</sup>

While maternity leave was available, its mandatory nature meant that women were often required to leave work well before they wanted to or thought they needed to. Additionally, these mandatory leaves did not guarantee a woman could return at the same or comparable level. No benefits or seniority protection were offered.

In the 1960s and 1970s, many social changes took place that affected women's position in the workplace. In 1963, the President's Commission on the Status of Women conducted an extensive study of existing and needed protection for women workers. Maternity benefits were among the policies addressed. Two of the Commission's subcommittees recommended that "paid maternity leave or comparable insurance benefits should be provided for women workers; employers, unions, and governments should explore the best means of accomplishing this purpose."<sup>17</sup> Further, it was recommended that state legislation be enacted to ensure at least six months maternity leave without loss of reemployment and seniority rights.<sup>18</sup> This is the first time that such recommendations were made in a national, governmental report.

In 1964, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act was passed. The Act outlawed all forms of employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. Title VII became effective in 1965, but it left a fundamental question unanswered. Is discrimination based on pregnancy a form of sex discrimination? There had been no Congressional debate about this issue, and thus, no record existed concerning Congressional intent of Title VII in regards to pregnancy.

The General Counsel of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) issued an opinion in 1966 concerning this issue:

The Commission policy in this area does not seek to compare an employer's treatment of illness or injury with *his* [author's emphasis] treatment of maternity since maternity is a temporary disability unique to the female sex and more or less to be anticipated during the working life of most women employees. Therefore, it is our opinion that according to the facts stated... a company's group insurance program which covers hospital and medical expenses for the delivery of employee's children, but excludes from its long-term salary continuation program those disabilities which result from pregnancy and childbirth would not be in violation of Title VII.<sup>19</sup>

The EEOC issued a series of guidelines in 1972 that reversed the 1966 opinion issued by the General Counsel. The "Guidelines on Discrimination Because of Sex" provided that disabilities resulting from pregnancy, miscarriage, abortion, childbirth, and recovery therefrom are, for all job-related purposes, temporary disabilities and must be treated as such under any health or temporary disability insurance or such leave plan that may be available to employees.<sup>20</sup>

It was the 1966 EEOC position, unfortunately, which continued to influence judicial decisions into the 1970s. While a new approach to treating pregnancy at work had begun to

be delineated by the 1970s, based on assumptions of equality and the permanence of female labor-force participation, the United States Supreme Court stepped into the process and staunchly resisted the attempt to bring pregnancy into the equality framework.

Led by Justices Potter Stewart and William Rehnquist, the Court delivered two opinions that endorsed the traditional view of pregnancy as normal but unique and not comparable to other conditions. The decisions had the practical impact of denying employment benefits to women. In *Geduldig v. Aiello* (1974), the Court determined that a temporary disability insurance plan that excluded pregnancy-related disabilities did not violate Fourteenth Amendment guarantees of equal protection. In *General Electric Company v. Gilbert* (1976), the Court ruled that denial of sickness and accident benefits to women disabled by pregnancy did not violate the equality mandate of Title VII.

In effect, the Court was saying that for the purposes of equality analysis, men are the standard against which women are to be measured. Insofar as women and men are alike, they must be treated the same. Because woman's normal biological capacity to become pregnant is unique, and insofar as pregnancy is a unique condition, the situations of men and women cannot be viewed as comparable. The Court in effect stated that different treatment of pregnant workers is not necessarily unequal treatment. In legal terms, the sexes are not similarly situated in this respect, and special treatment of pregnant women does not constitute discrimination. The difference between the sexes simply represents an extra burden—an additional risk—unique to women.<sup>21</sup>

Outraged at the Court's position, a large coalition of feminist, labor, civil rights, church, and antiabortion groups mobilized as the Campaign to End Discrimination Against Pregnant Workers. The Coalition pressured Congress to make Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act consistent with the 1972 EEOC Guidelines that banned discrimination on the basis of pregnancy. In 1978, Congress passed the Pregnancy Discrimination Act that outlawed employment discrimination on the basis of pregnancy. A policy of paid maternity leave benefits, however, continued to elude American workers.

On August 5, 1993, the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) was implemented. FMLA covers all public and private sector employers of fifty or more employees. The Act grants eligible employees up to twelve weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave per year, with health insurance coverage maintained during the leave, for the birth or adoption of a child or for the serious illness of the employee or an immediate family member. Upon return from FMLA leave, an employee must be reinstated to his or her original job or an equivalent job with equal pay, benefits and terms and conditions of employment. To be eligible for FMLA leave, an employee must have worked for a covered employer for at least a total of twelve months, for at least 1,250 hours over the previous twelve months, and must work at a location where at least fifty employees are employed within seventy-five miles.

#### **Adequacy of FMLA**

In 1996, the United States Congress commissioned a report to explore the impact of FMLA on employers and employees. The Commission on Family and Medical Leave,

composed of congresspeople, businesspeople, and representatives of prominent women's groups, conducted national surveys of employers and employees to understand the effect of FMLA on both groups. The Commission found that "the FMLA is of great benefit to a large number of working Americans while imposing minimal burdens on employers. The Family and Medical Leave Act is good for families and good for business."<sup>22</sup>

While the Commission's Report painted FMLA in very rosy colors, emphasizing that it was not harmful to employers, many other studies show that FMLA is extremely insufficient in fully protecting women. For example, single mothers or families in which the female is the primary income source cannot afford to take an extensive—or perhaps any—amount of unpaid leave. It is estimated that as many as seventy-seven per cent of women work in lower paying, nonprofessional jobs, and cannot afford to take available leave.<sup>23</sup> Many women are employed in the service sector, as domestics, or in retail, which typically employ fewer than fifty people, so FMLA does not even apply to them. More than three-fourths of the establishments in the United States have fewer than ten employees, and women are disproportionately represented in these sectors.<sup>24</sup> Due to the absence of paid maternity benefits and job security for the many women employed by businesses to which FMLA does not apply, numerous women turn to public assistance after childbirth in order to provide some income for their families.

In January 1997, an amendment to FMLA was proposed. The bill, "Family and Medical Leave Enhancement Act," proposed nothing that would assist the many women who are not currently covered by FMLA. The only section of the bill that could have somewhat assisted a marginal number of women involved lowering the number of employees in an organization from fifty to twenty-five to mandate compliance with the Act. According to the 1997 and 1998 Congressional Records, there has been no discussion about this bill, and it is, in effect, dead.

It is fair to conclude that FMLA has had a very limited practical effect on women.

### **Conclusion**

Why has the United States failed to develop a comprehensive policy of paid maternity leave? The employees who suffer because of the lack of a policy have little or no political clout. They tend to be the working poor. Thus, Congress has no incentive to change its attitudes or practices toward this constituency.

The terminology used to describe pregnancy and maternity has been extremely destructive. Examples already cited in this paper depict women's pregnant state as unique, different, disabled, disadvantaged, not normal, embarrassing, and more. Uncomplicated pregnancies are none of these things. Women make up more than fifty percent of the population. Logically, then, their biological capacities cannot be considered unique or different or abnormal. Furthermore, all of these terms apply to women as they compare to men. Because men have historically comprised the majority of Congress, courts, and employers, it comes as no surprise that these groups have failed to develop a paid maternity leave policy. And Puritanical influences in the U.S. have contributed to the "embarrassing" status attributed to pregnancy.

Studies have shown that men tend to define time spent with children as “play.” So it is not surprising that men see no need to mandate a paid maternity leave policy in order for women to have time away from work to “play” with their children. While studies have shown that men both within and outside of the U.S. share this view, I believe that the staunchly capitalistic system under which the U.S. operates bestows more weight on this particular point of view. An organization is certainly not going to pay a woman (and thus, supposedly, lower its profit margin) so that a woman can stay home to “play” with her child.

Extensive time away from work is the exception, not the norm, in the United States. While in Europe and in many other parts of the world, a standard four-week summer vacation is part of many employees’ annual activities, this is certainly not the case in the United States. The U.S. does not have a tradition of extensive breaks from work.

### **Where Do We Go From Here?**

Until pregnancy and maternity are viewed and accepted as something that “just is”—a normal part of existence in their own right and on their own terms, we will never be able to move forward. Pregnancy and maternity are not different or unique; they are the biologically normal rights and functions of the majority of people on this planet.

Nearly every country in the world has managed to develop a paid maternity leave policy. The U.S. could easily fund such a policy by diverting an insignificant proportion of its defense budget to this endeavor. The U.S. needs to make a fundamental shift in its perceptions of pregnancy and maternity. Prior decisions rendered by the Supreme Court and other governmental bodies and commissions make the shift difficult, at best. It is a change, however, that must be made, and one that all but six countries in this world have managed to do.<sup>25</sup>

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# Women in the Federal Republic of Germany

Timothy Crow, University of Wisconsin-Superior

I am interested in taking a closer look at where the Women's Movement is in central Europe, specifically in Germany, the nation which is now often referred to as the *economic locomotive* of united Europe or the European Union.

On the twenty-third of May, 1999, the Federal Republic of Germany celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of that nation's constitution. The equality of men and women was officially written into this document for the first time in 1949, but it has been up to the German Supreme Court to give practical interpretation to this tenet, issued in a series of judgments over the past five decades. For example, the Court removed a clause in 1959 that originally gave fathers the last and final word over all differences of opinion concerning the welfare of a child.<sup>1</sup> In a recent ruling, the Court instructed legislators to change the pension laws to give women compensation for child rearing.<sup>2</sup> In 1977, a new Marriage and Family Act was passed which made housework the duty of both partners. Before this, the sole responsibility of the wife to do the housework had actually been encapsulated into German federal law.<sup>3</sup>

## Brief History of the First German Women's Movement

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, European society changed significantly. The German Women's Movement, now often referred to as the First German Women's Movement, began then. One of the most significant influences of this period was the publication in 1879 of August Bebel's *Women and Socialism*. Although most of Bebel's ideas seem antiquated and even contradictory today, he asserted that nineteenth-century women were not only without rights and economically suppressed, but were essentially held in sexual suppression by the authoritative position of men. Not only was a woman's social esteem dependent upon her chastity, but the very contract of marriage, and thus financial security, also rested upon a woman's chastity. Bourgeois society took revenge on the illegitimate children of "deviant" women, as well as on the women themselves.<sup>4</sup>

In 1900, a new civil law code was passed which was to remain in effect until after the Second World War. Women were then able to work without their husband's consent, but at the same time, the code clearly stated that all decisions relating to conjugal life lay solely in the hands of the husband. An event that occurred in 1882 would seem to be somewhat indicative for the period. The German Cultural Federation had been formed to fight licensed prostitution, but its founder was stopped by police from lecturing on the Enlightenment, on the grounds she was a woman.<sup>5</sup> Her house was searched for Socialist writings, and she was then prosecuted for "gross misdemeanor" and "offending against public decency."<sup>6</sup>

However, certain advances were made during this period. In 1889 education for women

was greatly improved when the first secondary school for girls opened in Berlin, and in 1896 the first six girls passed the qualifying exams with remarkable success.<sup>7</sup> Then, in 1901, the first women were allowed entrance to the universities at Heidelberg and Freiberg, and other universities opened their doors in 1908 when the general ban on the association of women in political parties was lifted. All the same, the middle-class view was that a choice had to be made between *either* work *or* marriage and motherhood.

The inferiority of women was even debated on scientific levels during the early nineteenth century. Paul Möbius advocated that women suffered from mental deficiencies due to the lesser weight of their brains, while Otto Weininger found that women were instinctive creatures without personality or memory.<sup>8</sup>

The constitution of the Weimar Republic had established the first true democracy in Germany after the chaotic defeat of 1919, but due to the mass poverty and unemployment, prominent women often became accomplices of the Right, reflecting their concern that home and family stay above water. One example is Hildegard Wegscheider, the first German woman to practice as a physician. She stressed education for women, but at the same time remained a staunch symbol of the traditional female ideal.<sup>9</sup> Discrimination was worst for women in highly qualified positions, and by 1923 it had become law that married women civil servants could be dismissed legally with six months notice, providing their living could be assured—soon this *could* became *must*.<sup>10</sup> Access to the professions of judge and lawyer, which had been made available, once more became blocked to women. For the most part, women could only work in housekeeping and agriculture, but most domestic and agricultural workers were not allowed to join unions. There was even a call to ban the profession of waitress at the beginning of the Weimar Republic on behalf of the “enhancement of morality.”<sup>11</sup>

Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist Workers’ Party were heirs apparent to this situation. Under the National Socialists female teachers were dismissed—except at the elementary level; and female physicians could only practice in homes for the aged and psychiatric clinics, while women at universities were strictly limited to ten percent of the student body.<sup>12</sup> When this dark period finally came to an end at the close of World War II, women found themselves back where they had been in 1918.

Among the most notable early feminists in Germany had been Bettina von Arnim, Rahel von Varnhagen, and Louise Otto-Peters. The last was responsible for founding the first women’s newspaper as early as 1849. It was largely the legacy of struggles, courage, and defiance left by these women, and others like them, which provided a base for the emergence of the “Second Women’s Movement” in postwar Germany.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Modern German Legacy**

The new or “Second Women’s Movement” can trace its beginning to the spring of 1968, when student revolt rocked much of Europe. One of the most outspoken leaders was Alice Schwarzer, who summed up her demands in her book *The Little Difference and its Big Result*: “We claim the right to be no longer female, but human.”<sup>14</sup> Schwarzer was one of the

organizers of the pro-abortion rights campaign of 1971 during which more than four hundred women, prominent and unknown, confessed in the popular magazine *Stern*: "I have had an abortion."<sup>15</sup> Later, in 1977, Schwarzer established the magazine *Emma*, in large part based on the American magazine *Ms*.

In the West, professionals and students remained at the forefront, but in the East, it was the workers and activists who led the movement.<sup>16</sup> In the East, with its socialized system, it was much easier for women to combine work and family, and half of the workers were women. Ninety percent of the women in the former GDR were employed full-time, compared to less than seventeen percent in the West.<sup>17</sup> Women in the East were the first to suffer when the social network collapsed, especially as a result of the closing of childcare facilities. In the West, it had always been a problem to combine a profession and family due to the shortage of such facilities. Furthermore, women in the West normally received less pay for the same work, approximately sixty-five percent of what men received within the same work categories; and they often had to settle for part-time instead of full-time work as well.<sup>18</sup> As a result, women reaching retirement age today are usually better off in the eastern states than their western counterparts. Working women in the West, at least during the early years of the Federal Republic, continued to be stigmatized by the so-called *three K's*, a legacy of the former Third Reich: *Kinder, Küche, and Kirche* (children, kitchen, and church). In fact, up until 1977, forty-seven percent of all female students in the West trained to be salesgirls, hairdressers, secretaries, or medical assistants.<sup>19</sup> Marriage remained their greatest concern.

Currently, there is no official "poverty-level" scale in use, therefore, the "public-assistance" eligibility level is usually taken as the "semi-official" poverty level. This is defined and set by the *Bundessozialhilfegesetz* (BSHG).<sup>20</sup> In recent years the number of single mothers receiving social welfare under this system has increased dramatically. About one-fifth of all single-parent households in the West currently receive government payments, and ninety-five percent of these single parents are women.<sup>21</sup> According to a 1989 study, two-thirds of all single-parent families are existing on the edge of poverty.<sup>22</sup> Figures from 1995 show that of the entire population, thirteen percent in the West and twelve percent in the East are considered "poor," however, when one looks at children under fifteen, these figures increase to twenty-two percent for the West, and twenty percent for the East.<sup>23</sup>

According to statistics received at the *Allgemeine Ortskrankenkasse* in the city of Augsburg, the "public-assistance" eligibility level is currently DM 1764 per month for individuals, DM 2425.50 for those with one dependent (gross).<sup>24</sup> These amounts would then be subject to taxes and social security payments.

Elderly women often find life harder than their male counterparts. Widows qualify to draw only sixty percent of their deceased husband's pension, although they live on average seven years longer.<sup>25</sup> About one-third of women over sixty-five, living on their own, must get by on DM 1400 or less per month.<sup>26</sup> There are some specific programs available for these women, however, such as rent subsidies, free prescription drugs, special subsidies for local telephone use, heating subsidies, paid hospitalization and ambulance, and free reception of state TV and radio.

As late as 1992 it was estimated that the average income of women in top executive positions was at least twenty-five percent below that of men for exactly the same job.<sup>27</sup> Although the new Red-Green coalition government, under Gerhard Schröder, has promised to make social justice one of its primary goals, economic pressures may necessarily retard progress in this area, since this government has not inherited what could be called a modernized economy, but rather just the opposite. Schröder has basically been handed a “wheezing enterprise” by the former conservative government that “failed to introduce practically any of the necessary structural changes.”<sup>28</sup>

Jutta Limbach, the first female chief justice of the German Supreme Court and an outspoken advocate for women’s causes, has commented that the higher one looks in German society, the rarer the female sex becomes.<sup>29</sup> Although only three of the sixteen states (Bavaria, Baden-Wurtemberg, and Thuringia) have refused to enact quota laws for the specific advancement of women in the professions, many of the more strict laws have been declared unconstitutional, and very few of them have achieved significant changes thus far. In a recent case before the European Court in Luxembourg, it was decided that women could be preferred as hires in certain civil positions, as long as men were not automatically disadvantaged by such individual instances. Interestingly, the current European Court is composed of twenty-five judges and lawyers, without a single woman among them.<sup>30</sup>

However, the number of women entrepreneurs is growing slowly. The Federal Bureau of Statistics states that six percent of all women with jobs outside the home are now in business for themselves. By contrast, twelve percent of men are now self-employed.<sup>31</sup>

Since 1979, maternity laws have allowed working mothers a four-month leave in addition to six weeks before and eight weeks after giving birth. The mother’s position remains secure and she is paid in full for the time before and after birth, and up to DM 750 per month for the remaining time.<sup>32</sup> The four months can be extended to three years for either the mother or the father, with no pay, but with a guaranteed same or similar job upon return. In certain cases the federal government will also supply mandated child-care funds on behalf of a delinquent parent, and will then take the responsibility of retrieving them independently, providing the delinquent parent is living in a separate household. There are various other special programs, as for example, for a family with triplets.<sup>33</sup>

In 1996 a new law allowed the option of receiving *Kindergeld*, or a federally-funded tax-option program. *Kindergeld* entails across-the-board child-rearing payments made through the eighteenth year of each child’s life. These amount to DM 220 per month for the first and second child, and increase to DM 300 for the third, and then to DM 350 for each additional child. *Kindergeld* can continue until the child is twenty-seven, if educational conditions so warrant. There is also a federally funded program of family leave, known as *Bundeserziehungsgeld*, which is available during the first twenty-four months of a child’s life. It provides DM 600 per month, but the family cannot earn over DM 100,000 with one child, and not over DM 75,000 for a single parent. The main guardian cannot work more than half-time during these two years.<sup>34</sup>

Many fear that these benefits often work against women in the long run. To avoid them,

employers may simply not hire women in the first place. In fact, in 1992 there was a mini-scandal involving German women from the East having themselves sterilized and obtaining official affidavits in order to make themselves more marketable.<sup>35</sup>

Women are prohibited from serving in combat by the German constitution, which states that such service would be against nature and female destiny, but 2,849 German women are currently serving in the medical and music corps of the *Bundeswehr*. Officially, the *Bundeswehr* refuses to use the linguistic female form *Soldatin*, and steadfastly refers to women in the army as *weibliche Soldaten*, or “female (male) soldiers.” Approximately one-third of the overall population thinks that women should be allowed to serve in all divisions including combat, but politically, both the Left and the Right are against women serving.<sup>36</sup>

In 1977, out of approximately 27,000 professors, fewer than 1,500 were female, and among technical college teachers there were fewer than 800 out of a total of 15,807.<sup>37</sup> Today, however, women are slowly moving ahead in German academia. In 1997 almost seventeen percent of all academic appointments went to women; since less than thirteen percent of all applicants were women, these placement numbers are very good.<sup>38</sup> At present, about one-third of all doctorates are being awarded to women, and for the first time in history the freshmen class at German universities last year had well over fifty percent women.<sup>39</sup>

Due to the fact that the technical fields remain very much a man’s world, the Technical College of Wilhelmshaven in Lower Saxony is trying something new in its Department of Economics and Engineering. They have established a special academic track for women only which will run at least through the turn of the century. During the past year, the ratio of women students jumped from five to forty-eight percent at the college. If the program continues to be successful, it could well prove a model for other institutions in Germany, as well as in other European countries.<sup>40</sup>

*Witec*, or Women in Technology, is also trying to help women who may feel that they are alone in physics and technology courses, and then afterwards as engineers. The goal is to help women by keeping them motivated; and two percent of German electrical engineers are now women. *Witec* has issued a new handbook that aims to nurture the self-confidence of qualified women in science, technology, and engineering. The most unusual aspect of *Witec* is the program *Mellow*, which stands for *Life Long Mentoring of Women* in technical jobs. Female university students and experienced professional students take the time and effort to motivate high school pupils and undergraduates in special groups.<sup>41</sup>

Today, abortion is illegal in all of Germany, but it is not prosecutable, provided the woman has attended state-approved counseling to review her options. This modern law represents a very difficult compromise between the East’s abortion on demand within the first trimester and the West’s complete prohibition, except under extreme circumstances.<sup>42</sup> In 1992, after reunification, an abortion law was passed for the country as a whole. Basically, one can get an abortion on demand during the first three months, with compulsory counseling. The law gives abortion a stigmatizing label that prevents insurance companies from paying (except on medical and criminal grounds, or when the woman makes under DM 1,700 per month, DM 1,500 in the East). The judges and legislators have stressed that it is

the woman's duty to carry a fetus to term for the protection of unborn life; however, the counseling must be open-ended and an abortion permit cannot be denied. The centers are strictly controlled and must have legal, medical, psychological, and social work experts available; and the states have the right to check into hospital records.<sup>43</sup>

Pope John Paul II originally condemned the German abortion law as well as the issuance of abortion papers by Catholic counselors in Germany, but in February 1999, the German Bishops' Conference decided to continue to take part in the state-approved counseling program. According to Annette Schavan, vice president of the Central Committee of German Catholics, "German bishops are suggesting a letter of assistance that encourages life, offers help and at the same time fulfills the legal requirements of pregnancy counseling."<sup>44</sup> In 1996, of the 114,508 pregnant women counseled by Catholic centers, 20,117 were issued papers for an abortion, while more than twenty-five percent decided to carry the pregnancy to term.<sup>45</sup>

On another religious note, today, for the first time in German history, there is a female rabbi serving within an official religious position in Germany. Bea Wyler has been the official rabbi in Oldenburg since August 1, 1994. Wyler has been soundly rejected by Orthodox Jewish circles, however, who do not believe that women can serve as scripture authorities, given that their place is in the gallery, segregated from the men. Many see this as a tragic split within an already weak religious group. It was only in 1992 that close to one hundred faithful were able to establish a congregation in Oldenburg and seek out a rabbi. It was their wish from the outset not to have the traditional segregation of men and women during services, but again, the Orthodox Jews are angry that thousands of years of Jewish law has been defiled. The Jewish congregation in Frankfurt is also flirting with the idea of ending segregation; and now many are fearful that the small Jewish community of 50,000 people cannot hold up and flourish under such circumstances of strife.<sup>46</sup>

### **Where to in the New Millennium?**

The German Women's Council has joined together in calling for much broader changes in public and private life in order to realize the goals of equality. Among the most needed are more flexible working hours and increased child-care options. Men not only need to do more of the household chores, but they also need to take more advantage of the available social options, such as the family leave of absence (*Erziehungsurlaub*).

There was a new party formed in 1995: *Die Frauen*. This party's preamble clearly states that the precarious state of current world affairs (poverty, hunger, war, etc.) is the work of men, and continues to be carried out by these same men. The new feminist policies of *Die Frauen* are now meant to address the life and needs of all the world's people.<sup>47</sup>

Many Germans are discussing a new movement called *Girlism*, the adherents of which are known as *Girlies*. *Girlies* usually look like Lolita, but often have the behavior of a Bruce Lee—they are sexy and provocative, used to doing as they please. *Girlies* usually come from very anti-authoritarian families, often with parents who were the student radicals of the 1960s. They normally admit that their parents would be their best friends, if it were not for

the fact that they are their parents. These young women profess the philosophy that being female in modern German society is to experience the best of all possible worlds.<sup>48</sup>

Although most women do not share the very optimistic view of the *Girlies*, the lot of women in modern Germany would seem to be getting better. The chief justice of the Federal Supreme Court is a woman. There is a female bishop in Hamburg, and German TV is alive with female personalities. One of the most powerful officials in the EU government today is Monika Wulf-Mathies, EU Commissioner in charge of the Cohesion Fund, which supports less-favored regions within the EU with development aid. One British newspaper has referred to her as “Germany’s mighty Monika.”<sup>49</sup> Dagmar Schipanski was nominated to run for the Office of President on the Conservative ticket in the May 1999 elections, and if elected, she will be the first woman ever to serve as President of Germany. Moreover, the new Red-Green coalition has placed special emphasis on the implementation of social justice, and five of the total fifteen departmental ministers in Berlin are now women.<sup>50</sup> Needless to say, there is still much to be done before full equality in all aspects of modern life can be achieved. On the other hand, no one could dispute the fact that women in Germany have come very far in the past five decades since their arduous toil among the rubble and ruins that formed their physical postwar legacy.

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# Liberalization and Poverty Alleviation: An Indian Experience

Madhu Bala, National Open University, New Delhi, India

South Asian women confront many gender-related inequalities, which in fact predate current economic reforms and policies. These inequalities are not only found in the labor market, in access to productive resources, skills, and education, but also in terms of the definition of women's work and the double burden of work at home and at the work front. Studies on poverty also reveal that within households the weight of poverty falls more heavily on women rather than men, and as poverty increases in both rural and urban areas, more and more women enter the ranks of absolute poverty.<sup>1</sup>

Recent policy shifts towards liberalization and structural adjustment policies (SAP) have in fact added to the already existing problems. They have resulted in increased poverty<sup>2</sup> in general and feminization, marginalization, and casualization<sup>3</sup> of the women's work force in particular.<sup>4</sup> This is not only because of women's lack of political control and lack of participation, but also the type of poverty alleviation programs and policies adopted, which lack sensitivity to the gender dimensions of poverty. Benefits have not trickled down to the targeted groups. Thus, the challenge lies in understanding how much women have been affected by this process of change, given the preexisting inequities. Similarly, the challenge also lies in organizing women so that they can influence existing facilities and mobilize pressure for policy change.

In particular, this paper attempts to a) note the impact of the policies adopted during the liberalization period in the South Asian countries, b) understand the structure and trends of women's workforce participation, c) illustrate the direct and indirect impact of the policies adopted, d) assess the poverty alleviation policies with reference to women, and e) critically assess those policies and recommendations to suggest policies that will reverse the trends of growing feminization of poverty.

## Liberalization Package

The stated objective of the liberalization and structural adjustment policies worldwide is to change the production process and introduce an international competitiveness along with the internal flexibility that will ultimately alleviate poverty and allow development of human capabilities. This same economic policy has been followed in India since 1991, with elements of short-term stabilization and long-term structural transformation. The general thrust of the package is to minimize the role of the government in the economy and allow market forces to operate in order to determine efficient resource allocation and distribution.

These structural adjustment policies with greater market orientation have important implications for labor in the labor-abundant countries of South Asia. Despite the peculiar political and social aspects of each country, the outcome with respect to the labor market

interventions and the impact of structural adjustments on employment and poverty are remarkably similar—just the opposite of the stated objectives.

The impact of the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) on South Asian countries has not included the reduction of poverty in this region. After ten years of the reform package, for example, 55.4 percent of the population lives in extreme to moderate poverty in Bangladesh. Reforms have largely worsened the employment situation and the quality of employment has declined. The adjustment process has been accompanied by large-scale underemployment, low-paid unskilled employment, casualization of labor, self-employment, and informal sector employment. Despite a wide network of social welfare programs, the benefits do not reach the target groups, with some exceptions in Sri Lanka. There are trends towards the feminization of the workforce in Sri Lanka and India, where more and more women are employed either in unpaid or low-paid work under less than hygienic conditions.<sup>5</sup>

Generally it is obvious that various elements of the SAP package have implications for employment, wages, and working conditions that are linked to poverty. These policies affect women in other ways, such as reduced health, literacy, and skill building, along with declining expenditures on social welfare and poverty alleviation programs.

### **Structure Of Women's Workforce Participation**

A survey conducted in 1995-96 by the Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST)<sup>6</sup> has thrown some light on the features of women and men engaged in informal sector activities in Delhi. The results placed women in mostly two categories in urban areas of Delhi: petty trading and domestic services. It revealed that women earn less than men in both of these categories and work for longer hours and take fewer days off compared to men. Moreover, they are less literate than men; fifty-seven percent of women and twenty-nine percent of men were reported illiterate. It has been documented that males have more productivity related to human capital such as education, type of schooling, experience, and training as compared to their female counterparts. Such differences account for about fifty percent of the male-female gross wage differentials.<sup>7</sup>

Several facets make women's employment different from men's employment. The intertwining of women's productive and reproductive roles is a major factor that makes such a difference. Women often tend to be invisible as far as their productive roles are concerned. Despite some improvements, a large part of their economic activity tends to go unreported or underreported, as a majority of women are employed in informal sector activities for which there is lack of data available. Also, various cultural and regional factors constrain women's workforce participation.

To understand the structure of the women's workforce, it is useful to look at the participation in both the formal and informal sectors. Since women workers are mostly found in the informal sector, they are concentrated in the bottom layer of the employment ladder—in relatively low-paid and insecure jobs. Only four percent of women are engaged in the formal or organized sector, while ninety-six percent of women are found in the

informal or unorganized sector. In 1995, women's employment constituted fifteen percent of the total organized sector employment. In terms of industry, they are mainly found in community, social, and personal services (21.7 percent), manufacturing (11.3 percent), construction (5.3 percent), trade and hotels (8.3 percent). Women perform jobs that are not skilled, well-paying, or easy to perform. For example, in community, social, and personal services, they are involved as health workers, domestic workers, and *anganwadi*<sup>8</sup> workers; in manufacturing, they are performing jobs like checking, finishing, and packaging.<sup>9</sup> In the unorganized sector, they are mainly in three major categories: agricultural laborers, non-farm workers, and home-workers. In India, the most critical sector of female employment is the agricultural sector. All rural women are involved in either farm or non-farm agricultural activities to some extent. As indicated in 1991 Census data, 78.8 percent of all women are working in this agricultural category. Here again women are involved in low-paying, unskilled, and tedious activities like transplanting, harvesting, threshing, and picking. Non-farm workers are another major category of women workers, including mining and quarrying, construction, and forestry. Women also perform jobs like collection of bamboo, cane, grass, oilseeds, fibers, gums, dyes, medicinal plants, and firewood. Women's employment in these non-farm activities is in the form of direct wage employment, including self-employment and secondary employment where workers are paid wages or piece rate. A large number of women workers is also involved in small-scale forest-based enterprise activities such as incense sticks and *bidi*<sup>10</sup> making. Another major category of women workers is home-based workers who work on a contract basis. Some of the processes of the organized sector production are given on contract to women who finish this work at home. The trend over the years indicates the rise in this type of non-farm employment, which is a reflection of an increase in part-time irregular work for women at the lowest level, indicating growing distress for women rather than economic advancement.

#### **Direct and Indirect Effects of Policies on Women's Labor**

Since 1991, several public policies designed to increase employment and reduce poverty, particularly in rural areas, have been reversed. NSSO<sup>11</sup> survey data show a phenomenal increase in the number of people living in rural areas and a comparatively moderate increase in urban areas. In rural India, the proportion of the population living in absolute poverty is estimated to have increased from 36.6 percent in 1990-91 to 48.1 percent in 1992. This is the sharpest rise in rural poverty ever recorded. It means that nearly half of the population in rural areas was reported to be in absolute poverty. For urban areas, the corresponding figures increased from 32.4 to 33.9 percent, respectively.<sup>12</sup> One major factor contributing to this significant increase in rural poverty can be traced to rising food prices in India. Despite favorable agricultural performance, procurement prices are very high. Higher food prices impact the poor directly and push those on the margin below the poverty line. In India, much empirical evidence shows that rural poverty is directly linked with food prices.<sup>13</sup>

There are significant changes in the nature and sectoral distribution of the workforce over the years, as presented in Table 1. The data show two trends—the casualization and the

feminization of the workforce. These two trends are more prominent in urban areas, especially in the organized sector. Increases in casual employment have occurred among both men and women in rural areas. Feminization of employment has manifested a growing share of female labor, particularly in export-oriented industries. Women will even work for low wages and under inferior conditions, without organizing to fight for higher wages and improved working conditions. Data on regular employment show that the proportion of female workers has gone up in urban areas, supporting the hypothesis of feminization of the workforce.

**Table-1: Usually employed persons by the type of employment (percentage)**

Year	Self Employed	Regular Employed	Casual Employed
<b>Rural Males</b>			
1993-94	56.9	8.5	34.6
1987-88	57.5	10.4	32.1
1983	59.5	10.6	29.9
1977-78	62.2	10.8	27.0
<b>Rural Females</b>			
1993-94	51.3	3.4	45.3
1987-88	54.9	4.9	40.2
1983	54.1	3.7	42.2
1977-78	56.3	3.7	40.0
<b>Urban Males</b>			
1993-94	41.1	42.7	16.2
1987-88	41.0	44.4	14.6
1983	40.2	44.5	15.3
1977-78	39.9	47.2	13.9
<b>Urban Females</b>			
1993-94	36.4	35.5	28.1
1987-88	39.3	34.2	26.5
1983	37.3	31.8	30.9
1977-78	42.2	30.8	27.0

Source: Kundu, 1997<sup>14</sup> p.446

Similarly, liberalization has also resulted in the marginalization of the female workforce, as is clear from Table-2, which shows workforce participation rates between 1987-88 and 1993-94. The table reveals that the period of liberalization witnessed a rise in male workforce participation rates, and a near stagnation of female workforce participation rates, resulting in decline in the ratio of male to female participation rates, particularly in rural areas.

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**Table 2: Workforce participation Rates - Usual Status**

ITEMS	43rd 1987-88	50th 1993-94
Rural Males	53.9	55.3
Rural Females	32.3	32.8
Urban Males	50.6	52.0
Urban Females	15.2	15.4
Ratio of Males to Females		
Rural	0.60	0.50
Urban	0.30	0.30

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Source: NSSO, 1996. Tables 1.2.2 and 4.2.3<sup>15</sup>

The Liberalization period has included changes in unemployment rates. Table-3 shows decline in unemployment during 1977-78 to 1990-91 from 5.5 percent to 0.4 percent in 1991 for rural women, but then an upturn in 1993-94. For urban female workers, the percentage has declined from 17.8 percent to 5.4 percent, and then increased to 8.3 percent for the same period. Thus, the period after policy shifts is accompanied by growth in the unemployment rate for both males and females in urban as well as rural areas.

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**Table-3: Unemployment Rates (%) – Usual Status**

YEAR	RURAL		URBAN	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1977-78	2.2	5.5	6.5	17.8
1990-91	1.3	0.4	4.5	5.4
1991-92	1.6	1.2	4.6	6.7
1993-94	2.0	1.3	5.4	8.3

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Source: NSSO, Consumer expenditure & Employment Survey, 1994 and NSSO, 1996<sup>16</sup>

There is a reversal of the highly prominent trend of increasing diversification away from agriculture in rural areas during the eighties. NSSO data show a decline in the non-agricultural proportion of rural male workers from 28.3 percent in 1989-90 to 24.3 percent in 1992. For rural female workers the trend was more obvious, declining from 18.6 percent to 13.8 percent for the same period.<sup>17</sup> In terms of sectors, the largest absolute decline took place in sectors like construction, manufacturing, and community and other services.<sup>18</sup> In all of these areas, women are found in large numbers as compared with the other sectors, suggesting distress as they may be trapped in declining occupations.

Thus, liberalization has directly and indirectly resulted in growing poverty, particularly among women. This is manifested by higher unemployment rates among females, a shift to low-paying occupations, casualisation of female labor, and lower workforce participation rates for women, especially in the formal sector. Evidently, for poor women the principal

overall objective is to ensure family survival. All types of work—be it productive, reproductive, or home management—can contribute to the goal of family survival. These women are engaged in any type of work, even with low pay and poor working conditions, in order to earn money to feed their families.<sup>19</sup>

### **Poverty Alleviation Programs**

Direct state intervention in the labor market, particularly for women, is important in light of the fact that gender discrimination is operating within the household, in the labor market, and in the allocation of productive assets. Some of the reasons for discrimination are embodied in cultural institutions that may be resistant to policy interventions, including the economic trends discussed above, demographic transitions, and human resource development or lack of it for women. These reasons are modifiable to some extent through specific programs for women that can fill those gaps in infrastructure and assist women's work.

In fact, realizing this need, the government has taken several steps to improve women's economic and social status. There are mainly two types of programs: wage-employment creation via rural public works, and self-employment creation via provision of subsidized credit for purchasing assets. Some of the anti-poverty programs like Integrated Rural Development Program (IRDP) and Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) reserve a percentage of their placements for women. A list of these programs is given below:

#### **Programs for Employment and Infrastructure in Rural Areas:**

There are many programs for the rural poor that address the need for wage and self-employment and infrastructure development. These programs include:

- Jawahar Rozgar (employment) Yojana (plan) (JRY)
- Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS)
- Integrated Rural Development Program (IRDP)
- Development of Women & Children in Rural Area (DWCRA)
- Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM)
- Indira Awas (residence) Yojana (IAY)

#### **Programs for Employment and Infrastructure in Urban Areas:**

A rapidly growing urban population accompanied by anti-labor policies under liberalization has also resulted in aggravating the problem of urban poverty. The government programs for urban poor are:

- The Nehru Rojgar Yojana (NRY)
- Scheme of Urban Wage Employment (SUWE)
- Scheme of Housing and Shelter Upgradation (SHASU)
- Prime Minister's Integrated Urban Poverty Eradication Program (PMIUPEP)
- Urban-based Services for the Poor (UBSP)

In December 1997, the government combined the three major programs of poverty

alleviation, such as NRY, PMIUPEP, and UBSP, into Swarna Jayanti Shahri Rozgar Yojana (SJSRY).<sup>20</sup>

### **Poverty Alleviation and Women**

To provide opportunities for women to improve their social and economic conditions, almost all the poverty alleviation programs have a special component for them. The 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 enabled a substantial number of women to take direct part local level self-governments (Panchayats). Women now play an active role in the decision-making process of programs that have direct relevance to the rural poor. For example, women are members of watershed committees, which plan and implement watershed projects, and are active participants in self-help groups where they take responsibility for the assets created. Several different policy measures in the form of schemes to provide better opportunities to women in rural India include: **National Social Assistance Program** (NSAP), which provides benefits to poor households below the poverty line, with a major focus on women; **National Maternity Benefit Scheme** (NMBS), which is exclusively aimed at assisting pregnant women financially by providing them Rs.300 each for the first two live births; under **Indira Awaas Yojna** (IAY), there is a provision for giving houses free of cost to the poorest of the poor. This program gives priority to widows and unmarried women. IAY houses are to be allotted in the name of the women members of the household or in the joint names of husband and wife.

### **Wage Employment Program and Women**

Apart from the various women-focused schemes referred to above, wage employment programs like **Jawahar Rojgar Yojna** (JRY) have also been helpful. The objectives of this program are a) to generate gainful additional employment for the unemployed and underemployed, and b) to create sustained employment by strengthening the rural economic infrastructure and community assets. During 1985-90 JRY was the largest single antipoverty program. People below the poverty line are the target group of JRY. Preference is given to the members of SC/ST.<sup>21</sup> Thirty percent of those served by this program are women. JRY covers asset creation that impacts women's lives both indirectly and directly. Assets are created in the form of social forestry, soil conservation, minor irrigation and flood control, construction of village tanks, land development, and construction of roads and school buildings.

These public works contribute to women's employment in very significant ways, particularly in drought years. They may be more important for females than males, as the NSSO data showed that in 1987-88, public works contributed around ten percent of female non-agricultural employment. However, some of the states intervened actively and their share of public works in the female non-agricultural employment sector was 56.5 percent in Gujarat and 40.3 percent in Rajasthan.

### **Self Employment Programs and Women**

Self-employment programs that provide work in or near homes were recognized as a priority for ameliorating women's poverty. Consequently, such programs started in 1980. These programs are:

**(a) Integrated Rural Development Program (IRDP)**

This program was launched all over the country on October 2, 1980, as a major credit for self-employment programs intended to alleviate poverty. The objective is to enable targeted rural poor families to increase their income by acquiring productive assets through a credit subsidy from the government. To ensure greater participation of women, it was decided that at least thirty percent of those assisted will be women. The target was raised from thirty to forty percent in 1990-91. The coverage for women increased from ten percent in 1985-86 to almost thirty-four percent in 1994-95; more than 699,000 women were assisted during 1995-96 and about 262,000 women were given assistance in 1996-97. In total, 3.3 million women were served from 1992-93 to 1996-97. The percentage of women beneficiaries was thirty-three percent each for the years 1995-96 and 1996-97.

**(b) Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM)**

This program provides technical and entrepreneurial skills to rural youth from families below the poverty line, to enable them to assume income-generating activities. The coverage of women in this program is pegged at forty percent. Almost 1.6 million women have been covered under TRYSEM since its inception. The share of women youth trained under this program increased from thirty-four percent in 1985-90 to around fifty percent during 1985-90. Since then, however, the percentage decreased from 52.1 percent in 1991-92 to 42.8 percent in 1995-96.<sup>22</sup>

**(c) Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA)**

DWCRA has a strategy different from IRDP. Instead of the family as the focus, groups of poor women are assisted through a package including subsidy, loan, training, and special extension program setup.<sup>23</sup> Under this scheme, poor village women are organized into groups of ten to fifteen for engaging in economic activities that suit their skills, aptitude, and local conditions. The program seeks to encourage collective action and make poor women self-reliant. Of late, there has been increasing emphasis on empowering women through training, information, and knowledge. Through education and communication, DWCRA seeks to sensitize women about their needs, and to assist them in prioritizing and articulating these needs by using the existing facilities. Childcare activities have been added to this program to facilitate access to primary education, health, and nutrition for the welfare of the children of DWCRA beneficiaries. About 188,000 groups of women have been formed, with total membership of about three million women since its inception in 1982-83.

**A Critical Assessment**

In spite of mega-policy initiatives such as JRY and EAS, these programs meet only four percent of the actual need. With the marginalization and casualization of women's workforce participation, along with poor working conditions, the proportion of beneficiaries served by the program generally falls short of the need. The women do not always get fully

involved in the projects enacted under various programs. There are complaints about corruption, poorly designed, badly executed, and expensive projects. Most projects in the non-farm sector are nothing more than hasty initiatives to train the women in a limited range of crafts and activities considered suitable for women.

The low participation and involvement of women is attributed to several problems: a) the work sites under different projects are not always suitable to women; b) contractors are less enthusiastic about employing women; c) long working hours on the JRY program do not suit women, as they have to shoulder domestic responsibilities as well; and d) the number of trainees has been going down since 1991-92, from 52.1 percent female to 42.8 percent in 1995-96.

Evaluation of DWCRA projects by researchers<sup>24</sup> revealed many problems such as:

- DWCRA is mainly focussed on economic activities, while other components of the program, such as child care, adult education, overall organization of women, and reduction in drudgery of women's work have received inadequate attention.
- Despite the number of groups that have been formed under DWCRA, only some of them have started economic activities and only a few have been able to implement the scheme successfully.
- Group philosophy could not be implemented well, as either the group organizer dominated or the voluntary agency did not train the group.
- Gram Sevikas<sup>25</sup> were not capable of understanding and implementing the spirit of the program.
- Marketing is one of the weakest points of the programs. Many groups found it difficult to face competitive markets.
- Most DWCRA groups took up traditional economic activities and did not attempt non-traditional activities.

Thus, there have been major gaps in the functioning of field level workers. Despite co-ordination committees, the concept of integrated development has remained imaginary.

However, the story does not end here. A glance at the budgetary allocations to poverty alleviation programs indicates the policy directions of the government under liberalization after 1991. In fact, the allocations to basic minimum services and poverty alleviation programs are far from satisfactory.

A comparison of the budget allocations and actual expenditures since 1991 shows that there has been a significant increase (thirty-seven and twenty-two percent, respectively, over the previous year in constant terms) in social sector allocations, particularly after 1993-94. However, taking JRY and EAS together, there seems to be a clear policy shift towards cutting budget allocations for rural employment programs, up to twenty percent in the central government budget allocations in 1996-97. For IRDP and NRY, there has been no improvement in the budget allocations.<sup>26</sup>

A scheme like Indira Awaas Yojana has substantial scope for leakage, including

the ambiguity of defining eligibility criteria. The National Social Assistance Program (NSAP) maintains high levels of budget allocations, but actual expenditures are much less (as much as twenty-seven percent) than the budget allocations, suggesting poor implementation of the program. However, it would not be an exaggeration to say that sometimes state policies themselves harm women's employment and income; field workers often say that government policies harm the poor much more than they benefit them through schemes like IRDP, which includes land rights of women, laws regarding forests and common property resources.<sup>27</sup> The following is an example:

The women living in the desert area of Santalpur Taluka of Banaskantha district, Gujarat survive mainly on gathering gum from the Babul trees planted by forest department. The forest department insists on licenses from gum collection, and since women had no licenses, they were in the past collecting gum illegally and selling to private traders. After joining SEWA they formed DWCRA groups and demanded licenses, so that they could legally sell the gum to the Forest Corporation. The rates for the gum are fixed by Forest Corporation, and to the women's dismay their legality has resulted in getting them poorer rates from the Forest Corporation than what they could get from the open market. . . . The tragedy is that women can get the better rate for gum in the open market but the Forest Corporation will not allow the gum pickers to enter the open market and they have to sell their gum for 1/3<sup>rd</sup> to 1/4<sup>th</sup> of the market price.<sup>28</sup>

There are still a lot of things to be done in the form of properly designed and executed projects. Efforts should be made towards special anti-poverty programs and schemes for the women. The World Bank has shown concern about the growing poverty in the East Asian and South Asian Region. It has been increasingly recognized that the current strategies for the eradication of poverty have failed due to the lack of gender analysis of the economy.<sup>29</sup> In fact, there is a need for an integrated approach. All the programs and schemes should be implemented with gender sensitivity. Women should have the provisions for facilities like child care, flexible working hours, and maternity leave benefits. Efforts should be made for reducing women's drudgery by providing them the latest developments in cooking stoves and other domestic appliances. Special provisions for health care facilities are also required to truly alleviate women's impoverishment.

Thus far, the impact of these programs on the lives of women is small, given the amount of funds spent on such schemes. A major criticism of the government's anti-poverty programs involves the lack of people's participation. The government's approach seems to be much more technical. There is need for involving local self-governments (Panchyats), NGOs, and community-based organizations in this process and forming self-help groups for strengthening government employment programs.

Gender training at all levels to change the mindset in perceptions, policies, and practices is necessary. For continuous evaluation of such programs, a data bank with sex

disaggregation should be maintained. In this connection, such poverty alleviation policies must address individuals in the family rather than the family as a unit. More and more efforts toward women's access to credit, support services, and marketing of their products is essential.

Political will to reverse the trends of feminization of poverty is a must. However, in light of apprehensions about the highly stratified and unequal socioeconomic structure of Indian villages and the dominance of land-owning classes in controlling the power, the Constitution reserved one-third of the seats in the local governing bodies (called Pachayats at the village level and municipal corporations at the district level) for women, so they will have a share in decision-making. However, this is not very effective in situations where female illiteracy rates are very high. Therefore, it becomes imperative to raise literacy rates of women and disseminate information to them.

Cooperatives are important structures that can meet the needs of self-employed women. Such activities should be encouraged, organized, and implemented so that they work in the interest of poor women. Similarly, NGOs that show interest in women's employment and are working in different areas should be encouraged. These voluntary agencies make local people accountable, sensitize them to women's work needs, and thus play a vital role in improving the socioeconomic conditions of women.

Efforts should be made to build alliances and networks with like-minded groups involved with similar issues, organizing women in poverty through the formation of self-help groups and saving and credit schemes. Such alliances and networks provide opportunities for women to learn from each other's experiences and can generate a lot of self-confidence in women, going a long way to help women in poverty.

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## **Part IV:**

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# **Teaching Resources and Strategies**

# The Liberal Arts, Public Literacy, and Pushing Out of Poverty

Jennifer Shaddock

University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

The brutally realistic and controversial novel *Push* (1996) by Sapphire describes the plight of a sexually abused, illiterate African-American teenage mother, Precious Jones.<sup>1</sup> Precious is just barely surviving a life of absolute impoverishment in Harlem. The novel follows one radical teacher's efforts to empower Precious through encouraging her to read and write. The progress Precious makes in the classroom is contrasted with her treatment within the cynical pragmatism of the social welfare system. The novel's message is not optimistic, giving full weight to the obstacles the embattled heroine must overcome to achieve a modicum of self-determination. Nonetheless Sapphire, who herself taught reading and writing in Harlem, uses the novel to argue poignantly that whatever real economic progress is possible for poor women will be achieved, not through basic job training—as the social welfare system would have it—but rather through the development of public literacy. Public literacy, as articulated by Sapphire throughout the course of the novel, is the cultivation of the imaginative mind, a process through which a secure personal and social identity can emerge.

I begin this paper by invoking *Push* because it graphically illustrates the short-sightedness of state programs such as Wisconsin Works (W-2) that emphasize job skills for low-income mothers at the expense of general literacy skills gained through liberal education. Specifically, Wisconsin's welfare reform law eliminates the possibility of higher education for low-income mothers who have been pushed from welfare into low-paying, dead-end jobs, a state mandate that will essentially perpetuate the current class status of these women. I argue that even as academics advocate broader access to higher education for these now excluded women, we must be wary of inferring that education is useful only as a means of acquiring job skills. Such a perspective grossly simplifies a liberal education's crucial role as a remedy to poverty.

Despite the American public's general perception that a liberal arts education is a luxury unaffordable for the middle classes, let alone the poor, low-income women in particular are best served by gaining access to a liberal arts, rather than a vocational, education. Economically privileged Americans have benefited for generations from the essential aspects of liberal education: the development of strong critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills; a broad-based introduction to the sciences, arts, humanities, and social sciences; an initiation into the concepts of American citizenship; an appreciation for history and culture; an exposure to different kinds of people and ideas; and an understanding of the increasing necessity for life-long learning. To most educators these may appear sound, even clichéd educational goals; indeed, they parallel my own university's

stated educational mission. In the past ten years, however, an increasing number of students have come to see college as only a means to a good-paying job, as a vocational training ground. As these students turned from a more holistic idea of education to the “learn in order to earn” paradigm, universities across the country were quick to cater to this idea in an effort to maintain high student enrollment. Such a paradigm does not, however, prepare the low-income woman, whose situation may demand both a socio-economic and a psychological transformation, for sustained economic advancement.

There are several reasons why a narrow vocational program will be largely ineffective in eliminating poverty among low-income women in the twenty-first century. Richard H. Hersh, president of Hobart and William Smith Colleges, argues that as business grows more international, competitive, and susceptible to technology-driven change, “specialists limited to one specific skill are quickly left behind.”<sup>2</sup> Employers, according to a survey supported by the AT&T Foundation and administered by the polling firm DYG, Inc., indicate that they value independent thinking, creativity, risk-taking, perseverance, entrepreneurship, learning for learning’s sake, and strong communication skills—skills that a liberal education encourages, but a minimum-wage job stunts.<sup>3</sup> The AT&T Foundation’s study concludes that a liberal arts education will more effectively insure job security in the future than will vocational training.

However, a fundamentally more valuable reason to promote the liberal arts for low-income women is not only because of earning power, but to advance the potential for a more radical personal transformation than any job can provide. In an excerpt from his influential book *The Affluent Society*, economist John Kenneth Galbraith claims that “insular poverty”—that is, islands of poverty created by seemingly inescapable environmental forces—won’t be remedied by a “general advance in income” but only through first-rate education and “the opportunity for advanced education for those who qualify.”<sup>4</sup>

A provocative educational experiment initiated by writer Earl Shorris with thirty low-income students in New York City tested and extended Galbraith’s theory. Shorris summarizes the results of his case study in an article entitled “The Liberal Arts as a Weapon in the Hands of the Restless Poor,” published in the September 1997 *Harper’s Magazine*.<sup>5</sup> The piece has garnered an enormous amount of attention in educational forums and has, within just a year of its publication, been anthologized in several college readers.

Shorris had been working for three years on a book about poverty when a surprising interview he had with prison inmate, Viniece Walker, culminated in his founding an experimental liberal arts program for the poor. Shorris describes Walker as twenty years old when she was sent to prison. She was:

... a high school dropout who read at the level of a college sophomore, a graduate of crack houses, the streets of Harlem, and a long alliance with a brutal man. On the surface Viniece has remained as tough as she was on the street. She speaks bluntly, and even though she is HIV positive and the virus has progressed during her time in prison, she still swaggers as she walks down the prison corridors.

While in prison, Niece, as she is known to her friends, completed her high school requirements and began to pursue a college degree (psychology is the only major offered at Bedford Hills, but Niece also took a special interest in philosophy). She became a counselor to women with a history of family violence and a comforter to those with AIDS.<sup>6</sup>

When Shorris asked Walker, “Why do you think people are poor?,” she responded,:

You got to begin with the children. . . . You’ve got to teach the moral life of downtown to the children. And the way to do this, Earl, is by taking them downtown to plays, museums, concerts, lectures, where they can learn the moral life of downtown.<sup>7</sup>

Shorris indulged her: “And then they won’t be poor anymore?”

She answered angrily, “And they won’t be poor **no more**.”

“What you mean is. . . .”

“What I mean is what I said—a moral alternative to the street.”<sup>8</sup>

For Shorris, Walker’s comments suggested a way out of what Galbraith calls “insular poverty” and what Shorris describes as the “surround of force”—“the numerous forces, hunger, isolation, illness, landlords, police, abuse, neighbors, drugs, criminals and racism, among many others—[that] exert themselves on the poor at all times and enclose them” in a seemingly inescapable embrace.<sup>9</sup> Shorris explains:

I had come to understand that [the surround of force] was what kept the poor from being political and that the absence of politics in their lives was what kept them poor. I don’t mean “political” in the sense of voting in an election but in the way Thucydides used the word: to mean activity with other people at every level, from the family to the neighborhood to the broader community to the city-state.<sup>10</sup>

The poor, continues Shorris, “. . . had no public life, no place; they lived within the surround of force, moving as fast as they could, driven by necessity, without a moment to reflect.”<sup>11</sup>

Reflection and community are central values of the liberal arts tradition. While I was reading various essays about the liberal arts last spring with my first-year English students, those two words—“reflection” and “community”—surfaced (among others) repeatedly. It is not a difficult stretch of the imagination then to understand why Walker invoked “the moral life of downtown,” the museums, plays, lectures—the study of human constructs and concerns that is the humanities—to remedy the paralyzing isolation of the poor. Shorris summarizes her essential point, “If the political life was the way out of poverty, the humanities provided an entrance to reflection and the political life.”<sup>12</sup>

So began Shorris's creation of the Clemente Course in the Humanities, a year-long rigorous education in poetry, art history, logic, rhetoric, American history, and political philosophy for thirty low-income students. The details of the course's progress, the anecdotes Shorris shares, are fascinating, but too expansive to relate here. Let me simply share with you the results of the course. Shorris concludes that:

. . . of the thirty students admitted to the course, sixteen had completed it, and fourteen had earned credit from Bard College. . . . [S]tudents' self-esteem and their abilities to divine and solve problems had significantly increased; their use of verbal aggression as a tactic for resolving conflicts had significantly decreased. And they all had notably more appreciation for the concepts of benevolence, spirituality, universalism and collectivism.<sup>13</sup>

And all for \$2,000—a bargain, Shorris notes, in comparison to unemployment, welfare, or prison.

What Shorris apparently accomplished is what political scientist Benjamin R. Barber calls an “education in the arts of liberty.” The fundamental task of education in a democracy, says Barber, is:

. . . what Tocqueville once called the apprenticeship of liberty: learning to be free. . . . The claim that all men are born free, upon which America was founded, is at best a promising fiction. In real life, as every parent knows, children are born fragile, born needy, born ignorant, born unformed, born weak, born foolish, born dependent—born in chains. We acquire our free-dom over time, if at all. Embedded in families, clans, communities, and na-tions, we must learn to be free. We may be natural consumers and born nar-cissists, but citizens have to be made. Liberal-arts education actually means education in the arts of liberty; the “servile arts” were the trades learned by the unfree men in the Middle Ages, the vocational education of their day.<sup>14</sup>

In other words, when we move from vocational or professional education to an education based in the liberal arts, we move from chains to freedom, from isolation to community, from powerlessness and frustration to a particular politics defined as the negotiation of power within a community. This is what Shorris means when he claims that the students who finished his program were “dangerous.” They may use politics, he says:

. . . to get along in a society based on the game, to escape from the surround of force into a gentler life, to behave as citizens, and nothing more; or they may choose to oppose the game itself. . . .<sup>15</sup>

One such dangerous Clemente student was fired from her job in a fast-food restaurant for trying to start a union.

We need more of this kind of dangerous woman: more women with the *choice* to play or effectively change the game. What can academics do to help women move from fragile, harried lives of economic hardship to lives where reflection and choice are real possibilities? Admittedly the university, indeed especially the liberal arts tradition that I am espousing here, is still in many ways the patriarchal and elitist institution that Adrienne Rich described in her now classic essay, “Toward a Woman-Centered University.” Rich asserted that:

The university is above all a hierarchy. At the top is a small cluster of highly paid and prestigious persons, chiefly men, whose careers entail the services of a very large base of ill-paid or unpaid persons, chiefly women. . . . The structure of the man-centered university constantly reaffirms *the use of women as means* to the end of male “work.”<sup>16</sup>

In this way, university-educated women have historically been excluded from participating in public literacy, from an active role in the “moral life of downtown.” And yet, many of the core values of the liberal arts—the emphasis on community, compassion for self and others, respect for difference, the cultivation of self-knowledge and wholeness, the development of an integrated person—are in keeping with general feminist philosophy that embraces, rather than excludes, women.

What then can academics do? At a university like the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, where roughly fifty percent of the students are first generation college students, twenty percent are low-income, and the majority are women, we must—perhaps counter-intuitively—resist the pressure to view education as solely or even primarily a means to a job. We must help low-income women *imagine* themselves and their society in a new way. We must make Walker’s “moral alternative of downtown” palpable and show its *practicality* in preparing them for a life of passion, self-expression, connection, and choice.

We must reassert that the most empowering education is one where instead of helping our students find a job—a model where the university is seen as an assembly line producing workers—we act as midwives to help them birth themselves. We must strive to aim higher than mere vocational training in order to effect the radical transformation of self that Viniece Walker claims is essential to end the paralyzing poverty she was born into. We must, like Precious Jones in *Push*, rebel against a social welfare system that merely moves poor women from workfare programs into menial jobs. Instead we must understand and communicate that the development of literacy through reading and writing is much more than a path to correct grammar and business communication skills.

At one point in *Push* when Precious is feeling most defeated, she says to her teacher, “I drownin’ in river.” She continues:

She [the teacher] don’t look me like I crazy but say, If you just sit there the river gonna rise up drown you! Writing could be the boat carry you to the other side. One time in your journal you told me you had never really told your story. I think

telling your story git you over the river Precious.

... "I'm tired," I says. She says, "I know you are but you can't stop now Precious, you gotta push."<sup>17</sup>

Through the liberal arts we learn public literacy—the articulation of our own stories and their relationship to the stories of others. Public literacy makes clear our particular connection to the larger past, our particular relationship to our contemporary communities and culture, our unique talents and proficiencies and how they can be used in the world as we know it. It also enhances our potential for political self-expression. What can academics do to improve conditions for low-income women? We must push to insure that all women have access to education, but specifically to a *liberal* education, an education broad enough to carry low-income women across that rising river, the drowning force of insular poverty.

#### NOTES

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8. Shorris, p. 50-51.
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# Reclaiming Hope

**Judith Pedersen-Benn,  
Community Initiative on Welfare Reform in Minnesota**

I am a former Welfare Mom. For more than nine years I struggled with being a single parent who got little or no child support, had minimum-wage jobs without benefits, and had to deal with a welfare system that was intrusive and abusive. I want to discuss what I learned from these experiences and what I learned from other women who shared them with me.

Let me begin with the end. I hold a master's degree in Community and Organizational Development from Michigan State University, work in the nonprofit sector, teach at a local university, do consulting work, and volunteer regularly at a local women's resource center. I am also currently supporting two of my children in their efforts to get college degrees.

I am not an exceptional person; many women have the potential to do what I did. What made the difference for me is that I was able to reclaim HOPE. By reclaiming hope I mean that I was able to summon up just the least bit of belief that I could do something that would make my life better and give me some control over my life. *Hope didn't just descend on me magically.* Certain **supports and assistance** helped me to work my way out of the cycle of poverty, low self-esteem, and hopelessness. Here are some of the things I can identify that helped me in this process of reclaiming hope:

1. Through a sliding fee scale I started seeing a psychologist who listened to me, helped me articulate what I really wanted to do with my life, encouraged me to go out and do it, and then helped me figure out ways to do it.
2. I found a support group of women who were struggling to change their lives in more positive ways through education and self-awareness, and I joined it.
3. I moved closer to my sister (who was also a single parent) and we were able to help and support one another when we needed child care or had emergencies.
4. Welfare money along with grants, work-study, scholarships, and loans allowed me to support my family financially while I went to college.
5. Several women professors mentored me through the process of beginning school after being out for twenty years and helped me deal with things like the school's bureaucracy, deciding what direction I wanted my career to take, and how to get assistance for graduate school.
6. At school I met other women who were like me—on welfare, with kids, and struggling to create a better life. We supported each other and celebrated each small victory. We validated our sense of worth in the face of a world which named us as “those lazy no good welfare moms.”
7. I discovered a unique spiritual community that nourished my spiritual growth (as I defined it) and encouraged my efforts to change my life. They did not judge my financial situation, rather, they accepted me as worthy on my own merits.

This is not to say that I didn't have perseverance, drive, and ambition; I did. But I needed the help and support of all these people in order for me to bring forth my own talents and initiative. Then as now I see that these kinds of supports are often lacking for women who are trying to move off welfare. Presently, women have lost even the financial support of a welfare income while getting an education.

How many women are as lucky as I was to have such a constellation of support descend upon them? While I can't explain why this happened to me, I can tell you that it has transformed my life forever. I am a different person; my life is radically different; my children's lives are better, and I have a deep-seated, compelling desire to help other women do what I did.

Based on my experience and the experiences of other women I have encountered on my way, I developed a model for a program that provides a more "holistic" approach to helping women leave poverty.<sup>1</sup> It is a program that would give women the same opportunity to change their lives that I had, to reclaim their own sense of hope that they can take themselves and their families out of poverty permanently. This holistic approach has six basic components:

1. Personal Growth Education
2. Basic Needs Resource Information and Networking Assistance
3. Professional Growth and Development
4. Support and Mentoring Networks
5. Micro-enterprise Business Program that includes: Small Business Training and/or Supported Employment
6. Cooperative Living Housing arrangements for women who want to pursue a degree program

#### **Personal Growth Areas of Education**

These educational classes would be developed and implemented based on adult non-formal education models that promote an empowering learner-centered approach. Classes would be offered in an informal atmosphere, open to anyone from the community, and encourage the development of continuing learning groups. Content of the classes would include:

- Stress Management
- Nutrition and Wellness
- Goal Setting
- Problem-solving
- Understanding yourself (women's ways of knowing, personality types, feminist perspectives, psychological and sociological research and knowledge as it relates to women)
- Diversity Education: how to maintain your integrity as a woman and, if appropriate, as an ethnic or racial minority in a white, male-dominated world

- Parenting Skills
- Assertiveness Training: how to make yourself heard and be taken seriously
- Setting Personal Boundaries
- Developing Self-Esteem
- Building Positive Interpersonal Relationships
- Dealing with Domestic Violence
- Budgeting and Financial Planning
- Time & Energy Management
- Developing a Spiritual Practice: offer a variety of techniques for getting in touch with meditative states of being, e.g., meditation practice, yoga, prayer, visualization, music, dance, tai chi, art
- Leadership Development
- Organizing for Community and Political Activism

#### **Basic Needs Resources Information and Networking Assistance**

The Program would serve participants' basic needs in two ways, by making informational booklets available on site for people to use, and by having a staff person available to answer questions and make key contacts with other agencies to assist participants in getting help. This would be based on interagency collaboration with groups like domestic violence centers, United Way, human and social service agencies, churches, food banks, volunteer organizations, legal aid associations, and others. The following needs would be addressed in this part of the program: housing, healthcare, daycare, transportation, financial assistance, counseling services, legal services, food, clothing, domestic violence.

#### **Professional Growth and Development**

For the most part, these assessment/education programs would not be offered through this program unless they are unavailable in the community, but assistance in referring, enrolling, and selecting alternatives would be part of the program. Some of the education/assessment components that could be coordinated with other agencies and programs (e.g., literacy programs, GED programs, Workforce center, etc.) would include:

- Assessment of current job skills, abilities, and education
- Job aptitude testing
- Assessment of diverse jobs and the education and training needed to do them
- Literacy, General Education Degree (GED), English as a Second Language (ESL)
- Explore avenues for higher education and training
- Basic Job Skills I (Maintaining a schedule, Cleanliness, Dress, Relating to authority)
- How to interview for a job
- How to look for and apply for a job
- Basic Job Skills II (Communications, Conflict resolution, Working with others - teamwork)
- Sexual harassment and legal rights in the workplace

### **Support and Mentoring Groups**

Perhaps most important to the success of the program is the creation of a “learning community” among those who have finished the program, new participants, those at various stages in the program, and other women in the community. A learning community opens up the opportunity for new understandings and education through dialogue and interaction that could not be anticipated nor created by other means. Understanding would grow from the shared experiences and knowledge of women both within and without the program. As co-learners, all women should expect to both gain and share knowledge in this process. Learning/support groups could include but would not be limited to the following kinds of groups.

- Support groups (including women who are new to the program, women who have been in the program for some time, and women who have finished the program) where women share experiences and reflect on their continuing needs, successes and challenges
- Mentoring program comprised of professional women and women who have finished the program who are willing to volunteer to mentor and support a program participant on a one-on-one basis
- Support groups of current and past participants who are willing to educate mentors about the needs, challenges, and successes of participants.
- Women who would agree to train and serve as ADVOCATES and assist women who are trying to get their needs met through public agencies.

### **Cooperative Living/Housing**

A small number of women (probably no more than three to ten, depending on space available) would be provided housing for a period of from one to four years. The purpose of this arrangement would be to offer transitional housing to low-income women (and their children) who wish to pursue training or higher education and are unable to do so under the current welfare laws. These women would be expected to learn how to live in a cooperative structure where all responsibilities and decisions are shared, and they would also contribute an agreed-upon amount of their time and labor to the program’s economic ventures. This program would allow them to share expenses and responsibilities while attending school.

### **Economic Development Programs**

In order to make the program self-supporting and to help women who are interested learn how to start a small business, a series of micro-business enterprises would be developed. These enterprises would serve multiple purposes, that is, they would give some women the training needed to learn how to run a small business, others would gain training in skills needed to work in a specific business, and others would use the businesses as a place to learn the skills needed to re-enter the workforce. Some of the potential micro-enterprises that the program could develop are:

- Small business training and loan program

- Daycare program that includes drop-off, weekends, evenings, and nights and provides training for women interested in learning how to set up a daycare business
- Restaurant/take-out service that trains women in professional cooking
- Create a space for aspiring musicians to perform and artists to display and sell their art
- Bookstore specializing in titles and items related to the women's needs

All women would not need every service, but some would. The time needed to complete any or all of the programs would depend on individual needs. Functions such as the support group and mentoring program could extend indefinitely.

Of course this approach is not without problems. Start-up funding would be considerable and it would need strong community support. Many people and agencies will argue that the program takes too long, that it offers poor women opportunities that others in our society don't have, that it is an idealistic "pie in the sky" approach. Yet I know it works. It worked for me, and it's worked for others. All of the women I know who made their way out of poverty had these kinds of support available to them in one form or another.

Until we look at supporting the whole person, understanding the complexity of people's lives, and helping them to change their whole environment, I don't think we will be able to help women release the gifts locked up inside them. All their "potential" has nowhere to go unless someone offers them a place where they can let it out and helps them nurture it. **I want to do that. We need to do that.** We do not live in isolation from one another. Our collective future depends on our ability to foster the talents of everyone, not just a lucky few. Let's join together in nurturing the seeds of promise that *all women* hold inside themselves. By doing so, we restore **HOPE** to them and to ourselves as well.

#### NOTES

1. Along with three other women, the author is currently working to implement this project in southeastern Minnesota. A nonprofit organization, *Women's Dreamwork*, has been established and is presently seeking funding for the project.

# Facing Student Resistance to Images of Poverty in the Women's Studies Classroom

Karen Peterson Welch  
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

As a teacher/activist in Women's Studies and English Composition, I frequently encounter student resistance to the ideas of privilege associated with race, class, gender, and culture. This resistance manifests in a number of ways. Some students see privilege as **earned** and therefore not privilege at all; others see it as something about which they are expected to feel **guilty**; and still others see it as part of "**natural selection**" and therefore not really an issue. Each of these views presents barriers not only to students' attempts at personal reflection and analysis of their own place of privilege, but also barriers to an acknowledgement of the real plight of those in economically or culturally marginalized groups.

Teaching college students about poverty makes them uncomfortable. Bell hooks notes, in *Teaching to Transgress*, that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are fearful of revealing that background in fear that classmates will think less of them.<sup>1</sup> I suspect that the silence which surrounds such fear is common on many campuses throughout the country. Hooks offers significant suggestions for dispelling that problem of silence—in the form of "safe" classroom practices, student-centered activities, and other strategies common to liberatory pedagogy.<sup>2</sup> Such strategies are effective in emboldening the timid and giving voice to the silent. However, the resistance to issues of poverty among students who enjoy greater economic privilege is a serious problem that I believe undermines many of our efforts to "equalize" the college classroom. Students of privilege often need help recognizing and understanding the power of that privilege before they can begin to imagine what their lives would be like without it.

Peggy McIntosh describes white privilege as "an invisible package of unearned assets":

White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear, and blank checks.<sup>3</sup>

Striking as those words are, they do not easily convince our students, who seem to fear that if they acknowledge their privilege, they will then have to relinquish it. As teachers, we have compelling opportunities to help students see ways in which their own positions of power can effectively contribute to, rather than compete with, the empowerment of others.

I often tell my students a true story that occurred just two years ago at a local discount

store. My friend was standing in a checkout line behind an African American woman with two small children. The clerk rang up the few inexpensive items from the customer's cart, took her check, and asked for two forms of identification. The customer had a driver's license but nothing else. After asking several times for a credit card or phone card or membership card of some kind, the clerk called a manager who asked the woman a few questions and then finally approved her check. My friend, whose purchases totaled over \$100, was not asked for any identification. When she asked the clerk why she had not needed identification, the clerk mumbled something about store policy. Pursuing this policy, my friend found the store manager and asked for clarification. He explained, rather embarrassed, that he and the clerk were "just following orders" but would not discuss the topic further. (Despite subsequent written and verbal inquiries, my friend found no person responsible for setting such a policy. She has simply stopped shopping at that store after notifying the corporate office of her observation and subsequent decision.)

While my students often gasp at the moment in which they recognize the power imbalances in this story, they seldom have a suggestion for action. Occasionally, a student will approve of asking the clerk for clarification, but more frequently, students say they would "just feel sorry for" the first customer. Borrowing from Davida A. Alperin's chapter in *Bridges of Power* on the necessity of alliances among socially diverse groups, my students and I discuss this statement: "If it is important to understand oppression in order to fight it, then ignoring oppression that does not touch us directly will reduce the effectiveness of our political action."<sup>4</sup>

In her discussion of the need for alliances, Alperin stresses the numerous and complex ways in which forms of oppression interact. More often than not, my students seem willing to speak out against racism or sexism or even heterosexism within their own experience. Yet those same students find it much more threatening to acknowledge classism "in our society" (a favorite phrase which allows them to push responsibility elsewhere) but especially in themselves.

In an article which appeared in a spring 1997 issue of *Center News*, a publication from the University of Memphis Center for Research on Women, visiting assistant Professor Martha Schmidt calls for classroom projects across the curriculum which get students to "analyze the dominant cultural discourse that shapes their own preconceptions about poverty and those who experience it." She notes that

The challenge we face is how to teach views of poverty that adequately address the complex matrix of class, gender, and race, and allow for a discussion of the interplay between structure and culture and subvert both the victim-blame cultural perspective and the faceless and voiceless approach of social structures.

<sup>5</sup>

Schmidt describes an undergraduate group project that involves presenting the class with some kind of artistic representation of the lives of the poor. This assignment is designed to help students think not only about the experiences of the poor but also about the

complexities of representing their voices. One of the requirements of the project is that students receive permission from all people whose voices or faces they record and involve as much as possible those whose images are represented. Some examples of this project include a **photographic exhibit** of a tour of the poorest county in the state, a **video** of a group's experiences building a house with Habitat for Humanity, a **slide show** of interviews with children in a Head Start Program, and a **news-paper** based entirely on the daily experiences of a man who lived in a cardboard box. Schmidt's goal is to "push students to understand how much cultural discourse shapes our conceptions of the lived experience of poverty and ultimately of social policy." <sup>6</sup>

Schmidt's article does not evaluate the effectiveness of this classroom project, so I cannot compare it to the challenges that my students and I face in my own class activities designed with the same purpose in mind. (I will soon describe such an activity.) But Shelley White-Means' review of William Julius Wilson's 1996 book, *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor*, illustrates one of the strengths of this assignment. White-Means, an economist who reminds us that joblessness is a prime factor in urban poverty, applauds Wilson's opposition to the current tendency to blame persons living in urban ghettos for creating their own systems of joblessness. Just as our students would often rather assign poverty to stereotypical character flaws or life styles or moral standards, employers in Wilson's study "ascribe characteristics to the average urban ghetto resident, such as criminality, poor language skills, laziness, and lack of commitment to work."<sup>7</sup> If we do not persist in helping our students recognize the Machiavelian nature of these assumptions, they will have nothing with which to defend even their strongest intuitive knowledge of "what is right" against the classism that they will surely observe.

We need to find ways, as Schmidt has, to immerse our students in the experiences of the poor—not just assign readings about poverty. Her students, because they are required to interact with the subjects of their studies, will have a greater chance to dispel for themselves the myths and stereotypes that so successfully keep people in poverty.

One activity that I use in my Women's Studies class continues to be particularly (and predictably) problematic. I ask students to take on the persona of a woman in an oppressive economic situation as a way to illustrate the predicted effects of Wisconsin Works (W-2), the most current Wisconsin effort at welfare reform. Students work in groups to determine the options available to a young mother of two preschoolers who has recently moved to our community to escape an abusive marriage and nonsupportive family. She has \$140 left over from her bus ticket and the security deposit on a tiny one-bedroom apartment in a dangerous downtown neighborhood. Her high school diploma and experience as a cashier qualify her for several part-time or minimum-wage jobs (\$5.50/hour). One opening pays \$6.20/hour, but it is as a night clerk at a hotel on the edge of town. Our young mother has no car, and our city buses stop running at 9:00 p.m. None of the jobs that she qualifies for offers health care benefits for her or her children.

I supply the discussion groups with copies of the classified section of our daily newspaper and ask them to pretend **that they are she** as they work together to solve her

problem. The only requirement I make is that the students say “I” rather than “she” when referring to this young woman. As I wander around the room, I hear group after group trying earnestly to find a way to help her buy food, pay rent, find childcare, get herself to work, take good care of her children, and stay within her budget. But they continually refer to the young woman as “she.” When I remind them to speak of her as “I,” some of the students quickly recover, but only once; after that they become even more resistant to saying “I,” and they often become defensive if reminded again.

This might seem a small issue, but I believe it is a most significant one. The hostility with which the students respond when even gently reminded to say “I” always confounds me in its strength and frequency. And even when we open the discussion later and approach that problem, students remain adamant that “becoming” her is not necessary to enhance their empathy. When I ask about the significance of that adamancy—the ferocity with which they resist taking on her responsibility, they say that they “just forget”; or as one student said, “I just can’t relate because that situation will never happen to me.”

So I continue to struggle with this assignment, hoping to find a way to help students experience as closely as possible the dilemma that institutionalized poverty presents. Meanwhile, I am more convinced than ever that we need to help our students of privilege understand the reality, the complexity, and the imminence of this issue to their lives.

One more story. During my second year of teaching, I taught a first-year honors course in critical reading, writing, and research. Early in the fall semester, I assigned an article by John Kenneth Galbraith which discussed certain poverty issues during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the beginning of class, I asked students to do some free writing in response to Galbraith’s article as preparation for class discussion. I wanted them to think about ways in which poverty in America might be “different” today from the poverty of the 1930s and ‘40s. One of my best students, a bright and engaging young woman from a prosperous suburb in a neighboring state, sat quietly at her desk, paper and pen still tucked away in her leather backpack. I knelt down beside her desk and asked if she was okay.

“Yes,” she replied, smiling sweetly.

“Did you read the Galbraith article?” I whispered.

“Oh yes; it was awesome,” she replied.

“How will you respond to the question?”

“I can’t,” she smiled cheerfully. “I don’t know anything about poverty today.”

Over the years, my amazement at her total comfort with this lack of understanding has ebbed, as I now see in her confidence and cheerfulness a safety zone that was as important for her to protect as my question was for me to ask. Peggy McIntosh reminds us that “Power from unearned privilege can look like strength when it is, in fact, permission to escape or to dominate.”<sup>8</sup> And in this case—perhaps also in the case of my Women’s Studies students who refuse to role-play as a poor single mother—the student was finding ways to escape from something that felt like it could threaten her privilege.

In subsequent years in the classroom, I have tried to find ways to not only encourage the voices of students silenced by their poverty, but also to help build a concern for issues of

poverty among students of privilege who have never considered the need for such empathy. I draw strength of purpose from the words of Lisa Albrecht, who, in an introductory section of *Bridges of Power*, reminds us that

Meaningful social change can only occur if it touches each of us personally while dismantling institutional structures. This means that we cannot compartmentalize our political lives. Generating social change engages our whole being; we cannot neatly carve up our lives into alliance work as if it were separated from our personal, family, work, and social lives....we must recognize the nuances, permutations, and the whole range of connections any single issue has with other issues, coalitions, and alliances.<sup>9</sup>

Pedagogy that engages students in “poverty as lived experience”<sup>10</sup> rather than merely as a structural or cultural phenomenon is one way to begin working toward this needed social change. Students who can recognize the institutionalization of poverty—not through objective analysis, but through tangible experiences—will be more likely to form the cross-cultural alliances that we so urgently need.

The following words hang on a bulletin board above my desk: “Whenever we fail to treat students as equal partners in the learning process, we take unfair advantage of our authority.” This striking reminder affirms my responsibility to my students and to “our society” and encourages me to view my students of privilege as “in progress” rather than as merely immature or self-absorbed. I need to remember my own lack of experience and commitment at that age. And I need to recognize that seeds of understanding planted in a first-year composition course, or a senior-year Women’s Studies course, will likely not blossom immediately but will perhaps lie dormant until my students encounter their own experiences of classism. Only in this way can I help **all** of my students break through those silences which so often result from a fear of reproach—not only for our poverty, but also for our privilege.

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3. Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women’s Studies” in *Race, Class, and Gender*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., eds. Margaret L. Andersen and Patricia Hill Collins (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1995), p. 77.
4. Davida Alperin, “Social Diversity and the Necessity of Alliances” in *Bridges of Power*, eds. Lisa Albrecht and Rose M. Brewer (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1990), p. 28.
5. Martha Schmidt, “Projects Useful in Teaching Poverty,” *Center News* (Center for

Research on Women, University of Memphis), v.15, no. 2 (Spring 1997), p. 3.

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7. Shelley White-Means, "Wilson: Persistent Joblessness Cause of Urban Decay," review of *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor*, by William Julius Wilson, *Center News*, v.15, no.2 (Spring 1997), pp. 6, 8.

8. McIntosh, p. 83.

9. Lisa Albrecht and Rose M. Brewer, eds., *Bridges of Power* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1990), p. 148.

10. Schmidt, p. 3.

# Where is the Voice of Women in Poverty in the Psychology Classroom?

Suzanne C. Griffith and Hal S. Bertilson  
University of Wisconsin-Superior

When we first talked about this topic, we were aware of the limited voice of women of working class and poverty in our disciplines of Psychology, Women's Studies, and Counseling. We saw this paper as an opportunity to bring the voice of women/people who live in conditions of poverty into our own consciousness, into our teaching, and into our scholarship. We also realized that materials alone would not be sufficient. The first part of the paper reviews resource materials that make available the voices of women of poverty. The second part focuses on moving us from having the reading material in hand to preparing ourselves to bring it into the classroom.

## Voices of Women of Poverty

Because we live in a patriarchal society, it is important to value women and women's experience, including the unique experience of each woman, especially as that may vary with race, ethnicity, religion, social class, sexual orientation, age, and physical ability.<sup>1</sup> However, theory and empirical research has for the most part failed to recognize the many distinctions among women.<sup>2</sup> Critics show that we have "come up short" in reaching this goal, as there remain large numbers of unknown women.<sup>3</sup>

The voices of poor women have been particularly absent. Russo identified poverty as one of the major areas in need of more research for women.<sup>4</sup> Further, when poor women have been included in the sparse body of existing literature, they are not shown in their full complexities.<sup>5</sup> If feminist teaching is to represent the true diversity of women's experiences, it must include the variety of experience of poor women in multiple roles and contexts.

P. T. Reid has reported results of a computer search that provide a cursory review of attention given to women in poverty in the psychology literature.<sup>6</sup> Using a database for the years 1984-1991, Reid reported that the combination of "woman" and "poverty" produced only eighty-six abstracts. Reid went on to discuss the reasons for and importance of studying women in poverty, and the reasons poor women have been excluded from the literature. She did not discuss or evaluate the resources she found, nor provide suggested resources for teachers who wish to include the voices of poor women in their classes. Our aim in this paper is update Reid's analysis by suggesting resources and uses of these resources that can remedy the situation.

### **Methodology and Results**

Our computer search used the *PsycLIT* database for the years 1991-1997. Whereas Reid's search included only the word "woman," we combined the terms "women," "gender," and "female" to obtain a list of 117,044 journal article abstracts and 8,913 book and chapter abstracts referring to women. This was a set of 125,957 abstracts nearly ten times larger than Reid's citations for women. We found 332 journal articles and 147 books and chapters for the combined search on "women," "gender," or "female" with "poverty." This set of 479 references was more than 5 times larger than Reid's. In addition to these articles, we included in our review twenty-five books and journals on our bookshelves that were not captured in the data search.

### **Articles and Books About Poor Women**

We believe the actual voices of poor women are particularly powerful in teaching about women and poverty. A few resources were found which contain the actual "voices." Most articles and books, however, are "about" poor women rather than "from" them. This section begins with resources "about" poor women and concludes with descriptions of resources that contain the first-person narratives of poor women.

F. L. Paltiel's article is particularly useful for university teachers who wish to share experiences of poverty with their students.<sup>7</sup> The article provides a list of the causes of women's poverty, a discussion of stress and coping, and a model of mental health. According to this model the mental health of adults is dependent upon three anchors—work, family, and friendships. Her elaboration of the model describes the increasing risk that occurs to a woman when one, two, or three of these anchors are missing.

Piazza and delValle offer an example of clinical work with people of color living in poverty.<sup>8</sup> Using two case histories, they illustrate how to develop and teach interventions using community leaders as advisors as well as incorporating community values and structures to give direction to families, therapists, and trainers. The case histories are vivid, long, and detailed enough to give students a good idea of the cultural beliefs central to the clients and how important it is to include community and cultural resources in treatment. The article also presents a model for students that shows how some professionals give of themselves and their time without pay. Both trainers were employed in other full-time jobs to support themselves because the fees from trainees and clients barely paid for operating expenses. Piazza and delValle begin with a consciousness-raising statement about the European history of accumulation of wealth through practices of slavery, genocide, and colonization of African and indigenous people. The article includes literature from African-American, Latin-American, and Native-American scholars describing community traditions that have provided identity and security for people of color. It informs the reader that these communities tend to value conformity to group norms, informal communication, minimal hierarchy, and maintaining respect for the elders and those in authority.

### **Homeless Women**

Our search identified two special journal issues on homelessness in the early 1990s, one in the *Journal of Social Issues* and the other in *The American Psychologist*.<sup>9</sup> We also identified a 1993 book, Elliot Liebow's *Tell Them Who I Am: The Lives of Homeless Women*, which reports on a participant observation study of single, homeless women in emergency shelters.<sup>10</sup> In this well-written and interesting monograph, Liebow describes the conditions, hassles, and hardships of these women's lives and discusses their survival needs. More than most other sources, this book includes the voices of poor women, as Liebow includes brief stories and quotes from the women he got to know when he volunteered at a soup kitchen and shelter. He also describes the women's families and includes some of the women's life histories in the book's appendix. These life histories are particularly poignant and powerful resources for teaching about homeless women.

### **Global connections: The significance of women's poverty**

Bertilson, this paper's second author, uses the paperback edition of *Lectures in the Psychology of Women* in his Psychology of Women classes.<sup>11</sup> In the book's third chapter, "Global Connections: The Significance of Women's Poverty," Bernice Lott describes the life of a typical poor woman in India, the lives of women working in multinational businesses in Malaysia and in U.S.-owned factories in the free-trade zones along the U.S.-Mexican border.<sup>12</sup> Lott documents the dangerous working conditions that women experience in many of these marginal factories and discusses the link between education, family planning, and poverty in Third World countries. The lecture ends with suggested readings and references that are helpful to faculty who wish to include women and poverty in their classes.

Lott also describes several exercises she uses to get students to "experience" poverty. She asks students if they know of anyone they consider to be poor and, if so, to talk about that person's circumstances and behavior. She asks students to focus on descriptions of everyday life. She asks small groups of students to imagine themselves as part of a United Nations task force charged with developing a ten-point proposal to end hunger in the United States as part of a hypothetical presidential commission.

Students in the Psychology of Women class have reacted strongly to this reading. One student said, "What stuck out in my mind most is the fact that these women are not receiving health care and education—so there is little hope for them." Another student wrote, "I really enjoyed this chapter. Every day I realize more that education is the key to making this planet a better place to live on. For everyone! When I was reading about the girls who spent the Semester at Sea, and how they 'blamed the victims,' how they said that poverty was caused by some unknown fault of the victim, I realized that I had once done that. When I went to Mexico it was the first time I had really seen poverty. I was confused. I asked my Mom why the ladies did not stop having babies. She told me that they did not know any better. I never *fully* understood what she meant until reading this chapter. . . . Education is the key."

### **Resources that Directly Depict the Voices of Poor Women**

*Generations* is a book of interviews that helps us get to know more than two hundred women.<sup>13</sup> The authors chose to interview grandmothers, mothers, and sisters to represent the diversity of experience of women and to show how American women's lives have changed over the past century. The lead interview, titled "I Never Knew We Were Poor," is a fascinating life story about the weekly bath in a galvanized tub, having only one outfit to wear to school, learning about sex from girlfriends, and a law that married women could not work.<sup>14</sup> The interview titled "Men Always Made the Big Decisions" describes a woman's experiences with abuse, poverty, not seeing her husband's paycheck, having her husband leave her, and learning to cope and make decisions on her own.<sup>15</sup> Another interview, "It's Called Survival," includes a discussion of temporary poverty,<sup>16</sup> and "How Did Someone Like You Get Elected?" charts the process of overcoming poverty.<sup>17</sup> These interviews are also excellent resources for including ethnic and immigrant diversity issues in the courses that we teach.

In "A Question of Class," Dorothy Allison talks about growing up in a desperately poor family and the prejudice she experienced being a girl from such a family.<sup>18</sup> She frames the story of her family as a morality tale, including her struggle to know herself, her feelings of rejection as a lower-class lesbian from the lesbian community, her grief, and her victimization from physical, emotional, and sexual violence, and how she taught herself to be a storyteller.

*Experiencing Race, Class, and Gender in the United States* is an edited anthology with several essays that include voices of women in poverty.<sup>19</sup> For example, "First They Changed My Name" tells the story of a woman who grew up in the Tennessee Hill country where "old" English was the only language she knew until she was six years old, and details the discrimination she experienced as a result.<sup>20</sup> "Something is Robbing Our Children of Their Future" also contains snippets from poor women in its description of a Hunger Project,<sup>21</sup> and in "Mother Courage" a woman talks about being on welfare and the ridicule she experienced getting food stamps.<sup>22</sup> Other useful essays include: "Targeting Welfare Fathers,"<sup>23</sup> which offers strategies for getting the public to appreciate the experiences of welfare mothers; "The Fall,"<sup>24</sup> which documents the experiences of a homeless woman; "A Way Out,"<sup>25</sup> which explains how one woman moves out of poverty and finds her voice to confront public policy; and "Saving Native Lands,"<sup>26</sup> a Lakota mother's story of resistance to the oppression and exploitation of her people.

### **Bringing the Voices of Women of Poverty into the Classroom**

Our premise is that having the materials is only a first step; the best materials in the hands of an uninformed, unaware instructor who then ignores the material or is ignorant about it sends a destructive message. BUT how does one become aware, alert, and comfortable with new materials? How do we change our presentation to include these materials?

Griffith, this paper's first author, found that her experience with teaching counseling students about issues of cultural diversity influenced how she subsequently introduced

issues of class. She would hear her students talk in a disparaging manner about clients, about the range of problems and disarray of their lives, blind to the full context of their clients' lives and unable to understand, let alone empathize with, the situations. Griffith developed a new course, Cross-Cultural Counseling, for the Counseling Program. The book she chose<sup>27</sup> provided an excellent political examination of the counseling relationship in cross-cultural contexts. However, what she first had to deal with was the denial of bias and prejudice among some of the students. She started the class by saying: "The premise of the book is that, as whites in this culture, we are prejudiced and unaware of our bias." She went on to say that she agreed with that statement and asked her students to read with a mind open to that message, even though they may not now buy it. She explained that after the class progressed further and the students heard from community members, they could discuss the premise further.

Griffith took this stance because of what she learned at a workshop on how to incorporate issues of race and ethnicity into a curriculum. She had heard stories from faculty about the discomfort of students being exposed to their whiteness and position of privilege, and the backlash against instructors because of it. The first point was to avoid a debate that you cannot win. The second point was that creating receptivity worked best when the message came in personal stories. That first year she invited several people from the community to speak to the very issues the book was raising. The combination succeeded. The message on how to teach a potentially sensitive issue kept getting clearer and it changed how she taught her other classes. The second year a community component was added. No longer was it enough to have speakers come in; students needed to go out and interview, participate, and get to know firsthand the diversity in the community. The combination of reading and experiences in the community allowed her and her students to become aware and more comfortable with addressing these issues. While initially not addressing class, socioeconomic status, and the privileges that come with class, as her own awareness grew, it became easier to introduce these issues. At the same time, faculty working together on integrating issues of race/sex/class into the college curriculum suggested and used these questions for self-reflection and group discussion. Some are reworded below to assist specifically with social class.

#### SELF AWARENESS:

- \* How does who I am (race, sex, class) influence how I will review the literature?
- \* How does who I am (race, sex, class) influence what I will look for?
- \* How does who I am (race, sex, class) influence what questions I will ask?
- \* How might my (race, sex, class) biases blind me to other interpretations of the literature, to comments from my students, and to seeing whose voice was absent?
- \* How do I work to develop in students an awareness of how class (and the denial of class) and economic issues impact and interact with all other areas of people's lives, not just those issues relevant to my discipline?
- \* What kind of message do I give concerning those issues?
- \* Do I bring to my students' attention the full context of people's lives?

#### CURRICULUM:

- \* Does my material reflect just the views of the intellectual and scientific elite or does it present the voices of different classes and socioeconomic levels?
- \* Does the material even mention the lives, dreams, pains, problems, and daily concerns of common women and men?
- \* How were these presented: scientifically, statistically, or in first person? (In whose voice?)

#### CLIMATE:

- \* How do these variables affect my classroom—simply in terms of who attends and who does not?
- \* What is the mix of students in my classroom?
- \* What is the mix of students on campus?
- \* What kind of environment exists on campus that is supportive of exploring issues of class?
- \* What kind of environment exists locally, regionally, nationally that is supportive of exploring issues of class?
- \* What prior experience have my students had with discussing class?
- \* How will I encourage students to speak about their experiences related to class?
- \* Where/How will I draw the line in class between freedom of speech and opinions clearly owned, or bashing and impingement of freedoms, and still encourage people to speak up?

In considering how to encourage students to speak up, we are reminded of the lessons learned in addressing issues of race and ethnicity: that we not single out students whom we assume or even know to be of lower socioeconomic status to speak on this issue as some kind of representative spokesperson, nor that we assume that they want to speak out, or can. As a final note, we need to remember the work of Belenky and colleagues in *Women's Ways of Knowing*.<sup>288</sup> As students find their voices and hear that their experiences have a place in the classroom, it becomes important to legitimize their stories, tie them into the topic, and definitely not dismiss them. What they say may not relate to our experiences and we may need to stretch to see how it ties in, but this is part of our education.

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**Part V:**

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**Mechanisms of Resistance**

# Perceived Self-Efficacy and the Experience of the Welfare Recipient

Lorie Schabo Grabowski, University of Minnesota

## Introduction

In 1996, federal legislation was passed eliminating the Aid to Families with Dependent Children [AFDC] program and abolishing public assistance as an entitlement to the poorest segment of the population. This move has resulted in the federal government devolving much of the structure and control of economic assistance programs down to the states. During the reform effort, discussion focused on welfare dependency, work disincentives inherent in the AFDC program, and welfare mothers' values and beliefs being altered by receiving government support for extended periods of time. State level reform plans were created with the explicit goal of eliminating these presumed AFDC program effects. The actual standards-of-living in families receiving public assistance, the community and larger social constraints under which these families live, and the actual day-to-day survival strategies employed by these families were given little attention in the debates and subsequent policy creation. The "experience" of AFDC participation is, however, an important consideration if one wishes to consider how reform programs may impact welfare recipients and how successful reformed welfare programs might be in helping families attain self-sufficiency.<sup>1</sup>

Drawing from social scientific research on the welfare "experience" and from social psychological theory on the self, the following literature review indicates that welfare program participation may have an important impact on the self-concept, particularly on self-efficacy. Self-efficacy influences a variety of behaviors, yet political treatments of the psychological effects of welfare use have not addressed this potentially important social psychological concept. In general, little research in the area of poverty and social policy has looked at how self-efficacy and welfare program participation are related. This review emphasizes the need to take domain-specific self-efficacy into account, rather than only global efficacy, in research on the perceived-self-efficacy of welfare recipients. It concludes by pointing out limitations of existing work and highlighting a direction for future research.

## The Social Psychology of Welfare Receipt – How Recipient Status May Impact the Self-Concept

A substantial body of social psychological work on welfare's effect on the self has focused on the stigmatizing character of the welfare system in the United States and its resulting effects on the self-esteem of program participants. Goffman, in a classic

sociological look at stigmatized identities, classifies stigmas into three categorical types: physical or bodily, social, and tribal.<sup>2</sup> An example of a physical stigma would be a physical disability or deformity. Social stigmas, by contrast, involve “blemishes of individual character”; examples include “mental disorder, imprisonment, addiction, alcoholism, homosexuality, unemployment, suicidal attempts, and radical political behavior.” Finally, tribal stigmas involve those discrediting attributes associated with “race, nation, and religion.” Within this categorization scheme, poverty and welfare receipt fall into the social stigma category (though the physically and tribally stigmatized may be overrepresented in the poor population).

Pettigrew takes Goffman’s categorization into account in introducing a paradigm for “viewing American poverty as a type of labeled deviance.”<sup>3</sup> He defines deviance as

- (1) perceived differences, (2) which are negatively evaluated by powerful others,
  - (3) because these differences involve a violation of their expectations or norms.
- Deviance also usually (4) invokes some degree of threat to others, and (5) implies to others the need for correction, either through isolation or remediation.<sup>4</sup>

Welfare participation fits this definition of deviance, as it violates several American norms, including individual responsibility and expression of a strong work ethic through participation in the paid labor force. Welfare receipt invokes a threat to the cultural belief in work not only as a way to support oneself but also as a means of being socially successful. The typical family structure of welfare recipients, namely single-parent families, can also be taken as a middle-class norm violation. A two-parent family may not even be the numerical norm in middle-class families, but the *idea* that it is the norm holds great social power. Isolation and close observation of welfare recipients are enforced through certain design features of social welfare programs, where behaviors are closely monitored and regulated in exchange for economic assistance. As Williamson states, “stigma [attached to public income assistance] serves the important function of discouraging voluntary dependency”;<sup>5</sup> economic dependency is inconsistent with the basic premises of an individualistic capitalistic society.

There is ample evidence from the accounts of welfare recipients that they do feel stigmatized by the public, by potential employers, as well as by the bureaucracy with which they must interact in order to receive benefits.<sup>6</sup> Moffitt demonstrates that stigma from welfare receipt does not depend on the level of the benefit, but arises from the simple fact of receipt.<sup>7</sup> He also finds that this stigma keeps some potential recipients from participating in the program. Horan and Austin’s study of AFDC recipients in the South measures the recipients’ perceived stigma in terms of their “expression of shame or distress at their participation in the AFDC program.”<sup>8</sup> They find that education level and time on AFDC have substantial positive and direct effects on the level of perceived welfare stigma, while age shows a smaller positive effect. However, knowledge of the local chapter of the Welfare Rights Organization reduced feelings of stigma. The negative impact of such knowledge on

feelings of stigma indicates that stigmatized feelings are malleable and that welfare participation's effects on the self can be altered. It also suggests that efficacious feelings, stemming from participation in the political process through collective action, may buffer detrimental program effects. The provision of alternative understandings of welfare participation, a possible function of a welfare rights group, could give welfare recipients another way of understanding their participation, one which minimizes stigmatizing feelings.

With time limits and work requirements a key part of reformed welfare programs, more women are expected to turn to private agencies/charities for help. Yet even this private sector assistance has been shown to carry a feeling of stigma. Edin and Lein note that when turning to agencies for help, poor mothers reported feeling stigmatized when they went to one agency for help more often than was considered "normal" within that agency's context.<sup>9</sup>

Another way of understanding the perceived stigma of program participation is through the fundamental attribution error, a concept not articulated in public policy debates but often alluded to in spirit. The fundamental attribution error, a concept demonstrated in multiple laboratory experiments on non-poverty topics, is the tendency to "underestimate the force of situational and societal pressures and overestimate the force of people's dispositions on their (own) behavior."<sup>10</sup> In application, because welfare recipients' situations are perceived to result from their own inadequacies and not from societal forces, a stigma is attached to the role of welfare recipient. The fundamental attribution error is reflected in public opinion on poverty and welfare participation. While research documents that women who receive welfare benefits want to work, public opinion often centers on laziness and lack of initiative in explaining why people are poor or are recipients of government assistance.<sup>11</sup> Inherent in the recent program reforms, including work requirements in exchange for benefits, is the assignment of personal fault to the needy, saying work must be required because it is not voluntarily being chosen. Even the title of the legislation suggests this attributional error—*The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act*. Though designers may be trying to instill positive work habits through mandatory work programs, their inclusion of this requirement implies assumptions that the problem lies *within* the person rather than in the organization of society. The socially and economically complicated circumstances many poor families face are not given as much weight in welfare policy debate as is the argument for changing welfare recipients' work habits and attitudes.

### **Self-Efficacy: What (it is) and Why (it is important)**

The study of self-efficacy is grounded in a social psychological research tradition that examines the self-concept as an important component of human thought, behavior, motivation, and mental health. The self-concept is "the totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object."<sup>12</sup> The self-concept is the product of reflexive activity,<sup>13</sup> building on theoretical work within social psychology, including the work of Mead,<sup>14</sup> who distinguished the "I" and the "me," Cooley,<sup>15</sup> who portrayed a "looking glass self," and Rosenberg,<sup>16</sup> for whom the self-concept is dependent on reflected appraisals.

All of these theories assume that the self-concept is in some way the product of the views of others.

While some research has examined the self-esteem of welfare recipient women,<sup>17</sup> self-esteem and self-efficacy are distinct concepts (although they may be related to one another),<sup>18</sup> and self-efficacy has not been the focus of welfare research. Self-esteem refers specifically to one's feelings of self worth, while self-efficacy refers to one's "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (emphasis added).<sup>19</sup> Rosenberg uses a related concept, "self-confidence," which "essentially refers to the anticipation of successfully mastering challenges or overcoming obstacles or, more generally, to the belief that one can make things happen in accord with inner wishes."<sup>20</sup>

In theory and in research (focusing largely on health issues), Bandura cites four sources of efficacy information from which people form perceptions about their own efficacy: enactive performance (or personal accomplishment), vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological reaction.<sup>21</sup> First, enactive performances are said to be the most influential source of efficacy information because "they provide the most authentic evidence of whether one can muster whatever it takes to succeed."<sup>22</sup> Successes are said to build one's efficacy beliefs, while failures diminish one's sense of efficacy. Accordingly, current political rhetoric would suggest that job acquisition or earned income might serve as successes to boost self-efficacy levels. Additionally, yet given much less attention in welfare reform discussions, successful parenting (by the mother's own definition) may enhance efficacy.

The second efficacy information source, vicarious experience, refers to a person's attention to others' attainments in assessing his/her own efficacy level. It is others most like oneself that serve as the best source of efficacy information. Therefore, family members, neighbors, or others judged to be like oneself in terms of class or race might serve as likely efficacy informants.

Verbal persuasion is the third source of efficacy information. Bandura notes it is likely not as significant a source as the previous two, but that "it can bolster self-change if the positive appraisal is within realistic bounds."<sup>23</sup> If it exceeds realistic limits, it will likely encourage a person to attempt actions that will lead to failure, and therefore, it will be overridden by the "enactive experience" of failure. The fourth source of efficacy information is one's physiological state. This refers to the tendency of people to read their ability level by their state of arousal when faced with a given challenge or course of action.

Research in substantive areas other than poverty has shown that efficacy beliefs encourage a number of beneficial behaviors. For example, those with greater feelings of ability to succeed in the academic realm have been shown to do better in school, as well as to set higher academic goals.<sup>24</sup> A sense of career efficacy engenders consideration of a wide range of options at the time of career choice.<sup>25</sup> Relatedly, high school students who are more confident about their abilities to secure employment are more likely to be employed after leaving school.<sup>26</sup> Finally, economic self-efficacy has a positive effect on students' efforts to prepare for college and to make educational plans.<sup>27</sup>

To apply Bandura's theoretical ideas on efficacy to a welfare sample, a central source of efficacy information for welfare recipients derives from the interactions women have with welfare office workers. Evidence of this is seen in Holloway and colleagues' in-depth study of fourteen welfare-recipient mothers. Caseworkers' presentation of work, housing, and childcare options influenced the way these mothers felt about their parental and economic control. The authors note, "These mothers may yearn for a greater sense of agency and control over when they work and where their young children spend forty hours per week. But the range of possible choices is quickly reduced as only a few narrow pathways become visible on the horizon."<sup>28</sup> Such limited choices block opportunities for efficacy-enhancing experiences. This analysis supports Bandura's enactive performance efficacy-source theory; when given little opportunity to exercise agency, a person will not feel particularly efficacious. Welfare reform programs require women to get a job in order to receive benefits, and in some cases, work is assigned to those women who do not/cannot find work for themselves. Yet we cannot assume that these reform efforts will improve women's self-efficacy beliefs, as much political rhetoric has assumed they would, because the women are not exercising choice and control in their roles as workers.

Holloway et al. also give examples of how verbal persuasion by social workers and children's teachers influences mothers' self-efficacy beliefs. They note that teachers or social workers who are critical of mothers, or who are at least perceived to be critical, "in some way undermined their feelings of efficacy as mothers."<sup>29</sup> Hasenfeld notes that among clients with a range of social service needs, it is those in financial need who report the least favorable encounters with the system.<sup>30</sup> Rhodes' study of social service worker-client dyads shows that workers as a group preferred traditional, hierarchical relations with their clients, while clients preferred more equality in the relationship.<sup>31</sup> These relationships are one arena for future efficacy research.

Because experiences with the welfare system happen on a one-to-one level in welfare service offices, an examination of the way welfare recipients perceive those interactions may provide insight into how welfare use impacts efficacy in a variety of domains. Are clients given performance opportunities in work or parenting (opportunities most likely to produce success in the short or long-term), encouragement by caseworkers (both financial workers and job counselors), or supportive examples of similar women who have been successful? Or are choices limited and women mandated to take actions in terms of work and childcare that defy their own judgement? In-depth discussions with women involved in these programs could be used to explore the roles of wages and economic self-sufficiency as foundations of economic self-efficacy .

Preliminary research on welfare reform implementation in one state, Minnesota (with the Minnesota Family Investment Program or MFIP), suggests that under reform, case managers are endorsing a short-term work focus for recipients who meet with them. Miller et al. report that in the pilot MFIP program, conducted in seven Minnesota counties beginning in 1994, MFIP case managers were more likely than their STRIDE (welfare-to-work program within former AFDC system) counterparts to

believe that work was financially advantageous for their caseload. Consequently, they were more likely to talk about the advantages of work, to urge recipients to go to work quickly instead of raising their skill levels first, and *to encourage them to take a job even if the recipient would not earn enough to leave welfare* [emphasis added].<sup>32</sup>

While women may acquire a job, the negotiation of work, motherhood, and familial economic survival may not be as successful, since it is not even being addressed. In addition, this research was done on the pilot MFIP program, which did NOT contain time limits for recipients. Therefore, the danger of using up the sixty-month limit on income subsidies for low-wage work, leaving no safety net for unemployment or continued low wages, was not in place. This system of encouraging women to think only in the short-term about work in *any* job does not fit well with the welfare reform time limit, which requires long-range planning and welfare-use prevention (to preserve eligibility months whenever possible). It gets women into the work force but may not get them into jobs in which they can be financially self-supporting.

#### **Domain-Specific Self-Efficacy Beliefs**

Bandura makes the distinction between global and domain-specific measures of self-efficacy. He notes that more global measures are generally less predictive of behaviors than are domain-specific measures. Some research has been done using domain-specific efficacy measures within the domains of academics,<sup>33</sup> parenting,<sup>34</sup> and economic attainment,<sup>35</sup> as well as looking at domains of self-esteem.<sup>36</sup> However, no research has taken a welfare-reliant sample into consideration, despite research suggesting that it is in this population that economic and parenting roles and self-efficacy beliefs have the potential to intersect in unique ways.

The multidimensional character of self-efficacy parallels the ordering of identity elements within the self-concept. Identity elements that form the self-concept likely have domain-specific efficacy beliefs attached to them. Identity salience is “the relative importance or centrality of a given identity (and thus role) for defining oneself.”<sup>37</sup> Theories about the salience or ranking of identity elements provide direction for research on multidimensional self-efficacy. They point to the identity dimensions that are most relevant to the individual under study, and therefore may narrow the investigation of self-efficacy beliefs to focus on those most pertinent for self-esteem, general mental health, and behavioral choice. Self-efficacy beliefs within relevant domains or roles might be explored for individuals facing particular life experiences, such as poverty or welfare program participation. For example, there is evidence to suggest that, at least for some welfare recipients, the role or identity of mother has more psychological centrality or salience than does the role or identity of worker/wage-earner.<sup>38</sup> The worker identity may actually detract from one’s parental role performance and the ability to care for one’s child if the work

involves low wages and other negative job conditions (lack of benefits, etc.), and it takes time away from one's child.

In proposing a research program on a welfare-reliant sample of women, work, in addition to welfare receipt, is relevant for study, given the context of welfare-to-work policy reforms. Some research examining the relationship between global self-efficacy and economic attainment indicates that efficacy beliefs may very well be altered by one's successes or failures in the labor market. However, the reverse is generally not supported by empirical research, i.e. economic attainment is not well explained by one's overall self-efficacy beliefs.<sup>39</sup> In research on parental self-efficacy, Ensminger<sup>40</sup> and Elder et al.<sup>41</sup> show that economic conditions have an effect on parental self-efficacy beliefs, with welfare experience and economic stressors each having potentially negative impacts on a woman's parental self-efficacy. Economic stress can also affect the child. Both work conditions and economic stressors affect parenting behaviors, and this parenting can then impact children's self-efficacy.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, not only are parental self-efficacy beliefs subject to economic influence but, indirectly, children's self-efficacy beliefs are as well.

The character of low-wage work is such that women have little chance to work their way out of poverty.<sup>43</sup> The lack of advancement opportunities contributes to the difficulties of staying off welfare, and in the past, women have cycled on and off welfare.<sup>44</sup> Contrary to current conservative arguments about welfare-reliant women not valuing work, research suggests that work may not make many of these women financially better off. Edin and Lein's work suggests that employment may actually hurt their financial situations.

Sociological research on work and the self-concept suggests that work can impact one's general self-efficacy beliefs.<sup>45</sup> However to date, research in this area, too, has failed to examine welfare-reliant women. Downey and Moen<sup>46</sup> and Hill et al.<sup>47</sup> do examine female-headed households, and they note that improved economic conditions, through increases in earned *or unearned* income, are related to corresponding improvements in efficacy-related beliefs. In other words, it is increases in household *income, not work* itself, that most impact female household heads' general efficacy perceptions. Together, the body of literature on work and the self-concept suggests that if welfare reform results in recipients finding work with advancement potential, autonomy, and control over their day-to-day work, and wages that increase household income, recipients will show improved self-efficacy in going from welfare to work. However, if the work these women get is low-wage, has little autonomy, and lacks advancement opportunity, as research by Edin and Lein<sup>48</sup> and Harris<sup>49</sup> suggests, their efficacy beliefs may actually decline. With work or career self-efficacy beliefs potentially having implications for goal-setting, planning, and persistence in facing challenges<sup>50</sup> in the work realm, the effects of welfare reform mandates on self-efficacy need to be explored. This is not only for the good of poor families, but also for the future development of welfare program policies and the evaluation of their "success."

## **Conclusion**

Theoretical and empirical literature suggests that self-efficacy is open to experiential influence. Domain-specific self-efficacy beliefs correspond to particular spheres of social

activity, and are therefore especially relevant. Research on the self-concept and welfare participation has not taken domain-specific self-efficacy beliefs into account, but it does suggest that the welfare experience has potential to impact how one thinks about oneself and how able one feels to exercise desired actions, in general. Likewise, literature on work and the self-concept suggests that the potential impact workfare or work requirements might have on poor mothers depends on the quality of work they do. Autonomy and increased income could positively impact women's sense of self-efficacy, though the domain-specific aspect of this effect is as yet unclear. However, routine work under poor work conditions with low pay likely will not have positive consequences for the self-concept. It appears that reform rhetoric about work boosting one's self-confidence needs to take account of social psychological research suggesting that it is the *character* of work or welfare experiences, not work in-and-of-itself, that has the potential to alter the way poor mothers think about themselves in the world. The importance of positive self-efficacy beliefs for educational and occupational goal-setting and investment, as well as for persistence in the face of obstacles to set goals, is notable. Self-efficacy beliefs within a life domain have been shown to impact one's willingness to pursue, and to prepare for, goals and challenges within that domain. Therefore, for school and work-world investments, as well as for parenting, poor mothers' self-efficacy beliefs are relevant and important spheres for future research.

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# Creating a Sense of Power through Family Resource Centers

Sandra M. Stokes  
University of Wisconsin-Green Bay

## Statement of the Problem

Much of the popular press reports that there is widespread agreement that federal entitlement programs aimed at poor women and children have failed. There has been widespread disagreement, however, in explanations about why those programs have not been successful. Reasons posited range from laziness of the target population to lack of role models to structural issues.<sup>1</sup>

One factor associated with poverty and government programs is that of the culture of hopelessness and lack of control felt by those for whom the programs were intended.<sup>2</sup> These feelings have been exacerbated by the fact that the government programs have had the “power,” which has caused the programs’ clients to feel “disconnected.”<sup>3</sup>

According to John McKnight, “We [have] exiled our fallible neighbors to the control of managers, therapists, and technicians, [and] we lost much of our power. . . . We forgot about the capacity of every single one of us to do good work and, instead, made some of us into the objects of good works. . . .”<sup>4</sup> The truth of this sentiment can be seen when examining the records of what were once numerous federal and/or state programs designed to “help” those who are living in poverty, many of whom are women and children, some of whom are from minority backgrounds.<sup>5</sup> Such programs are run largely by white professionals.<sup>6</sup> As a result, the vision for these projects has generally come from the professionals, not from the recipients of the services.

In addition, very few neighborhoods whose residents are members of poor, ethnic minorities have accessible services; for example, libraries, health centers and hospitals, museums, recreation centers, drugstores, and supermarkets are often lacking in neighborhoods whose residents need them.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the providers of the services are generally white professionals from outside the neighborhood, often strangers to those residents who need the services.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the services provided by these outside professionals are often unacceptable to the families who must use them. Also, these services tend to focus on family weaknesses rather than on their strengths. As Shannon points out:

Without the power to represent themselves in public and private discourses, women and people of color often find themselves maligned or disparaged in stereotypic cultural representations and every-day interactions.<sup>9</sup>

Melaville and Blank define what is wrong with government programs and why they are often unsuccessful:

First, services are crisis oriented. . . .

Second, the current social welfare system divides the problems of children and families into rigid and distinct categories that fail to reflect interrelated causes and solutions. . . .

Third, the current system is unable to meet the needs of children and families due to a lack of functional communication among the various public and private agencies that comprise it. . . .

Fourth, the current system falls short because of the inability of specialized agencies to easily craft comprehensive solutions to complex problems. . . .<sup>10</sup>

The programs run by the “system” are “based upon deficiency and need.”<sup>11</sup> All too often, young children from families living in poverty are labelled as having deficiencies and needs when they first start school, a special kind of irony because school has long been seen as a place where family inequities could be overcome by the children from these families.

### **Neighborhood Resource Center/School Relationships**

There has been widespread recognition that the school is “the single non-needs-based institution that touches the life of every child.”<sup>12</sup> Maeroff says that it is not unusual today to find school personnel intentionally “creating a kind of community school that addresses health, social, and recreational needs.”<sup>13</sup> What has been called the Comer Model puts the responsibility for creating a sense of community squarely on the school by increasing the level of parent participation.<sup>14</sup> Timpone and Reich call for schools to devise “[a] community-oriented pedagogy”; thus, “local educators must find appropriate ways to address the issues that undergird the experiences of young people in their communities. . . .”<sup>15</sup> In such schools, the goal is to “help disadvantaged students by creating a structure approximating the networks, values, and norms that benefit their more advantaged peers.”<sup>16</sup>

Although school district personnel are increasingly recognizing the need to connect what schools know and do to the needs of the communities they serve, such connections are not always popular with the districts’ boards of education. According to a study conducted by Hardiman, Curcio, and Fortune, “almost three-fourths of the respondents [school board members] . . . say their districts do not favor legislation enabling school linkages with other services.”<sup>17</sup> Further, approximately fifty percent of the school board members did not want their schools to be used as the “sites for drug treatment programs, social service programs for families, health clinic services for families, or offices for probation officers.”<sup>18</sup>

Thus, it can be seen that neighborhood residents, many of whom already feel no sense of control over their lives, often face great obstacles in trying to create any sense of community. Yet, as McKnight points out: “Community associations are built upon the recognition of the fullness of each member because it is the sum of his or her capacities that represents the power of the group.”<sup>19</sup> It is obvious that such community associations, begun and run by neighborhood residents themselves, offer help to residents seeking a greater sense of empowerment. One can see the results of a neighborhood association by travelling to

Green Bay, Wisconsin, and visiting the Fort Howard-Jefferson Neighborhood Family Resource Center.

### **The Fort Howard-Jefferson Neighborhood Family Resource Center**

Green Bay, Wisconsin, located in the northeastern part of the state, has a population of almost 100,000; another 100,000 people live in the communities located around the city itself. While the original inhabitants were American Indians, Caucasians have lived in the Green Bay area since 1669, when Father Claude Allouez established a mission there.

Of the population of the greater Green Bay area, the percentage of people from ethnic minority backgrounds has recently exploded.<sup>20</sup> Until approximately 1990, the largest ethnic minority population was American Indian. Since that time, however, the Hmong have become the largest minority population, with the Hispanic population not far behind.<sup>21</sup> Most of the Hmong and Hispanic adults in Green Bay were not born in the United States and do not speak English. Most of them do not have even a high school diploma and/or lucrative job skills. As might be expected, many of these minority families have incomes below the poverty line and need social services.<sup>22</sup>

In 1993, several residents of the Fort Howard-Jefferson area of Green Bay and the director of the state program Families and Schools Together (FAST) had a dream: they wished to create a community center where neighborhood residents could gather for education, socializing, community building, and recognizing each other's talents. This neighborhood has the distinction of being the most ethnically diverse in the city of Green Bay.<sup>23</sup>

While early meetings took place in people's homes, the founders of the Center soon realized that the best location would be the Fort Howard Elementary School because of its central location and the school's kitchen and gymnasium, which the residents wished to use. Contact was made with Schreiber Foods, which held a golf outing to raise money for the new Center, and a total of \$100,000 was raised. The residents then formed a partnership with the school district, which resulted in converting the old school library into the Center for the residents, while the district added new classrooms and a new library to the school. The goal of the Fort Howard-Jefferson Neighborhood Resource Center is to "make it possible for every person to live up to [his/her] potential."<sup>24</sup> This goal is reminiscent of McKnight's description of the working together found in communities: "Thus, a person who has been labeled deficient can find a 'hammock' of support in the collective capacities of a community that can shape itself to the unique character of each person."<sup>25</sup> It has been important for those who have created the Center to build programs based on the needs articulated by the community members rather than having needs defined for the residents by outside professionals who see "deficits" among the residents. McKnight has described the typical behavior of programs run by outside professionals for people "in need":

While institutions and professionals war against human fallibility by trying to replace it, cure it, or disregard it, communities are proliferations of associations

that multiply until they incorporate both the capacities and central dilemmas of life. . . . To be in community is to be a part of ritual, lamentation, and celebration of our fallibility.<sup>26</sup>

The Fort Howard-Jefferson Neighborhood Family Resource Center is illustrative of such a community. The goals of the Center are to discover what each individual and family has to offer themselves and each other in order to support and revitalize the diverse and historic Broadway area. The Center is a place to learn and grow; it serves as a network of support, a place to meet neighbors, a place to recognize skills and build on strengths, and a place to talk about neighborhood issues.

Programs available at the Center include: the Hmong Family Literacy Program; Families Educating All Together for Success (F.E.A.T.S.); Mom's Respite Program; Ups and Downs; a program for dads and their children to learn and bond together; a neighborhood monthly meal; Talents and Treasure; Blockbuster; community gardens project; Hmong language classes; and computer classes. All of these programs use the talents of neighborhood residents in leadership roles, including the writing of the grants that provide funds for the programs.<sup>27</sup>

Health services are also available at the Center as a result of partnerships with Northeast Wisconsin Technical College (NWTC), the Visiting Nurses' Association, and Family Services Association. A nurse practitioner is available at the Center for children from newborn to age twelve. This nurse practitioner gives shots and physical examinations at no charge to neighborhood residents. NWTC nursing students at the end of their program do outreach work with the clinic, make home visits, and are available for questions. NWTC also provides dental hygienists who clean teeth for the residents. A secondary result of the latter service is that while parents were watching the hygienists work with the children, a number of the parents expressed the opinion that they could do the work the hygienists were doing. To that end, some neighborhood residents have obtained their GED's and enrolled at NWTC.<sup>28</sup>

There are two "beat cops" who have an office in the Fort Howard-Jefferson Neighborhood Resource Center. Prior to the beat cop program, relations between the police and neighborhood residents had been chilly at best; after several years of working together, however, the "beat cops" and the residents have helped clean up area problems such as drug houses and bars whose patrons caused damage in the neighborhood.<sup>29</sup>

### **Conclusion**

A visit to the Center confirms the vibrancy of the power the neighborhood residents have gained. New programs are constantly being added, in response to needs identified by neighborhood residents themselves and funded by grants that the residents themselves write. The Fort Howard-Jefferson Neighborhood Resource Center is a success; its success is the result of the dreams and hard work of community residents who have gained a sense of empowerment and control over their lives. The Center also provides living proof that poor

neighborhood residents can work to better their lives when they are in charge of the programs that can offer them assistance. If such a model is replicated, John McKnight's words quoted on the first page of this article could be changed to read: "We [have recognized]. . . the capacity of every single one of us to do good work. . . ." The Fort Howard-Jefferson Neighborhood Family Resource Center offers a model that could, and should, be replicated across the United States as a way to better the lives of all American citizens.

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# The Heroine's Journey—The Unavoidable Human Experience

Betty Salamun

DANCECIRCUS, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

The power of naming and the need to categorize are complementary and contradictory forces. Struggling to identify myself, I say I move, choreograph, direct, perform, and facilitate creative events. Equally unsatisfying are hyphenated labels to define my role—artist-educator, dancer-choreographer, eco-artist—and my work—talk-dance, poetry-movement, and environmental-dance.

Dominique Mazeaud describes herself as a “heartist . . . an artist whose first form is the heart, . . . someone in touch with their essence . . . whose unique creative contribution [is not] necessarily sanctioned by the mainstream art world.”<sup>1</sup> Or, as Maureen Murdock says, citing Joseph Campbell in her book *The Heroine's Journey*, the task of the heroine “is to shatter the established order and create the new community.”<sup>2</sup>

The cycle of the Heroine's Journey allows the exploration of the boundaries between concert works and community involvement, between art and activism, and between body and mind. Just as our lives bring our meanings and interpretations to a work of art, art is a process that brings meaning and interpretation to our lives. Developing personal stories through the Heroine's Journey focuses not on narrative but on climactic moments, making the journey singular to the person's history and part of the community's breath. The Heroine's Journey is a circular framework—mythic in its heroic outlines, universal in the commonality of events, and personal in the unique sequencing of these events. It is a creative process for structuring interpretation.

Maureen Murdock outlines the ten stages of the Heroine's Journey as a cycle in opposition to and encapsulating the hero's journey. In her book, she not only names the stages but also includes the psychological underpinnings of each, links them to her own life changes, then connects each stage with fairy tales and contemporary women's rites-of-passage. The journey, moving clockwise in the circle:

- 1) SEPARATION FROM THE FEMININE – rejecting the mother as metaphor for rejecting the unconscious;
- 2) IDENTIFICATION WITH THE MASCULINE – gathering of allies and mentors on the hero's journey;
- 3) ROAD OF TRIALS – meeting ogres and dragons causing separation from one's self
- 4) FINDING THE BOON OF SUCCESS – the hero pretender;
- 5) SEPARATION FROM THE MASCULINE – saying no to the “heroic” task - as one finds spiritual aridity and death;

- 6) INITIATION AND DESCENT – breakdown becomes breakthrough;
- 7) RECLAIMING THE BODY – releasing grief and sorrow, digging in the mud to find one’s bones;
- 8) HEALING THE MOTHER/DAUGHTER SPLIT – reclaiming the madwoman, the wise woman;
- 9) FINDING THE INNER MAN WITH A HEART – counterpoint to and sacred union with woman of wisdom; and,
- 10) INTEGRATION – of inner man with a heart and woman of wisdom.<sup>3</sup>

The Heroine’s Journey—the heroic journey of self-discovery that I lead—emerged from workshops with women in recovery to become relevant for many women. Assessment strategies, which I developed for the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, mirror the creative process of doing-analyzing-revising (“fire, ready, aim”). Making art, exploring aesthetic issues, reflecting on and writing about issues in relation to our lives are strategies to document our experiences.

Working with diverse groups applying the Heroine’s Journey as a creative process, four areas of discomfort emerged from these sessions:

- the journey is not sequential;
- we are frequently at more than one place at a time (a point Maureen Murdock makes in her book);
- masculine, feminine, and self energies weave throughout the journey;
- Initiation and Descent is a vortex that draws us in from any point on the journey.

While I reflected on these anomalies, a seminar on mathematics and crystalline forms provided the key to a new interpretation. Placing the *Initiation and Descent* at the heart of the journey, the other nine stages cycle with mathematical logic into the triads of complementary energies (masculine, feminine, and self), each including a section from the beginning, middle, and end of the journey. The three energies separate into patterns and categories that enable us to recognize and name the stage and begin to reconcile complimentary and contradictory forces in our lives:

Feminine:

1. SEPARATION FROM THE FEMININE
4. FINDING THE BOON OF SUCCESS
8. HEALING THE MOTHER/DAUGHTER SPLIT,

Masculine:

2. IDENTIFICATION WITH THE MASCULINE
5. SEPARATION FROM THE MASCULINE
9. FINDING THE INNER MAN WITH A HEART; and,

Self:

3. ROAD OF TRIALS
7. RECLAIMING THE BODY
10. INTEGRATION

The Heroine's Journey is a map that allows us to categorize, name, and reconcile our life journey. But, "The map is not the terrain," as Doug Wood warns in his book *The Power of Maps*; Never "forget that [the map] is *not* the landscape itself or anything remotely like a . . . description of it."<sup>4</sup> Each triad is a map of the shifting of energy, a turning point in awareness, the "ah-ha" moment of clarity. The triads embody these shifts like climactic moments in a story, novel, or fairy tale. As in different forms of writing, the climax peaks in a different place in each triad—the feminine tends to have the climax at the beginning, the masculine in the middle, and the self at the end.

In the workshop I led at the women and poverty conference in Eau Claire, one woman, N, identified the masculine energy as the one that "resonated the most with my true past self." N went on to describe how as student and teacher she "was well taught—I learned well—to read like a man, to take on a man's values in art and professional life." In a workshop with women recovering from substance abuse at the Milwaukee Women's Center, A described it as "sloshing around in a container trying to splash through a too tight mold."

Using movement, the kinesthetic experience, to draw out a story of personal meaning creates an opening for participants to reach deeper parts of themselves. The masculine triad for N "brought my own personal quest into startling perspective. . . . Separating from the job that has been the greatest part of my identity for thirty years and to find my inner wise woman. I'm sure she's there, but she's been in hiding a long time." In the Milwaukee Women's Center group, E used the metaphor of a rock (and novel spellings) to bring out the changes in her life; "the rugged side symbolized the struggle and the heartship [hardship], the lesson of life. The crystal side represents me know [now]— self acceptance, education, parenting, sobriety, responsibility."

The impact of talking and listening, self-reflection, stretching the body and the mind, and doing creative work alone breaks down our resistance to reconciliation with ourselves. "While the idea of searching for my bones in the mud even figuratively is daunting—indeed frightening," reveals N, "the perception of the descent as a positive route to discovering the new, the hidden self, both reassures and sustains me." Using the tree as a metaphor, EN at the Milwaukee Women's Center wrote, "I can bend but I'm grounded and strong/ I have beauty of my own/ but I have sadness of my own/ my branches and leaves bend and bounce back/ – strong."

"Extinction of experience," points out naturalist Robert Michael Pyle, "deprives [us] of a deeper more meaningful interaction with nature. . . and [understanding] broader concepts of community."<sup>5</sup> Similarly, passive participation in the arts does not expand our knowledge of our nature and our environment. Encountering our "higher" self through art-making not only stretches our artistic expression and multiple-intelligences, but also endows the personal dream and the individual's story with power in relation to the web of the community.

The Heroine's Journey workshop is an opportunity to re-interpret and re-evaluate personal stories and journeys in the larger context of one's community and within the complexity of one's environment. At the women and poverty conference, N found a "gift" in a visualization: "a golden-brown grasshopper. What a wonderfully complex symbol:

music, joy, flight, immortality in one myth, vulnerability in another, domestic well-being in a third—what a splendid gift!” At the Milwaukee Women’s Center, B wrote a poem expressing what, in the end, connects us to a sense of belonging in, or coming from, or being a part of a place and a community:

Love reaching towards me  
Energy lifting me suspended  
Encircled in earth  
Immortality (four children in cosmos connected to earth)  
Touching me through universe  
And earth, sky, peace, love not empty –  
Full.

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# **The Familiar Face of Oppression: Violence in American Indian Communities**

**Lisa M. Poupart**

**University of Wisconsin-Green Bay**

American Indians have suffered from systematic genocide within Western society, in the forms of government-sanctioned physical onslaughts and confrontations, murder, land theft, forced removal and relocation, economic deprivation, incarceration, environmental racism, and devastation of tribal sovereignty, all of which have resulted in continued economic dependency. Acts of genocide committed against Indian people are founded on and legitimated by Western constructions of abject Otherness. In over five hundred years of social, political, and economic domination, Western society enforced its cultural codes of Otherness upon American Indians to gain our complicity in the power structure. Through formal Western education, conversion to Christianity, and assimilation into Euro-American culture and the capitalist economy, tribal people learned to speak the language and to interpret and reproduce the meanings of our oppressors as our own meanings, languages, and cultures were simultaneously devastated. American Indian participation in the construction and reproduction of Western language and meaning ensured our complicity in patriarchal power and aided Euro-American exploitation of our lands, resources and labor.

Like colonized groups throughout the world, American Indian people learned and internalized the discursive practices of the West—the very codes that created, reflected, and reproduced our oppression. As American Indians participated in, created, and reproduced Western cultural forms, we internalized Western meanings of difference and abject Otherness, viewing ourselves within and through the constructs that defined us as racially and culturally subhuman, deficient, and vile. As Western constructions of abject difference are both forced upon and accepted by American Indians, we define ourselves through these constructions and, subsequently, participate in the reproduction of these codes. For, as we assume the dominant subject position, we often take upon ourselves definitions of the objectified, abject Other as (portions of) our own identities and act them out in flat, one-dimensional caricatures that mirror the dominant culture's representations. Moreover, as we buy into these codes, we not only apply them to our individual selves but also to those within our own marginalized group(s)—our loved ones and community members. Contemporary American Indian communities struggle with devastating social ills that were virtually nonexistent in traditional tribal communities prior to European invasion, problems including alcoholism, family violence, incest, sexual assault, fetal-alcohol syndrome, homicide, and suicide at startling rates similar to and sometimes exceeding those of white society. In their groundbreaking works, authors Maria YellowHorse BraveHeart and

Lemyra DeBruyn<sup>1</sup> depict the widespread social ills plaguing American Indians as manifestations of internalized oppression. The authors assert that experiences of racism and internalized oppression contribute to current social ills among Indians as a result of Western imperialism, assimilation, and Indian identification with the dominant culture's codes.<sup>2</sup> In describing causal factors leading to social problems, they state, "We contend that the high rates of depression...suicide, homicide, domestic violence and child abuse among American Indians can also be attributed to [the] processes of internalized oppression and identification with the aggressor."<sup>3</sup>

Through five hundred years of assimilation and acculturation, American Indians have internalized Western discursive practices and often view ourselves in ways mirroring the dominant subject position. However, Indian people also live in a sort of cultural double consciousness, as portions of our traditional subjective identities persist in the preserved beliefs of our ancestors that are practiced today. Through the telling of our experiences and stories in a continued oral tradition and through the preservation of traditional ways, many Indian people resist the dominant culture's subject position, knowing that we, like our Grandmothers and Grandfathers, have not deserved a history of violence and genocide. Moreover, our oral traditions preserved many stories recounting the subjugation of our ancestors, and these stories were passed along through generations, creating an alternative interpretation, or knowledge, of the harms inflicted by white society.

American Indians' knowledge of our historical and continued oppression is experienced as a profound anguish. As Shirley Hill Witt explains, "Among Native Americans, the memory of genocide and tribal extinction is a raw unhealing wound."<sup>4</sup> This pain is described by Duran and Duran as a "soul wound." The authors contend the genocidal efforts of Western imperialism have "inflict[ed] a wound to the soul of Native American people that is felt in agonizing proportions to this day."<sup>5</sup> Our experiences of colonization and disempowerment under patriarchal capitalism are silenced by white society. The perpetration of cultural genocide is *whitewashed* by the dominant culture in the master narrative of "discovery" and "manifest destiny."

Like the knowledges and stories of Others under patriarchal oppression, American Indian people's pain is not recognized nor validated by the dominant culture. Instead, white society uses negative constructions of Indians as subhuman and lacking a full range of human qualities and emotions in order to justify our disempowerment. BraveHeart and DeBruyn elaborate upon this contention, asserting that American Indians have been socially constructed as incapable of experiencing emotional responses to pain and suffering. They contend:

[T]he historical view of American Indians as being stoic and savage contributed to a belief on the part of the dominant society that Indian people were incapable of having feelings. This belief system intimates that Indians had no capacity to mourn and, subsequently, no need or right to grieve.<sup>6</sup>

Drawing upon the literature on Nazi concentration camp survivors, BraveHeart and DeBruyn assert that American Indians today experience a phenomenon the authors label “Historical Unresolved Grief Syndrome” resulting from the “historical trauma”<sup>7</sup> experienced under cultural and economic imperialism. The authors contend that social problems, such as alcohol abuse, experienced by Indian people are symptomatic of the past and present traumas we experience and, also, symptomatic of the dominant culture’s denial of the harms inflicted upon tribal people and the invalidation of Indian pain.<sup>8</sup>

The intense historical unresolved grief and pain that exist are accompanied by an extreme rage at the dominant culture for abuses past and present. And, like Indian grief and pain, this rage is also invalidated by the dominant culture and denied avenues for expression. American Indians who assert rage externally toward our white oppressors—as in the American Indian Movement’s occupations of Alcatraz and the Washington B.I.A. and the Wounded Knee standoff—are chastised, censored, imprisoned, and murdered.

Like Others who internalize the dominant subject position, American Indians sometimes express pain, grief, and rage internally toward ourselves and externally within our families and communities. Turned upon ourselves, American Indian people express rage, pain, and grief in depression, anxiety, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, and suicide. These contentions are supported by BraveHeart and DeBruyn, who understand alcoholism among Indians “as a self-destructive act motivated by depression and grief . . . resulting from internalized aggression and internalized oppression.”<sup>9</sup>

In addition, American Indians sometimes express internal oppression outwardly upon our families and other Indian people in physical assaults, homicide, and in violence against women and children. In a discussion of domestic violence in American Indian families, Duran and Duran explain, “The root of anger is at the oppressor, but any attempts at catharting anger to its root result in swift retaliation by the oppressor . . . [so it becomes] safer to cathart anger on a family member. . . .”<sup>10</sup>

The demonstration of internalized oppression among American Indians and Others does not occur deterministically, nor within strict dichotomous directions (inward/outward). Rather, inward- and outward-directed internal oppression should be understood as only two existing expressions within a nonlinear continuum of multiple expressions. Individual expressions of internal oppression are affected by individual material situations and experiences. Thus, there are potentially as many expressions of internal oppression as there are experiences of oppression. It is likely that the harm these expressions pose to self or others is related to the extent that one is marginalized and oppressed by the dominant culture. The fluidity of expressions is an important factor in understanding the presence of internal oppression, particularly among Indian people, where traditionally one was spiritually and culturally connected to the tribal community, and no explicit individual/community distinction was drawn. Here, outwardly expressed internal oppression and the subsequent harm to family or community is also an assault upon the self, as one destroys one’s own social network of support, connectedness, and love. Likewise, the inward expression of internalized oppression upon the self also harms the community to the extent that one is unable to provide support, connection, and love to family and tribal members.<sup>11</sup>

When we, as marginalized Others, internalize and portray our inferiority in these ways, we become a sort of “self-fulfilling prophecy,” as we provide the dominant culture with evidence to support our continued objectification, disempowerment, and exploitation. When marginalized Others internalize the dominant subject position, we become our own oppressors as we carry our abjection within. We view ourselves and our group(s) as essentially responsible for our political, economic, social, and cultural disempowerment. The dominant culture no longer needs to overtly force, threaten, or coerce our disempowerment, for now we enforce it within ourselves and within our communities of Others.

### **American Indian Family Violence as Internalized Oppression**

Domestic and sexual violence against women and children is linked to other forms of domination within society including racism and classism. Although the topic is largely absent from discussion, some feminists call attention to the significance of race and class constructs in the use of violence against women and children.<sup>12</sup> Like women and children, who are constructed and objectified as inferior Others, individuals marginalized based upon abject differences (race, class, sexual orientation, etc.) also experience violence under patriarchal domination. Others who are several times the subject of the dominant culture’s representations—poor children and women of color, for example—experience greater disempowerment and violence at all levels of society, to the extent that they are devalued within patriarchy.

Once valued and honored in their crucial roles in traditional families and communities, American Indian women and children today are among the most economically, socially, and politically disenfranchised groups in the U.S. Since contact, American Indian women and children have been victimized by Euro-American imperialist governments, religions, economies, and educational systems. Although violence was virtually nonexistent in traditional Indian families and communities, today American Indian women and children continue to experience violence within the dominant culture and its institutions and, also, within our own families and tribal communities.

Through the processes of colonization, American Indian people have internalized white patriarchy and Western constructions of abject Otherness upon which patriarchal power is justified and maintained. As our traditional cultures were devastated, we internalized Western power structures at many levels and assumed Western dichotomous gender differences, privileging men and objectifying women and children. We have internalized constructions of women and children as powerless commodities. Within our tribal communities today, Indian women and children are subordinated and oppressed by our own people.

As American Indian people internalize Western patriarchal power hierarchies, violence (as an exercise of power over those more marginalized) has become familiar within Indian homes and communities and can be understood as an expression of internal oppression. These expressions of internalized oppression became more acceptable in Indian families and communities as we internalized and participated in Western power constructs.

Largely eroded within many Nations, traditional American Indian economies, spiritual practices, and family and community structures no longer guard tribal members from marginalization and violent exercises of authority. As Western culture, language, religion, and economic structures were imposed upon tribal people, many traditional, extended, and matriarchal family structures eroded and was replaced by male-dominated familial structures.<sup>13</sup>

Within these Western patriarchal family structures, many American Indians recreate the power structures of the dominant culture. That is, Indian men often have privilege and authority over Indian women, and Indian fathers and mothers have privilege and authority over children, whereby each may exert violence as a socially acceptable operation of Western patriarchal power. Like other politically, economically, and socially disempowered individuals in the dominant culture, then, American Indian men may assert male authority violently in their homes and communities against women and children, and Indian women may assert parental authority violently against children.

The occurrence of violence within American Indian families today can further be understood as an experience that is normalized within Indian communities, as Indian people have experienced mass victimization within Euro-American society. A primary example of the mass victimization of Indian people is found within the Euro-American educational system. In boarding schools in the U.S. and residential schools in Canada, physical and sexual abuse were a common experience for many children attending the schools.<sup>14</sup> Boarding school teachers, staff, priests, and administrators (primarily whites) often physically and sexually abused students,<sup>15</sup> sometimes justifying their violations of children as disciplinary measures.<sup>16</sup> In several boarding schools in the U.S. and Canada, it is estimated that sixty to seventy percent of all students attending the schools were beaten or raped.<sup>17</sup> Not only were Indian children abused directly by staff and administrators, but children were also forced to administer assaults upon one another.<sup>18</sup> For many, violence was a way of life, as entire childhoods were spent in the boarding schools. In several tribal communities, it is estimated that all adults living within the communities today were either abused or witnessed the abuse of others when they were children attending the schools.<sup>19</sup> Author Charlene LaPointe, a survivor of boarding school atrocities, asserts that as generations of American Indian people were abused as children and forced to administer abuse upon other children in boarding schools, this common experience of violence normalized child abuse and family violence within Indian families and communities today.<sup>20</sup>

Removal of children from their communities and placement in often harmful environments, coupled with the erosion of traditional extended-family systems, has confounded child-rearing responsibilities and abilities for Indian parents today. Child-removal policies and the boarding school era impacted many Nations, as Indian children became completely absent from their communities. Sometimes, with only the exception of small babies and toddlers, many Indian communities were virtually *childless* for long periods of time. As generations of Indian children grew up in boarding schools and other off-reservation placements, Indian parents and communities were displaced from child-raising

responsibilities. In recent decades, after the closing of many off-reservation boarding schools and the passing of the *Indian Child Welfare Act* (1978), many Indian parents have suddenly found themselves responsible for the daily task of raising children. Often raised in neglectful or abusive placements themselves, these “unparented parents” are now expected to raise their own children without appropriate past experience or guidance.<sup>21</sup> The problem of child rearing is even more difficult as Indian parents seek to raise children in nuclear families, for not only are these (nuclear) parents sometimes without necessary parenting skills, but, as Nancy Gale contends, many are also without the traditional networks of emotional and economic support provided by extended families.<sup>22</sup>

Once uncommon or virtually nonexistent, the physical and sexual abuse of women and children in Indian families is now a familiar occurrence, as in the dominant culture. While silence about these harms exists both in the dominant culture and in American Indian communities, Indian communities suppress the harms committed upon us by one another often to a much greater extent. Within Indian families and communities, there is a *mass* silence enveloping domestic violence and sexual abuse committed by our loved ones and community members. This silence is distinguished from the pervasive silence in the dominant culture by the reality that silence among Indian people also occurs within double consciousness, as we simultaneously reject *and* re-create white male-patriarchal power. Like members of the dominant culture, Indian people are silenced as we buy into dominant cultural constructions that justify and normalize patriarchal violence. However, the double consciousness of American Indian people makes us simultaneously aware of our genocidal history with Euro-Americans.

With the knowledge of our past and present disempowerment, Indian people explain violence within our families and communities by attributing such actions to our historical and present-day suffering. Aware of our victimization by Euro-Americans, Indian people often attribute abuse by family members and friends to something the offender learned from the white man or as something he does out of helplessness, rage, and despair. We are aware of the dominant culture’s “scientific” truth/justifications for family violence. We accept theories about intergenerational violence, violence as learned behavior, social disorganization and anomie without ever challenging patriarchal power. In other words, we identify with our familial and community offenders and attribute their abusive actions to the historical genocide experienced by all American Indians or, even, to their own childhood victimization. However, as we (rightfully) blame the dominant culture for their harms, we have not held accountable the individual offenders within our families and communities. We have not challenged the white male-patriarchal power which creates and re-creates our victimization and disempowerment at all levels. Instead, we allow family and community violence to continue. We remain silent to the totality of harms that our own commit against those most marginalized—our women and our children. We have allowed these harms to continue in a way that contributes to our disempowerment and to our oppressors’ empowerment. It is, after all, what *they* want us to do to each other.

The silence found within American Indian families and communities also exists in

many Others' families and communities as well. African American women writers, including Michele Wallace, Patricia Hill Collins, Angela Davis, bell hooks, and Melba Wilson, discuss Black male violence against women and children as the exertion of patriarchal power in the home—power that has been denied Black men at all other levels of society.<sup>23</sup> Each of these writers discloses the pervasiveness of silence surrounding sexism and male physical and sexual violence in their homes and communities. Each understands that any protest against African American male violence against women and children is silenced, as it is justified and rationalized by the historical and continued disempowerment of Black men under patriarchy. These women writers of color also discuss the extent to which silence surrounding physical and sexual abuse in their families and communities occurs in order to prevent fulfillment of the dominant culture's negative constructions.

Like Others' seeking to insulate their families and communities from harm, American Indians also seek to protect our own perpetrators of violence. Traditionally, within many Nations, the tribal community as a whole was valued over individual members of the tribe. Individual actions which benefitted the entire tribe were highly revered, while acts of individual self-gain were scorned. Among the traditional Lakota, BraveHeart explains, "the survival of the *tiospaye* [extended family] and the *Oyate* [Nation] is paramount and the individual is expected to sacrifice for the good of the *Oyate*."<sup>24</sup> Today, silence surrounding violence perpetrated by family and community members may also be understood as a way in which individual victims seek to protect their tribal communities from the scrutiny of the dominant culture.

Among American Indian people, centuries of genocidal child-removal policies remain fresh in our minds. We remember our children were taken away from us by white society in order to facilitate assimilation and because we are viewed as essentially inferior, lazy, alcoholic, and inherently unable to care for our children. We remain silent about violence by family and community members to shield ourselves from white patri-archal responses and state intervention. We fear the dominant culture's responses if we contribute to their images of our essentially alcoholic and dysfunctional families, of our worthless and violent men, of our neglectful and abhorred women. In double con-sciousness we reject the dominant culture's stereotypes about us as false and/or we participate in them, fearing they are not false; and, in either case, we know the images subordinate and oppress us. Thus, we silence ourselves and other victims in our families and communities to prevent the dominant culture from using their Truth to further harm us.

In addition to the vast internal silences within our families and communities, there are numerous structural and institutional constraints that make it even more difficult for Indian women and children to break silence. Within our tribal communities, there are few, if any, appropriate avenues for American Indian women or children to break silence. With the erosion of traditional ways of healing—for both offenders and victims—and the banning of traditional mechanisms for dealing with such offenses, tribal people are largely forced to rely on Euro-American institutions for "help." Those living on reservations are required to notify federal or state officials (depending on jurisdiction) when "serious" cases of domestic and

sexual abuse are reported. After a report is made, system officials have discretionary authority over whether to investigate and process a case. Often cases of domestic and sexual abuse are ignored by officials. If a case is taken up by officials, it is processed in the Anglo-judicial system—an institution which historically serves as an instrument of cultural genocide. Justifiably distrustful of Anglo-system officials, tribal people are, thus, often reluctant to contact outsiders for assistance. Equally as problematic, however, are other “minor” cases of familial abuse which are handled by modern tribal courts in the communities where victim and offender reside. In the past, the handling of cases in tribal courts was often not a viable option for victims of familial violence, as tribal courts sometimes minimize or silence these occurrences within their own communities. Further, efforts to silence cases of abuse brought to tribal courts are maximized, as tribal communities are generally small and members interrelated, so individual justice-system workers are likely to personally know or be related to the offender and may seek his vindication.

It is critical for American Indian people to understand our now-familiar social problems (family and community violence, sexual abuse, alcoholism, etc.) *not* as essential qualities and *not* as actions caused by nor justified by the gravity of our oppression. We must understand family and community violence as an operation of power within the white male-patriarchal structure, a structure that we were forced to accept and now have internalized. We must struggle to understand violence as a form of genocide that we internalize as we assume the dominant subject position. We must struggle to understand violence as a form of genocide that we re-create within our families and communities as we are now oppressors unto ourselves. We must understand our silences as contributing to the oppression of our women and children as they are disempowered by the totality of race, class, gender, and age/ability (children) constructs at all levels of society—within the political and economic institutions of the dominant culture and *within our own homes and communities*.

### **Conclusion**

Like all Others who must resist patriarchy, American Indian people must also address specific issues within our own families and communities. We as Indian people must openly acknowledge and grieve our history and the many losses we have endured. We must come to express the pains we carry within us. We must understand the violations inflicted upon us by Euro-America as acts of capitalist domination and exploitation. This means we must resist the belief that we are excluded from the dominant culture’s social, economic, and political processes because we are inferior.

American Indian people must also understand violence in our homes and communities as acts of patriarchal domination that we perpetrate against those the dominant culture falsely defines as inferior—women and children. Indian people must end the silence of family and interpersonal violence and understand it within the framework of the totality of the oppression we endure. We must not allow the

knowledge of our oppression to justify or silence these harms. We must no longer shield individual perpetrators in our families and communities with silence. We must refuse all operations of Western power, even as they exist within our communities and homes, violating and exploiting our own women and children. Together we must unite and reclaim the traditions of the Grandmothers and Grandfathers and incorporate these ways to heal ourselves, our communities, and our individual perpetrators of violence. Culturally and individually we must recognize our past and present traumas and grieve our losses on a new path of healing.

American Indians, as all Others, must also demand that all drug- and alcohol-treatment programs and therapies for survivors and perpetrators of physical and sexual violence empower Others through raising awareness of Western patriarchal structures of domination and exploitation. Author Iris Young proposes a realistic alternative to mainstream Western-treatment programs, calling for programs that empower Others through “consciousness-raising talk.”<sup>25</sup> She explains the process:

Through the give-and-take of discussion, participants construct an understanding of their personal lives as socially conditioned, constrained in ways similar to that of others by institutional structures, power relations, cultural assumptions, or economic forces. The consciousness-raising group “theorizes” this social account together, moving back and forth between individual life stories and social analysis to confirm and disconfirm both. The members of the group propose interpretations of one another’s life stories as well as propose accounts of the social structures and constraints conditioning those lives, and these proposals are tested through discussion.<sup>26</sup>

As Young explains further, consciousness-raising talk is empowering for Others:

because it develops in people the ability to be reflexive and critical about the situated social basis of individual action . . . enabl[ing] people to move from an acceptance of institutional forms as natural and given to seeing them as human constructs that are changeable. . . .<sup>27</sup>

Treatment programs that are empowering, such as that described by Young, by definition then, would address the *cultural and individual (historical and present) traumas and victimizations* experienced by Indian people.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, Indian people, as all Others, must refuse to participate in a mental health industry that benefits from treating our social ills (substance abuse, depression, physical and sexual abuse) as individual pathologies or familial dysfunctions that are detached from Western cultural and historical forces. Such treatment programs ensure our complicity in patriarchal power and further promote our disempowerment by denying and invalidating the structural nature of our oppression.

American Indians, and all Others, must not allow members of the dominant culture to *create us and speak for us* through their news reports, films, writings, research, teachings, art works, or sciences. We must resist these productions and create our own images and subjectivities by breaking silence and expressing our truths and experiences under patriarchy in every way possible. Our expressions can assist members of the dominant groups in recognizing that their power and privilege exists at the exclusion of Others. Our truths can also assist these individuals in recognizing that patriarchal structures and dichotomies of abject Otherness restrict their full range of truths and human potentials as well.

Those members of the dominant groups who want to challenge patriarchy must critically examine the nature of their own privilege. They must reject constructions of Otherness and refuse to participate in the appropriation and reappropriation of abject differences. Moreover, members of the dominant groups must be willing to listen to the expressions of Others. They must be willing to question the framework—the universal Truths—through which they hear Others. When Others’ truths and expressions do not “fit” into these frameworks, members of the dominant groups must not reject (silence) us as wrong or false; instead, they must examine the exclusiveness of their framework.

#### NOTES

1. Maria YellowHorse BraveHeart, “The Return to the Sacred Path: Healing from Historical Unresolved Grief Among the Lakota and Dakota.” (Ph.D. diss., Smith College, 1995); Maria YellowHorse BraveHeart and Lemyra DeBruyn, “So She May Walk in Balance: Integrating the Impact of Historical Trauma in the Treatment of Native American Women” in *Racism in the Lives of Women: Testimony, Theory and Guides to Antiracist Practice*, eds. Jeanne Adleman and Gloria Enguidanos (New York, NY: Haworth Press, 1996), pp.171-205; Maria YellowHorse BraveHeart and Lemyra DeBruyn, “The American Indian Holocaust: Healing Historical Unresolved Grief” (Unpublished paper, 1996).

2. BraveHeart and DeBruyn, 1996b.

3. BraveHeart and DeBruyn, 1996b, p.6.

4. Shirley Hill Witt, “Native Women Today: Sexism and the Indian Woman,” *Civil Rights Digest*, v.6, no. 3 (1974), p. 35.

5. Eduardo Duran and Bonnie Duran, *Native American Postcolonial Psychology* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), p. 27.

6. Duran and Duran, p.27.

7. BraveHeart describes historical trauma as the “collective and compounding emotional and psychic wounding over time,” which is “multi-generational and is not limited to [one’s individual] life span.”

8. BraveHeart and DeBruyn, 1996b; BraveHeart and DeBruyn, 1996a.

9. BraveHeart and DeBruyn, 1996b, p.5.

10. Duran and Duran, p.29.

11. When Others accept the dominant subject position, we view ourselves in ways that

reflect that position and participate in the appropriation and reappropriation of difference, further contributing to our own disempowerment. An understanding of internalized oppression is not intended to provide a justification for or a comprehensive explanation of the existence of social problems among marginalized Others. Nor does such an understanding suggest that all marginalized individuals experience and express our oppression deterministically in the limited ways I have described here. It is important to underscore the notion that all marginalized individuals who experience and express oppression do so in a multitude of ways.

12. Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990); Angela Davis, *Women, Culture, and Politics* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1990); Kathleen Ferraro, "Review Essay: Culture, Feminism, and Male Violence," *Social Justice* v. 17, no. 3 (1990), pp. 70-83; Melba Wilson, *Crossing the Boundary: Black Women Survive Incest* (Seattle, WA: Seal Press, 1994); Lillian Comas Diaz, "Puerto Ricans and Sexual Child Abuse," in *Sexual Abuse in Nine North American Cultures: Treatment and Prevention*, ed. Lisa Aronson Fontes, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication, 1995), pp. 31-66; Amy Okamura, Patricia Heras, and Linda Wong-Kerberg, "Asian Pacific Island and Filipino American Sexual Abuse" in *Sexual Abuse in Nine North American Cultures*, ed. Lisa Aronson Fontes (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995), pp. 67-96.

13. Eleanor Burke Leacock, *Myths of Male Dominance: Collected Articles on Women Cross-Culturally* (New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 1987); Karen Anderson, *Chain Her By One Foot: The Subjugation of Women in Seventeenth-Century New France* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1991); Clarice Feinman, "Women Battering on the Navajo Reservation," *International Review of Victimology*, v.2 (1992), pp. 137-146.

14. Charlene LaPointe, "Boarding Schools Teach Violence" *Plainswoman* v.10, no. 4 (1987), pp. 3-4; Mary Crow Dog, with Richard Erdoes, *Lakota Woman* (New York, NY: Grove Weinfeld, 1990); Jim Northrup, "Ditched" in *Walking the Rez Road* (Stillwater, MN: Voyageur Press, 1993); Robert Emerick, "Sexual and Physical Violence in American Indian and Canadian Native Families and Communities." (A presentation at Scottsdale Community College, December, 1996).

15. Emerick.

16. LaPointe.

17. Emerick.

18. LaPointe; Northrup.

19. Emerick.

20. LaPointe.

21. Ronald S. Fischler, "Child Abuse in American Indian Communities," *Child Abuse and Neglect*, v.9 (1985), pp. 95-106.

22. Nancy Gale, "Childhood Sexual Abuse in Native American Communities," *Linkages Newsletter* (Washington, DC); cited in John R. Schafer and Blaine D. McIlwaine, "Investigating Child Sexual Abuse in the American Indian Community," *American Indian Quarterly*, v.16, no. 2 (1992), pp. 157-167.

23. Michele Wallace, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Super Woman* (New York, NY: Dial Press, 1979); Collins; Davis; bell hooks, *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1994); Wilson.

24. BraveHeart, p. 5.

25. Iris Marion Young, "Punishment, Treatment, Empowerment: Three Approaches to Policy for Pregnant Addicts," *Feminist Studies* v. 20, no. 1 (Spring 1994), pp. 33-57.

26. Young, p. 50.

27. Young, p. 50.

28. Young.

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## **Part VI:**

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# **Literary Explorations of Poverty**

# Literature and Poverty: Sandra Cisneros and *The House on Mango Street*

Patricia Thomas, University of Wisconsin-Superior

Sandra Cisneros (1954-) is a poet, essayist, and fiction writer. She has worked as a teacher for high school dropouts, a poet-in-the-schools, an arts administrator, and has taught at universities across the United States. Her writing, which has won many awards, gives voice to Chicanos and other Latinos in the United States:

When I was eleven years old in Chicago, teachers thought if you were poor and Mexican you didn't have anything to say. Now I think that . . . I was put on the planet . . . to tell these stories. Use what you know to help heal the pain in your community. We've got to tell our own history. I am very conscious that I want to write about us so that there is communication between cultures. That's political work: making communication happen between cultures.<sup>1</sup>

In this paper I would like to examine Cisneros' book *The House on Mango Street*<sup>2</sup> as it relates to poverty and Latina women.

The first story of the book highlights the idea that a house is much more than simply a place to live. This is made clear to Esperanza when a nun from her school approaches as the young girl is playing outside her apartment building. The nun points to the building and asks Esperanza if she lives there. The young girl looks toward the apartment: "the paint peeling, wooden bars Papa had nailed on the windows so we wouldn't fall out. You live *there*? The way she said it made me feel like a nothing. *There*. I lived *there*. I nodded."<sup>3</sup>

Maria Elena de Valdez notes that ". . . the house has become an extension of the person. . . . It is a reflection, an extension, a personified world that is indistinguishable from the occupant."<sup>4</sup> The humiliation of living in the old apartment reduces Esperanza to a nonentity, a nothing. The poverty and degradation of the house have the potential to degrade and impoverish the child. As critic Annie Eystury comments, the house has become "an emblem of the oppressive socio-economic situation that circumscribes her life."<sup>5</sup> Esperanza's developing consciousness of the need to have a life outside poverty is evident after her encounter with the nun: "I knew then I had to have a house. A real house. One I could point to."<sup>6</sup>

To find "a real house" that she can point to with pride, and to live a life in which she can feel proud of herself, Esperanza examines her surroundings and constructs an alternative life plan. The women in her family, her friends and neighbors become models that she either follows or rejects in her quest for a life outside poverty.

Cisneros dedicates the book “to the women” of Esperanza’s neighborhood and proceeds to tell their stories. The reader meets young girls who see marriage as a solution for their present undesirable lives. Marin wants to get a job downtown so she can wear nice clothes. She hopes to “meet someone in the subway” who might marry her and take her “to live in a big house far away.”<sup>7</sup> Marin is dreaming, but the dream revolves around a man who will appear, marry her, and in the traditional fairy-tale ending, they will live happily ever after. Esperanza concludes that her friend is “waiting for a car to stop, a star to fall, someone to change her life.”<sup>8</sup> Marin is preparing to give up authorship of her own life to “someone” else. There are many unknowns in her game plan, and none of the girl’s own desires or plans for her life seem to emerge.

In other stories, marriage is viewed as an escape from parental control or abuse. Sally is a young girl abused by her dad. Her mom tries to help by putting lard on all the places that hurt. Esperanza lets the reader know that her friend’s stories about falling down the stairs are too stupid to be believed. Sally, who cannot leave the house or even talk to boys, ends up married before the eighth grade. Her new life as a married woman turns out to be a nightmare and the escape from parental control ends up in even tighter control by a husband. She is not allowed to talk on the phone or even look out the window. She sits inside the apartment, afraid to go out. Her husband doesn’t like her friends so she cannot have visitors. He sometimes gets angry and once broke the door with his foot, but Esperanza says: “Most days he’s ok.”<sup>9</sup> Sally escapes one abusive situation only to enter another one which has the potential to become deadly for the girl. This cycle of abuse has been passed from mother to daughter, thus producing a new generation threatened and controlled by male violence.

The reader also meets Rafaela, who gets “locked indoors because her husband is afraid she’ll run away since she’s too beautiful to look at.”<sup>10</sup> Female beauty, which is portrayed as something dangerous enough to hide, turns against a pretty girl who sits by a window, longing to smile at others, wishing she could dance before she gets old. Her contact with the outside world reminds the reader of the story of Rapunzel who “lets down her hair.” In this story, Rafaela ties money to a string and the children buy her pineapple juice and sent it up in a basket.

In the story “There was an Old Woman She Had So Many Children She Didn’t Know What to Do,” Cisneros uses a nursery rhyme to examine the situation of a single mother left with lots of children after her husband deserts her. She’s overwhelmed, overworked, alone, tired, and dirt poor. The kids are out of control: “They are without respect for all things living, including themselves.”<sup>11</sup> At first, neighbors lend a hand and watch out for the children, but the kids don’t listen and the neighbors stop trying. Esperanza explains: “After a while you get tired of worrying about kids who aren’t even yours.”<sup>12</sup> And so, little accidents happen and no one notices, no one tries to stop them, and finally one day a child dies in a fall: “Angel Vargas learned to fly and dropped from the sky like a sugar donut, just like a falling star, and exploded down to earth without even an ‘Oh.’”<sup>13</sup> Cisneros uncovers a chilling truth of poverty by showing that it affects us all, dehumanizing and destroying both rich and poor, so that the cry of a child is no longer heard and the pain of another being is no longer felt.

Esperanza does not want a life like that of the women surrounding her. She does not want to stay in her broken down neighborhood where there is “. . . too much sadness and not enough sky. Butterflies too are few and so are flowers and most things that are beautiful.”<sup>14</sup> She is a young girl who has lived in so many different apartments that she loses count, but she does remember the noise, the lack of beauty and safety, landlords who wouldn't fix broken pipes, shared bathrooms with other families, and the need to carry buckets of water in empty milk gallons. She knows there is another world beyond her neighborhood:

I want a house on a hill like the ones with the gardens where Papa works. We go on Sundays, Papa's day off. I don't go anymore . . . I . . . am ashamed—all of us staring out the window like the hungry. I am tired of looking at what we can't have. When we win the lottery . . . Mama says, and then I stop listening. People who live on hills sleep so close to the stars they forget those of us who live too much on earth. They don't look down at all except to be content. . . They have nothing to do with last week's garbage or fear of rats. Night comes. Nothing wakes them but the wind.<sup>15</sup>

This gap is not only between the rich and poor, but has to do with the color of one's skin. When Esperanza's family moves into their house on Mango Street, a little white girl explains that her family has to move now because the “neighborhood is getting bad,”<sup>16</sup> with people like Esperanza moving in. Thus Esperanza faces a double discrimination: she is poor and she is Latina.

The mistrust and fear of different colors is evident when Esperanza tells of the non-Latinos who get lost and end up in her neighborhood: “They think we'll attack them with shiny knives. They are stupid people. . . .” Here Esperanza holds up the stereotype of Latinos as violent, knife-carrying people and tells us: “But we aren't afraid. We know the guy with the crooked eye is Davy the Baby's brother, and the tall one next to him in the straw brim, that's Rosa's Eddie V., and the big one that looks like a dumb grown man, he's Fat Boy, though he's not fat anymore or a boy.”<sup>17</sup> She puts faces and names on the people so the reader, too, can lose her fear and put a name on a face of a neighbor or a friend of a little girl.

What is the way out of poverty for these women and their children? School is one option that doesn't involve marriage or motherhood. Alicia started college that year. She studies all night and takes two trains and a bus so she won't end up in a factory or making tortillas at the crack of dawn. She's fighting not only to escape a future of poverty, but also the control of a father who believes a woman's place is making tortillas at home. The importance of winning the battle against poverty is evident in the story of Esperanza's Mom, who sighs as she tells her daughter, “I could have been something, you know?”<sup>18</sup> She tells Esperanza, “Go to school. Study hard. Look at my *comadres* . . . Izaura whose husband left and Yolanda whose husband died. Got to take care all your own.”<sup>19</sup> Her mom quit school because she “didn't have nice clothes. No clothes, but I had brains. Shame is a bad thing, you know. It keeps you down.”<sup>20</sup> Despite the importance of

school in the lives of these young women, it appears very little in the book. Those stories dealing with education usually involve nuns who humiliate Esperanza, thus increasing the child's shame, keeping her down.

In contrast to the poverty around her, Esperanza has a loving, supportive family and she is a fighter. Her name means "Hope" and it was the name of her grandmother. Although her grandmother was a strong woman, she was forced to marry and lost control of her life. Esperanza, who shares the same name as her grandmother, does not want to share her same fate. When she needs strength and comfort she turns to nature:

Four skinny trees with skinny necks and pointy elbows like mine. Four who do not belong here but are here. . . . Their strength is secret. They send ferocious roots beneath the ground. They grow up and they grow down and grab the earth with their hairy toes and bite the sky with violent teeth and never quit their anger. . . . Let one forget his reason for being, they'd all droop . . . , each with their arms around the other. Keep, keep, keep, trees say when I sleep. They teach. When I am too sad and too skinny to keep keeping, when I am a tiny thing against so many bricks, then it is I look at trees. When there is nothing left to look at on this street. Four who grew despite concrete. Four who reach and do not forget to reach. Four whose only reason is to be and be."<sup>21</sup>

Esperanza discovers that her reason "to be" is found in writing. Her stories will allow her to escape Mango Street and a life of poverty. The freedom found in writing is spoken of by an aunt who listens to Esperanza's poems and urges her to keep writing: "You just remember to keep writing, Esperanza. You must keep writing. It will keep you free. . . ." <sup>22</sup> Esperanza herself feels this freedom when she tells us: "I put it down on paper and then the ghost does not ache so much. I write it down and Mango says goodbye sometimes. She does not hold me with both arms. She sets me free."<sup>23</sup> Margaret Montoya reminds us that "stories can be unmasked to reveal their potential for challenging the dominant discourse." And stories can be "sites of resistance" used "to invent, reform and refashion personal and collective identity."<sup>24</sup>

This challenge to the dominant society is one of the greatest strengths of Cisneros' book. She has created a space that allows the Latina woman freedom to dream a new way of life and at the same time allows non-Latinos to understand the culture of a young girl whose life is affected by their culture. The ghost leaves Esperanza, but it enters the reader and it is up to us to set her free.

#### NOTES

1. Sandra Cisneros, "Eleven" in *Growing up Chicana/o: An Anthology*, ed. Tiffany Ana Lopez (New York: William Morrow, 1993), pp. 155-156.
2. I will quote from Sandra Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984).

3. Cisneros, p.5.
4. Maria Elena de Valdez, "In Search of Identity in Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*," *Canadian Review of American Studies*, v. 23, no.1 (Fall 1992), p. 66.
5. Annie Eysturoy, *Daughters of Self-Creation: The Contemporary Chicana Novel* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), p. 92.
6. Cisneros, p. 5.
7. Cisneros, p. 26.
8. Cisneros, p. 27.
9. Cisneros, p.101.
10. Cisneros, p. 79.
11. Cisneros, p. 30.
12. Cisneros, p. 30.
13. Cisneros, p. 30.
14. Cisneros, p. 33.
15. Cisneros, p. 86-87.
16. Cisneros, p. 13.
17. Cisneros, p. 28.
18. Cisneros, p. 90.
19. Cisneros, p. 91.
20. Cisneros, p. 91.
21. Cisneros, p. 74-75.
22. Cisneros, p. 61.
23. Cisneros, p. 110.
24. Margaret E. Montoya, "Masks and Identity" in *The Latino/a Condition: A Critical Reader*, eds. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefaniec (New York: New York University Press, 1998), p.37.

# Giving a Voice to Depression-Era Women: The Fiction and Nonfiction of Meridel LeSueur

Deborah Schlacks  
University of Wisconsin-Superior

Meridel LeSueur (1900-1996), of St. Paul, Minnesota, was a writer for whom the topic of women living in poverty was a primary concern. Her long career began in the 1920s and continued into the Great Depression of the 1930s, when she first became prominent. Then, during the period of McCarthyism in the 1950s, she was blacklisted because of her affiliation with the Communist Party USA, only to be enshrined during the flowering of contemporary feminism in the 1960s and 1970s as a significant feminist literary figure. Of all of her writing during all of these decades, LeSueur's Depression-era writing is particularly noteworthy for its eloquent portrayal of what it is like to be a woman living in poverty.

Other Leftist writers of the Depression era shared LeSueur's interest in writing about poverty, including Michael Gold<sup>1</sup> and Richard Wright.<sup>2</sup> However, in her special emphasis upon the plight of poor *women*, LeSueur had few peers. In nonfiction such as "Women on the Breadlines," in a short story such as "Annunciation," and in her novel *The Girl*, LeSueur provides a collective voice—with special stress on the notion of the "collective"—for poor women of the Great Depression. Theirs is a voice otherwise largely unheard.

In 1978, LeSueur wrote an Afterword to *The Girl* that indicates a great deal about her intent in all of her writing of the 1930s. The Afterword reads in part as follows:

This memorial to the great and heroic women of the depression was really written by them. As part of our desperate struggle to be alive and human we pooled our memories, experiences and in the midst of disaster told each other stories or wrote them down. We had a writer's group of women in the Worker's Alliance and we met every night to raise our miserable circumstances to the level of saga, poetry, cry-outs.

There was no tape recorder then so I took their stories down. Some could not write very well, and some wrote them out painfully in longhand while trying to keep warm in bus stations or waiting for food orders at relief offices.

They looked upon me as a woman who wrote (like the old letter writers) and who

strangely and wonderfully insisted that their lives were not defeated, trashed, defenseless but that we as woman contained the real and only seed, and were the granary of the people.<sup>3</sup>

Looking at these three examples of LeSueur's Depression-era work, we readily hear her giving this kind of voice to impoverished women.<sup>4</sup>

"Women on the Breadlines," written in 1932, is but one example of the many pieces of reportage produced by LeSueur for publication in such Communist Party USA publications as *New Masses*. Elaine Hedges has described "reportage" as

that special kind of journalism developed by the Left in the thirties. Described as "journalism with a perspective," and as "three-dimensional reporting" intended to make the reader see and feel the event, it eschews the presumed objectivity of traditional journalism. Often it adopts elements of the short story, emphasizing character, carefully selected detail and image, and narrative line.<sup>5</sup>

In "Women on the Breadlines," LeSueur speaks of the crushed dreams of women whom she sees as they all wait one day in the "women's section" of the "city free employment bureau." "We sit here every day," she writes, "waiting for a job. There are no jobs." She speaks of their "humiliation" at realizing there is no work for them, their "animal terror."<sup>6</sup> Indeed, she likes to use animal imagery to describe the women: for example, they "sit in this room like cattle."<sup>7</sup> Of course, in such instances, she might be speaking of either men or women who are out of work.

But much of "Women on the Breadlines" concerns women's particular predicaments and reactions to their poverty. LeSueur gives example after example of types of women, young and old. There are the young girls from the farms of Wisconsin and Minnesota. "The girls," she says, "are trying to get work. The prettier ones can get jobs in the stores when there are any, or waiting on tables, but these jobs are only for the attractive and the adroit. The others, the real peasants, have a more difficult time."<sup>8</sup> One of these "others," Bernice, "a Polish woman of thirty-five,"<sup>9</sup> came to the city from a Wisconsin farm as a young girl and has subsisted by working in kitchens for fifteen years. Now she has not worked steadily for a year. She has lost her thirty dollars in savings; she lives on crackers—a box a week. She dreams of marriage and family but will never have them.

The stories continue: Ellen, in the alley behind a café, shows her legs so that the cook will give her some food. Other young ones do more than merely show legs. And old Mrs. Gray, mother of six, three of whom have died, three of whom are now drifters, feels now "the brutality of hunger and cold," and has "a tumor that she will die of. She is thin as a worn dime with her tumor sticking out of her side. She is brittle and bitter. Her face is not the face of a human being."<sup>10</sup>

As these examples show, LeSueur emphasizes that poverty makes it hard for the women to remain human. This idea is especially clear in LeSueur's depiction of the young women's

attitude toward childbearing: “I don’t want to marry. I don’t want any children. So they all say. No children. No marriage. They arm themselves alone. . . .”<sup>11</sup> As we shall see, LeSueur was extremely concerned about this sort of attitude, since it was forced upon the young women by the dire economic situation in society and the lack of help available to these women.

Notably, LeSueur also stresses the quietness, the unobtrusiveness, and the isolation of the women (including herself):

I’ve lived in cities for many months broke, without help, too timid to get in bread lines. I’ve known many women to live like this until they simply faint on the street from privations, without saying a word to anyone. A woman will shut herself up in a room until it is taken away from her, and eat a cracker a day and be quiet as a mouse so there are no social statistics concerning her.<sup>12</sup>

Here, the animal image (“quiet as a mouse”) helps to stress the voicelessness of the women. Indeed, the available statistics, as LeSueur points out, are mostly about the out-of-work men, who are considered the breadwinners, not about the women, often *de facto* breadwinners because they are single and alone, or because their men have abandoned them and their children.

It is only LeSueur, as narrator, who provides the voice for these women. She numbers herself among them; she too waits for work while feeling hunger pangs. But though she has learned their stories enough to tell them to the reader, she stresses in the telling of them the voicelessness of the women themselves, their sense of isolation, and the lack of solidarity among them.

LeSueur’s short story “Annunciation,” written in 1935, contains an emphasis upon women and poverty similar to that of “Women on the Breadlines.” However, while “Women on the Breadlines” dwells on the hopelessness of a number of women, “Annunciation” is a hopeful piece about one woman—a character based upon LeSueur herself. In 1927, the anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti had been executed. According to Elaine Hedges, LeSueur’s decision at that time to have a child was directly connected to that event:

To have a child, she [LeSueur] has said, was a choice for life in a world that . . . was “dead and closed.” It was her way of “giving a gift,” even to a society that did not want it. . . . Looking back now [in 1990], she remembers having in mind also a statement by Lenin that the primal relationship between mother and child is the only community left in capitalist society.<sup>12</sup>

Although political repression, not so much economic, was what LeSueur apparently had in mind as she made her real-life decision, her fictional counterpart speaks rather of economic destitution, deciding to counter poverty with childbearing.

“Ever since I have known I was going to have a child I have kept writing things down

on these little scraps of paper. There is something I want to say, something I want to make clear to myself and others,” says the narrator as the story opens.<sup>13</sup> Thus LeSueur stresses from the outset the giving of voice to this woman, the woman’s need to be heard.

The woman’s poverty is made clear as well: “Old men and tramps lie on the grass all day. It is hard to get work. Many people besides Karl [her husband] are out of work. People are hungry just as I am hungry. People are ready to flower and they cannot.” She and Karl live in a boarding house in which “the dispossessed live . . . with the rats.”<sup>14</sup> Karl often “comes home drunk” after fruitlessly looking for work.<sup>15</sup>

Other people are not happy about her pregnancy once they know of it; it is in fact something she has kept secret from everyone except Karl for as long as possible, not wanting, she says, “to be pitied.”<sup>16</sup> Karl himself is angry. ““Why,”” he has asked her early in the pregnancy, ““don’t you take something? . . . Get rid of it. That’s what every-body does nowadays. This isn’t the time to have a child. Everything is rotten.””<sup>17</sup> And a woman tells her, ““I hear you’re going to have a child. . . . It’s too bad.””<sup>18</sup>

Yet, in the midst of these responses, set in great contrast to them, is the woman’s life-affirming one. In poetic language, this narrator describes her positive feelings about her pregnancy. She focuses in part on the very act of writing down these feelings. Writing is, she tells us, “a kind of conversation I carried on with . . . the child,”<sup>19</sup> in the absence of anyone empathic to talk to about her feelings. She wants to write also because she needs to “preserve this time for myself so that afterwards when everything is the same again I can remember what all must have.”<sup>20</sup> She fears being once again like the other people around her: dead, closed, stony; she recognizes every person’s need to be full of life, to be fruitful in some way. Pregnancy is her symbol of that fruitfulness.

The woman also speaks of a pear tree in her yard. The pear tree represents to the woman the natural world into which she is bringing her child, a world ““very strange and beautiful.””<sup>21</sup> And, significantly, she hopes the child will be powerful, like nature, ““glistening with life power, with it shining upon you as upon the feathers of birds. I hope you will be a warrior and fierce for change, so all can live.””<sup>22</sup> These images of tree and child are of places and people far different from the barren, hungry environment around the woman.

The woman herself is also a part of this natural world for which the pear tree is synecdoche, for she is like one of the pears on the tree. “I feel like a pear,” she says. “I hang secret within the curling leaves, just as the pear would be hanging on its tree. It seems possible that perhaps all people at some time feel this, round and full”<sup>23</sup> Pregnancy is pictured as a promise of fullness and fruitfulness amid the emptiness of hunger. To be fat instead of skinny is a delight in such circumstances.

LeSueur’s use of pregnancy as a subject is notable for two reasons. As the narrator says, “I’ve never heard anything about how a woman feels who is going to have a child. . . .”<sup>24</sup> It is a little-written-of part of life. LeSueur was indeed intent upon giving voice to an experience unique to women.<sup>25</sup> In addition, LeSueur was concerned about the specter of involuntary sterilization that hung over the era like a cloud. A poor woman might well find

herself sterilized against her will.<sup>26</sup> To choose to bear a child and to thwart those who would try to make doing so impossible are real feats in such circumstances.

LeSueur's novel *The Girl*—written in 1939 but published forty years later—combines some of the features of “Women on the Breadlines” and “Annunciation.” The stories of various women are there, as in “Women on the Breadlines,” yet the novel focuses primarily on one woman, the unnamed narrator, always called just “the girl,” or “girl.” The girl becomes pregnant and feels much the same way about her pregnancy as does the narrator of “Annunciation.” But the issues of forced abortion and involuntary sterilization are explicitly presented in the novel, as the girl barely escapes these fates. The girl's boyfriend, Butch, insists she have an abortion—even taking her to an abortionist's house—but the girl runs out of the place. Then later, after Butch has been killed in a botched robbery, she ends up in an institution, where, after giving birth, she is to be sterilized. However, with the help of Amelia, a Communist activist, she is released before the baby is due.

Despite the similarities among the three works, *The Girl* is significantly different in narrative voice. In each of the other two works, the narrator is an articulate woman able to speak eloquently, using Standard English. “The girl” is, in contrast, an untutored young woman whose colloquial speech—and through her, the speech of the other characters—is captured vividly on the page. It is as if one of the silent women from the employment office of “Women in the Breadlines” had found her voice and was now telling her own story!

But the girl is dynamic whereas the “Breadline” women are not. At the beginning of her tale, the girl, who is in fact just off the farm, seems little different from one of the young farm girls mentioned in “Breadlines”: naïve, virginal, unacquainted with any broader view of her own economic situation. The girl, however, evolves; by the end of the novel, she has understood her identity as a worker, the need to stand with other workers and demand such things as milk—so important to her during her pregnancy but so hard to get.

The girl has also experienced a community of women, something that is not present in LeSueur's other two pieces. In “Women on the Breadlines,” the women in the relief office will not even look at each other; full of shame, they face life alone. In “Annunciation,” the narrator faces her pregnancy essentially alone; other people—men and women alike—are pictured as unable to empathize. She is alone with her positive feelings, daring to write them down but not to speak of them to others. She communes only with nature and with the unborn child.

In the novel, however, the girl has human companionship—the company of other women who understand and value her experience—and thus she is able to both speak out and write. As LeSueur herself puts it, the character becomes a “beacon,” and “all because of the other women. Only because of the other women. The whole ending is the strength of the communal.”<sup>27</sup> Specifically, the girl and her female friends, following the deaths of the men in the robbery attempt, live together in an old, dilapidated building, offering each other support. The Worker's Alliance, represented by Amelia, becomes a part of their lives. The ultimate illustration of the women's solidarity occurs when at the end of the novel they all assist at the birth of the girl's child. The women's sense of community is amply illustrated

when, as the girl is in labor, pushing, “bucking like a goat,”<sup>28</sup> the mimeograph machine also pushes out notices for a mass meeting protesting the death of Clara, a prostitute who has just died of tuberculosis largely because she was considered unworthy to receive either government aid or private charity. The scene thus links the individual, earthy, physical birthing process to the collective and the political. Then, as the girl’s child is born, the girl sees “the women pressing in to see and I held her up for all to see and heard a kind of sound like AHHHHHHHHH of wonder and delight.”<sup>29</sup> The baby, says the girl, will also be named Clara, which means “light.” Thus the girl recognizes yet another linkage between generations, between the dead and the living. The older Clara, says the narrator, always believed in love and life, in spite of everything. The younger Clara, it is suggested, will take on the mantle and, because of her mother’s newfound understanding, will stand a chance of being the warrior for all women who is discussed in “Annunciation.”

This community of women features relationships much different from the male-female and male-male relationships pictured in the novel. Men beat their women—for example, Butch hits the girl—and the men treat the women like meat.<sup>30</sup> Men act duplicitously toward each other, as when the ringleader Ganz gets Butch and the other men involved in the ill-fated robbery attempt. The idea of “beating” others is, both literally and figuratively, the way of their world. As Butch tells the girl, “Beating’s everything. Everything there is.”<sup>31</sup> This attitude is shown to be especially prevalent in an economically strapped world where men strive more desperately than ever and against enormous odds to fulfill societal definitions of “manhood.” Interestingly, LeSueur has said of these men, “I don’t make them villains, because they’re not. They’re destroyed by their own illusions.”<sup>32</sup> But not so with the community of women; ultimately, they not only survive but also thrive.

Despite its potent portrait of poverty and the community of women, *The Girl* remained unpublished for forty years. This particular “oversight” is just one example of the misunderstanding and neglect to which LeSueur was subjected for many years. Her blacklisting during the McCarthy era is a blatant case in point. However, the negative response to her treatment of women’s issues had in fact manifested itself as early as 1932, when the Communist Party USA criticized LeSueur for her “negativity” in “Women on the Breadlines.” That year, the article was first published in *New Masses*. Appended to it was the following editorial note:

This presentation of the plight of the unemployed woman, able as it is, and informative, is defeatist in attitude, lacking in revolutionary spirit and direction which characterize the usual contribution to *New Masses*. We feel it our duty to add, that there is a place for the unemployed woman, as well as man, in the ranks of the unemployed councils and in all branches of the organized revolutionary movement. Fight for your class, read *The Working Woman*, join the Communist Party.<sup>33</sup>

LeSueur, dedicated Party member though she was, did not find the solution for women to be so simple.

Clearly, with her combination of feminism and Communism, LeSueur did not fit in

much of anywhere in the Depression era.<sup>34</sup> However, for us today, she can most definitely be recognized as a significant spokesperson for impoverished women of the Great Depression.

#### NOTES

1. Gold wrote *Jews Without Money* (London: Noel Douglas, 1930) and other stories of Jewish and proletarian life.

2. An African American writer, Wright published numerous stories on the Black experience in the U.S.

3. Meridel LeSueur, Afterword, *The Girl*, rev. ed. (Albuquerque: West End Press, 1990), p. 133.

4. For a discussion of LeSueur's use of "oral history," see Roberta Maierhofer, "Meridel LeSueur: A Female Voice of the Thirties" in *Women in Search of Literary Space*, ed. Gudrun M. Grabher and Maureen Devine Dischingerweg (Tübingen: Narr, 1992), p. 151.

5. Elaine Hedges, Introduction, *Ripening: Selected Work*, by Meridel LeSueur, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (NY: Feminist Press at CUNY, 1990), p. 10.

6. Meridel LeSueur, "Women on the Breadlines," 1932, in *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*, vol. 2 (Lexington, MA: Heath, 1990), p. 1650.

7. LeSueur, "Breadlines," p. 1654.

8. LeSueur, "Breadlines," p. 1651.

9. LeSueur, "Breadlines," p. 1651.

10. LeSueur, "Breadlines," p. 1654.

11. LeSueur, "Breadlines," p. 1654.

11. Hedges, p. 4.

12. Meridel LeSueur, "Annunciation," 1935, in *The Heath Anthology*, p. 1655.

14. LeSueur, "Annunciation," p. 1656.

15. LeSueur, "Annunciation," p. 1657.

16. LeSueur, "Annunciation," p. 1659.

17. LeSueur, "Annunciation," p. 1657.

18. LeSueur, "Annunciation," p. 1662.

19. LeSueur, "Annunciation," p. 1658.

20. LeSueur, "Annunciation," p. 1660.

21. LeSueur, "Annunciation," p. 1658.

22. LeSueur, "Annunciation," p. 1658.

23. LeSueur, "Annunciation," p. 1659.

24. LeSueur, "Annunciation," p. 1660.

25. Leo Hamalian, "Meridel LeSueur: Passion on the Prairie," in *D.H. Lawrence and Nine Women Writers* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996), p. 80, says that in such works as "Annunciation," "LeSueur was one of the first American writers to break the puritanical restraints that discouraged a woman from depicting her own body or her relationship to it."

26. Laura Hapke, *Daughters of the Great Depression: Women, Work, and Fiction in the American 1930s* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), p. 78.
27. Meridel LeSueur, Interview with Nancy J. Hoy, in *The Power to Dream: Interviews with Women in the Creative Arts* (NY: Global City Press, 1996), p. 51.
28. Meridel LeSueur, *The Girl*, rev. ed. (Albuquerque: West End Press, 1990), p. 131.
29. LeSueur, *The Girl*, p. 131.
30. Joseph Napora, "The Story and the Living: Meridel LeSueur's *The Girl*," in LeSueur, *The Girl*, p. 148.
31. LeSueur, *The Girl*, p. 14.
32. LeSueur, Interview with Hoy, p. 55.
33. Editorial Note, *New Masses*, January 1932, p. 7, rpt. in Harvey Swados, ed., *The American Writer and the Great Depression*, American Heritage Series, ed. Leonard W. Levy and Alfred Young (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), p. 190.
34. A number of critics have spoken of the Communist Party USA's treatment of women's issues during this era. See, for example, Hapke; Hedges; Barbara Foley, *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929-1941* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), pp. 213-37; and Linda Ray Pratt, "Woman Writer in the CP: The Case of Meridel LeSueur," *Women's Studies*, v. 14 (1988), pp. 249-63.

# Locating South Asian Feminisms within the Context of Postcolonial Feminist Theory

Asha Sen, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

In celebration of India's fifty years of independence, *The New Yorker* published a special issue on Indian fiction in June 1997. The issue included extracts from different novels as well as several short stories and articles on Indian writing. One of the articles, "Damme, This Is the Oriental Scene For You," by Salman Rushdie makes the controversial claim that:

The prose writing—both fiction and nonfiction—created [in contemporary India] by Indian writers working in English is proving to be a stronger and more important body of work than most of what has been produced in the eighteen 'recognized' languages of India, the so-called 'vernacular languages,' during the same time; and, indeed, this new and still burgeoning, 'Indo-Anglian' literature represents perhaps the most valuable contribution India has yet made to the world of books.<sup>1</sup>

Rushdie's authoritative statement was met with indignation from different members of the Indian community. However, the point of this article is not to support one side of the controversy over another, but to unpack what, for me, are some of the more dangerous implications of the author's claim.

After the tremendous success of his first novel *Midnight's Children* (1980), Rushdie has often been cast as the spokesperson for India by the Anglo-American academy and consequently, it is quite conceivable that most Western readers will accept his comments on Indian writing at face value. However, the critical reception of *Midnight's Children* exemplifies the incongruity of Rushdie's position as native informant for the West. While Western readers tended to read the novel as a transparent reflection of Indian history, Indian readers often pointed out the inconsistencies in his narrative.

If we, in the West, support Rushdie's claim that Indo-Anglian fiction makes a "more important" contribution than regional writing to the "world of books," we ignore several talented regional writers, both men and women, whose works are beginning to appear in English. In nineteenth-century India, many native intellectuals were reluctant to expose Indian women to the English-medium schools started by missionaries. Partha Chatterjee points out that "to administer . . . [modern school education] . . . in the English language was difficult in practical terms, irrelevant because the central place of the educated woman was still at home, and threatening because it might devalue and displace that central site where

the social position of woman was located.”<sup>2</sup> Indian intellectuals feared that overexposure to the West might also corrupt Indian women and make them want to be like their English counterparts. Because women were, for the most part, not exposed to the English language in the nineteenth century, there were fewer women writing in English at the turn of the century than there were men. It has only been the post-independence years that have seen a spate of Indo-Anglian writing by women like Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, and Arundhati Roy. However, in their collection entitled *Women Writing in India*, Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha show that women’s writing can be traced back to the sixth century BC and, despite the significant role played by English as a medium of education, today there are at least as many talented regional women writers as there are Indo-Anglian ones. Anthologies of translations of regional women’s writing such as *Slate of Life*, *The Inner Courtyard*, and volume two of *Women Writing in India* are evidence of the prolific nature of women’s regional writing.

In this article I will try to show that a full acceptance of Rushdie’s words will contribute to historical forces that discriminate against regional writers, and, in particular, women writers in India. My argument will foreground the ways in which British colonial policies and post-independence national policies led to the impoverishment of traditional women’s culture, forcing many of its practitioners into destitution. I will begin by positioning Rushdie’s statement against the ambivalent role that colonialism and, by extension, the English language played and continues to play within India today. I will then explore some of the alternative creative woman-friendly traditions colonialism destroyed and the attempts of feminist scholars and activists to retrieve those traditions today.

### **The Role of English in India Today**

Indian writing in English owes its origins to the infamous Minute in which Lord Macaulay stated his desire to create “a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals, and intellect.”<sup>3</sup> The promotion of “English literature” in the Indian colony was a way of achieving this end and, consequently, “English literature appeared as a subject in the curriculum of the colonies long before it was institutionalized in the home country.”<sup>4</sup> Today “in the majority of Indian universities . . . English continues to be a compulsory subject, as well as an optional Honours undergraduate programme leading to postgraduate and research studies.”<sup>5</sup> In most English medium schools and colleges in India, students study English and maybe even a little North American literature; they study very little Indian literature either in English or in translation. English is one of two official national languages along with Hindi, and is the language of state administration and the law. However, there is a strong lobby within India that views English as colonial in origin and wants to remove it as an official language. Their efforts have met with failure because the non-Hindi speaking states consider Hindi an imperial language and prefer to use English instead.<sup>6</sup>

Indian writers in English often find themselves caught in a double bind. On the one

hand, hostility toward the use of English tends to marginalize and render inauthentic those like Rushdie who write in English. On the other hand, English-medium educational institutions often privilege the study of British authors over Indian ones. Recently publishing houses such as Penguin India have started to create an audience committed to Indo-Anglian literature in India, but as Rushdie himself points out, “For some Indian critics, English-language Indian writing will never be more than a postcolonial anomaly—the bastard child of Empire, sired on India by the departing British. Its continuing usage of the old colonial tongue is seen as a fatal flaw that renders it forever inauthentic.”<sup>7</sup> This constant “othering” of Indo-Anglian fiction should help us understand the reasons behind Rushdie’s defensive need to assert that contemporary Indo-Anglian fiction is better than regional writing today. Like Rushdie, I believe that there “need not be, and should not be an adversarial relationship between English-language Indian literature and the other literatures of India.” However, Rushdie himself falls into the trap of one-upmanship when he says “The *true* Indian literature of the first postcolonial half century has been made in the language the British left behind” [italics mine].<sup>8</sup> The point of this article, as stated earlier, is not to privilege the merits of one kind of writing over another, but to historicize the conditions surrounding Rushdie’s statement and its attendant implications for contemporary regional women’s writing. This contextualizing necessitates a look at the ways in which colonialism affected the lives and creativity of Indian women.

### **How Colonialism and Nationalism Impoverished Women’s Cultural Traditions**

The early English settlers in India were greatly influenced by native customs and manners and even adopted native lifestyle. They attended nautches,<sup>9</sup> smoked hookahs, read Persian poetry, and acquired native mistresses. Because the duration and conditions of travel to India, and the hot weather there, were dangerous for many English women, the number of English women in India was very small until the end of the eighteenth century. In fact the Original Charter of the East India Company forbade the presence of English women in its colonies. Around 1790 there were only 250 European women in Calcutta and 4,000 men.<sup>10</sup> It became common practice for English men to keep unofficial Indian wives (bibis) and mistresses. Towards the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, British women started arriving in large numbers. Many English women attended nautch performances and some, like Mrs. Elwood in her *Narrative of a Journey*, describe its “novelty and splendour,” while others like Julia Maithland, a judge’s wife in South India in the 1830s, found nautch to be dull and insipid.<sup>11</sup> However, one thing was clear. English women soon came to see bibis as a threat to their position and tried to dissuade their men from making these native connections. After the 1857 war of independence, the practice of keeping Indian wives or bibis was outlawed and by the end of the nineteenth century the British had their own exclusive clubs.

The political changes of the nineteenth century were paralleled by some major ideological shifts. This period saw the creation of two major schools that influenced colonial and nationalist ideology about women. Anglicists such as Macaulay and John Stuart Mill

emphasized that the low status of Hindu women was indicative of the primitive nature of Hindu culture. Uma Chakravarti points out, “The ‘higher’ morality of the imperial masters could be effectively established by highlighting the low status of women among the subject population as it was an issue by which the moral ‘inferiority’ of the subject population could simultaneously be demonstrated.”<sup>12</sup>

The other dominant colonial school of thought was made up of Orientalists or Indologists like Max Mueller who believed that although nineteenth-century Indian culture was in a state of decline, the Aryan age<sup>13</sup> had been the “golden age” of Hindu womanhood. Faced with having to choose between these two representations of Hindu culture, the Indian nationalists opted for the lesser of the two evils and responded to Anglicist attacks on Indian culture by reviving the image of the high-caste Aryan woman of ancient India and using her as the normative model for all Indian women. In an attempt to ensure the “revitalization” of an “authentic” native culture, these intellectuals collaborated with the English in the destruction of several alternative woman-friendly cultural traditions. Their efforts gave rise to “the *idea* [my italics] of a Victorian middle-class Hindu gentlewoman who was made to represent the *true* [my italics] Indian woman who had to be saved from the licentious culture promoted by her lower-class counterparts.”<sup>14</sup>

The popular culture of the time—doggerel and poems, songs and theatrical performances, celebrated by lower-class women—ran parallel to the official high culture promoted by the *bhadralok* or Indian middle-class. Ironically enough, because lower-class women had to work outside the home for a living, they enjoyed more freedom than affluent middle-class women, who were made to suffer the burden of representing the moral core of the nation. The poorer women used whatever time they had left after housework to assist their men in traditional occupations, and because of this they had to move in the public world which was considered to be a threat to their sheltered sisters in *zenana*.<sup>15</sup> Because this multitude of women also had access to middle-class households where they often worked as servants, they could provide their sisters in *zenana* with a link with some of the more subversive ideas being discussed in the outside world.

These women used dialects and idioms that were common to almost all classes in their literary creations. There were different subgenres of music—*kavis* and *kirtans*—that lower-class women sang, which focused on the problems of every day life. Women singers were often Vaishnavites who stressed the equality between men and women. Their songs tended to ridicule men, and the Radha-Krishna<sup>16</sup> story was often used as a vehicle for voicing women’s grievances. However, because the popular culture performed by these women was sensuous and bawdy as well as critical of men and society, it soon came to be seen as vulgar by the British and the Indian nationalists. These art forms were seen as threatening to the Aryan ideas of femininity promoted by the Indian nationalists and came to be boycotted by the latter, who put pressure on the British to impose sanctions against lower-class singers and dancers. This ideological bias against popular art forms and the artistes that practiced them was supplemented by the rise of book culture, increasing administrative sanctions, and the spread of female education to the *zenana*, which resulted in a more Sanskritized language

taking over and extinguishing the popular dialects used by lower-class women. Thus as the 1891 Bengal Census indicates, there was a sharp drop in the number of actresses, singers, and dancers from 7,023 in 1891 to 3,527 in 1901.<sup>17</sup>

If we are to believe, like Rushdie, that the only true Indian literature today is Indo-Anglian literature, we do a disservice to the number of women artists and writers from previous centuries who struggled to create a space for the voices of their descendants today. We also slight the work of postcolonial feminists like Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha to establish a literary tradition where contemporary women writers can find comfort.

### **Retrieving Alternative Woman-Centered Traditions**

Chandra Mohanty and other postcolonial feminists have warned against the pitfalls of certain “recent (Western) feminist texts that engage in the production of the ‘Third World Woman’ as a singular monolithic subject.”<sup>18</sup> These texts often provide more sophisticated versions of early twentieth-century British feminists like Josephine Butler, who presented all Indian women as “helpless, voiceless, hopeless.”<sup>19</sup> By attempting to present a continuum between contemporary feminist workers and their medieval subjects, I will attempt to show how several alternative woman-centered traditions might be retrieved and kept alive.

In the introduction to their two-volume anthology *Women Writing in India*, Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha comment on the case of Muddupalani (1730-1790), an eighteenth-century courtesan at the court of Thanjavur ruler, Pratapsimha. Tharu and Lalitha point out that Muddupalani’s position exemplified the situation of most courtesans of her time. She had access to scholarship and to the arts of music, dancing, and literature. She also enjoyed an unabridged right to hold and inherit property and was able to retain control over her wealth.<sup>20</sup> Thus, in feudal India, a courtesan was much more than the eroticized prostitute of popular Western imaginings.

Muddupalani wrote a Telegu poem called “Radhika Santwanam” or “Appeasing Radhika,” which foregrounded the sensuality of the female protagonist, Radha, who takes the initiative in the relationship with her lover, Krishna. It is her satisfaction or pleasure that provides the poetic resolution. This breaks from most traditional representations where Radha is portrayed as longing for Krishna and the focus is on his pleasure. The poem was well received by Muddupalani’s feudal patron Pratapsimha and his court in the eighteenth century, but when another courtesan, Bangalore Nagaratnamma, tried to publish the poem in 1910, Queen Victoria was Empress of India and major political and ideological shifts had taken place. Victorian ideas of propriety and decency came to hold sway and women like Muddupalani had their professional careers taken away from them and were forced into poverty and prostitution. When Bangalore Nagaratnamma tried to publish Muddupalani’s poem “Appeasing Radhika,” she met with considerable opposition not only from colonial administrators but also from well-known Telegu critics and scholars. The former seized all copies of Muddupalani’s verse on the grounds of immorality, while the latter complained about its apparent obscenity. It was only after independence that “Appeasing Radhika” was finally published as a “nationalistic act” against British sanctions. However, as Tharu and

Lalitha point out, “the interests of empire and nation are not always in contradiction”<sup>21</sup> and Indian critics continue to emulate Victorian values and deride the poem for its apparent immorality.

After independence the Indian government’s attitude continued to be influenced by colonial value systems. The national government saw itself as the guardian of public morality and was offended by the “scandalous” lives courtesans led. A few years after independence a government official declared that tawaifs<sup>22</sup> be banned from All India Radio (AIR) and that their records be destroyed. The late Nilina Ripjit Singh, the granddaughter of the social reformer Keshab Chandra Sen, became spokesperson for tawaifs on AIR. At a time when princely courts were no longer the chief patrons of tawaifs and when audiences frowned upon their music, she spoke of them as repositories of an ancient oral tradition, of their exploitation and fears. By recalling childhood memories of *mujras*<sup>23</sup> which were attended by British viceroys and native rulers, she addressed the double standards of both colonial and Indian cultures that simultaneously admired and despised these artists.

As a young girl Nilina Ripjit Singh or Naina Devi, as she came to be called, studied music at home. Naina Devi married into the royal family of Kapurthala and when she was widowed at the young age of twenty-nine she turned to *thumri*<sup>24</sup> for solace. However, there was no question of a rani or queen singing even for her own pleasure and Naina Devi was criticized by her in-laws and by society for singing *thumri*. Nevertheless, she persisted in her craft and in her attempts at rehabilitating and taking care of those tawaifs who had been rendered destitute by political legislation, ideological prejudice, and selfish family members. In her own words “I was often mistaken for a tawaif. Probably for my style of singing and my name. I even received an invitation for participating in a Tawaif Welfare conference! It tickled me a lot but did not bother me. On the contrary I took it as a compliment that my music was as professional as a professional traditional singer.”<sup>25</sup> Following her death in 1993, the Naina Devi Foundation was set up by her daughter Rena Ripjit Singh with the twin purposes of raising funds to provide medicare facilities for old and infirm musicians and for funding scholarships for young musicians.

My last example of a woman-centered narrative that would be elided by a transparent reading of Rushdie’s claims on behalf of Indo-Anglian writing involves the case of contemporary Bengali writer Mahasweta Devi, who has over a hundred books to her credit. These include novels, short story collections, children’s books, and collections of plays. Her works in translation include “Breast giver,” “Douloti the Bountiful,” “The Hunt,” “Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay and Pirtha,” “Draupadi,” and *Bashai Tudu*. Mahasweta Devi’s writings have been popularized within the U.S. academy thanks to the efforts of one of her translators, the well-known postcolonial critic Gayatri Spivak. In her preface to a collection of Mahasweta Devi’s stories, *Imaginary Maps*, Spivak emphasizes the importance of having the Western reader understand that “‘India’” is not an undivided perspective.”<sup>26</sup> My reading of “Breast Giver” will try to illustrate what gets elided in the attempt to impose any kind of closure on gendered subaltern<sup>27</sup> identity in India. I will foreground the ways in which the body of Jashoda, the protagonist in “Breast Giver,” becomes a site for the production of

various nationalist discourses about Indian womanhood, and the manner in which Devi's representation of this body provides the aporia or gap in these discourses.

Jashoda is the product of the nineteenth-century nationalist culture described in the first half of my essay. Mahasweta Devi writes that

Jashoda is fully an Indian woman, whose unreasonable, unreasoning, and unintelligent devotion to her husband and love for her children, whose unnatural renunciation and forgiveness have been kept alive in the popular consciousness by all Indian women from Sati-Savitri-Sita (dutiful wives from Hindu mythology) through Nirupa Roy and Chand Osmani (the actresses who played these roles).<sup>28</sup>

Jashoda's middle-class consciousness is also influenced by Bengali writer Saratchandra, who wrote sentimental novels about dutiful wives and mothers. While my earlier examples are drawn from women who contest the excesses of nationalist discourses, Mahasweta Devi's characterization of her protagonist provides an example of what happens to a woman like Jashoda who perpetuates these discourses.

In Devi's short story, Jashoda's husband gets run over by a Studebaker driven by the son of the prosperous merchant, Haldar Babu. Both Haldar Babu and his wife are concerned that they may be punished because their son's reckless driving has injured a Brahmin. However, Haldar Babu dies before he can atone for his son's folly, and his widow decides to offer Jashoda the position of wet nurse to her children's offspring as a way of compensating for her husband's injury. Because the Haldar family believe in an orthodox Hinduism which suggests that a woman's spiritual worth lies in her ability to bear sons, the Haldar daughters-in-law are forced to suffer yearly labor pains. However, Jashoda's wet-nurse skills allow them to forgo breast-feeding and the Haldar daughters-in-laws get to keep their figures and wear Western-style, low-cut blouses. Because they no longer have to breast-feed their children, they become less reluctant to allow their husbands intercourse which, in turn, means that their spouses are less likely to visit other women. And so all members of both the Haldar family and Jashoda's family remain happy for a while. However, Jashoda's participation in the commodification of herself as mother-for-hire confronts nationalist representations which deify the concept of woman as mother as well as liberal-humanist notions of the joys of motherhood.<sup>29</sup> Motherhood thus becomes a floating signifier which for Jashoda means good food and clothing and for Haldar Babu's widow signifies a benevolent paternalism that allows her to pretend to care for those less fortunate than her. Gayatri Spivak points to a continuum between the Haldar family and "the world of many of Bharati Mukherjee's earlier heroines" when she writes, "Can we not imagine Haldar *daughters* of this generation going off to graduate school on their own, rebels and heroines suckled on Jashoda's milk? . . ."<sup>30</sup> Thus, as Spivak points out, it is important to remember that certain immigrant groups that are often considered marginalized in the U.S. might be "parasitical" (Spivak's word) on other less-represented women such as Jashoda.

Initially Jashoda's lactating abilities lead to her being worshipped as the goddess

Durga, but her treatment is conditional upon the use of her breasts as a means of production. Thus, even though she becomes the wage earner, she is dependent on her husband Kanglicharan to “*drill* her body like a geologist in a darkness lit only by an oil lamp.”<sup>31</sup> Spivak writes

the milk that is produced in one’s own body for one’s own children is a use-value. When there is a superfluity of use value, exchange value arises. That which cannot be used is exchanged. As soon as the exchange value of Jashoda’s milk emerges, it is appropriated. Good food and constant sexual servicing are provided so that she can keep in prime condition for optimum lactation. The milk she produces for her children is presumably through “necessary labor.” The milk that she produces for the children of her master’s family is through “surplus labour.”<sup>32</sup>

As Spivak emphasizes, “Jashoda’s body produces a surplus that is fully consumed by the owners of her labour-power and leads to no *capital* accumulation.”<sup>33</sup> Thus, when Jashoda’s means of production, her breasts, turn against her and develop cancer, and her family and employers neglect her, she dies alone and abandoned. On her deathbed she realizes that, “If you suckle you’re a mother, all lies! Nepal and Gopal don’t look at me, and the master’s boys don’t spare a peek to ask how I’m doing.”<sup>34</sup> Mahasweta Devi’s story provides a strong critique of the ways in which caste and class collude with gender roles in India to alienate women like Jashoda not only from other women, but also from their own bodies.

If we are to achieve an egalitarian politics of representation within the U.S. academy, it is essential that the voices of those like Jashoda are heard and the feminist efforts of workers such Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha, Gayatri Spivak, and Naina Devi not be in vain. Colonial and national policies led to the devaluation of traditional art forms, and postcolonial feminists today must engage in the work of retrieving and re-presenting the voices of those who do not have access to hegemonic structures of textual production and critical reception. I do not disavow the immense talent that can be found in contemporary Indo-Anglian writing, but instead I present a case for the complementary nature of regional writing in the hope that some day the two kinds of writing will share equal representation both at home and abroad.

#### NOTES

1. Salman Rushdie, “Damme, This is the Oriental Scene for You,” *New Yorker* (Summer 1997), pp. 50-61.
2. Partha Chatterjee, “The Nation and its Women,” *The Nation and Its Fragments* (New York: Princeton, 1993), p.128
3. Thomas Babington Macaulay, “Minute on Indian Education” in *Speeches by Lord*

*Macaulay with his Minute on Indian Education* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), pp.345-61.

4. Gauri Vishwanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), pp.1-22.

5. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, *The Lie of the Land: English Literary Studies in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp.1-6.

6. Sunder Rajan, p.14-15.

7. Rushdie, p.50.

8. Rushdie, p.52.

9. Anglicized form Hindi/Urdu “Nach” derived from the Sanskrit “nritya” through the Prakrit “nachcha,” meaning dance.” Pran Neville, *Nautch Girls of India* (Paris: RaviKumar, 1996), p.179.

10. Neville, p. 56.

11. Neville, p. 56.

12. Uma Chakravarti, “Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi? Orientalism, Nationalism and a Script for the Past” in *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History*, ed. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (New York: Rutgers, 1990), p. 34.

13. James Heitzmann and Robert L. Worden, Federal Research Division, *India: A Country Study*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Library of Congress, 1995. The authors write that there were a series of migrations by “Indo-European speaking seminomads [that] took place during the second millenium B.C. Known as Aryans, these preliterate pastoralists spoke an early form of Sanskrit, which has close philological similarities to other Indo-European languages, such as Avestan in Iran and ancient Greek and Latin. The term Aryan meant pure and implied the invader’s conscious attempts at retaining their tribal identity and roots while maintaining a social distance from earlier inhabitants.” The Aryan or Vedic age lasted from approximately 1500 BC to 100 AD. ( p. 5).

14. Chakravarti, pp. 29-38.

15. zenana: the part of the house where women are secluded

16. Different versions of the love story of Krishna and his divine consort, Radha, can be found in Hindu mythology. See John Hawley and Donna Wulff, eds., *The Divine Consort: Radha and the Goddesses of India* (Berkeley: Graduate Theological Union, 1982).

17. Sumanta Banerjee, “Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India” in *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History*, ed. Sangari and Vaid (New York: Rutgers, 1990), pp. 127-79.

18. Chandra Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse” in *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*, ed. Ashcroft, Griffith, and Tiffin (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 259.

19. Quoted in Antoinette Burton, “The White Woman’s Burden: British Feminists and ‘The Indian Woman,’ 1865-1915,” *Western Women and Imperialism*, eds. Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), pp. 137-57.

20. Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha, eds., *Women Writing in India Vol. II* (New York: Feminist Press, 1993), p. 14. Tharu and Lalitha's comments may offer a somewhat idealized representation of courtesan life, for as Naina Devi points out, "Unless [the courtesan] was very lucky, the caprices of a patron, the fickleness and dishonesty of a lover, not to forget silently creeping old age, would get her in the end" (Devi, p. 89).

21. Tharu and Lalitha, p. 14.

22. Courtesan, singer, dancer, nautch girl.

23. Dance and song performed by nautch girls.

24. Thumri is a form of light classical music that was popularized in the court of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah, the last ruler of Oudh. Naina Devi points out that this form of music is "komal" or delicate and therefore best suited to the female voice. Because of this factor, this art form was frowned upon by male musicians and composers who thought it smacked of "frivolity." Thumri gave tawaifs a way of emotionally articulating the injustices of their third-class status as artistes and human beings and acting as spokesperson for their sisters in zenana. Most thumri songs are about the Radha-Krishna relationship and provide a way for every woman to articulate the injustices of her situation by connecting with Radha's feelings of longing for Krishna. See Naina Devi, "Women In Traditional Media," *Empowering Women Through Media* (Bangalore: Media Centre, 1991), pp.86-91.

25. Naina Devi, pp. 86-91.

26. Gayatri Spivak, preface to *Imaginary Maps*, by Mahasweta Devi (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. xxii.

27. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. by Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1989); Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271-313; Gayatri Spivak, "Woman in Difference" in *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp.77-96.

28. Mahasweta Devi, "Breast Giver," *Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces Expanded Edition*, ed. Maynard Mack (New York: Norton, 1995), p. 2411.

29. Julia Kristeva's description of the "jouissance" of the maternal body in "Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini," in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Art and Literature*, ed. and trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), pp. 237-70.

30. Gayatri Spivak, notes for "'breast-giver': for author, reader, teacher, subaltern, historian. . . ." in *Breast Stories*, by Mahasweta Devi (Calcutta: Seagull Empire, 1997), p. 101.

31. Devi, p. 2406.

32. Spivak, "breast giver," p. 86.

33. Spivak, "breast giver," p. 87.

34. Devi, p. 2422.

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**Appendix:**

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**Wisconsin Women's Action  
Agenda**

# Wisconsin Women's Action Agenda

## Developed at Conference "Speaking Out: Women, Poverty and Public Policy"

### Economic Security Requirements

Higher minimum wage, gender wage equity, national day care, national health care, more and stronger unions, subsidized housing, other benefits (pensions), recognize global threat in "free trade" initiatives such as NAFTA and GATT that eliminate subsidies for basic necessities, need to counter global trends such as sweatshops and exploitation of sex workers.

### Child Care

1. Hotlines for support and referral
2. Quality, affordable, and accessible child care
  - a. Ill children
  - b. Special needs children
  - c. Shifts and weekends
  - d. Reduce copayments
  - e. Expand eligibility for subsidized care
  - f. Release excess federal and county money from TANF, reduce child care copays
  - g. Block grants to Community Action Program agencies
3. Provide safe, convenient transportation to and from child care
4. Boost pay and training (skills) for child care workers
5. Increase use of grandparents' programs
6. Provide field trips and enrichment activities for day care and fee-based school services

### Child Support

1. Update statewide computer system to accrue arrearages from support orders
2. Enforce collections for women not on W-2
3. Continue SSI payments to women even if getting child support

### Domestic Violence

1. Expose the pervasiveness of violence against women in our society; redefine what violence toward women is, showing the connections among all women in their experiences of the different types of violence they have experienced
  - a. Break down racial and class barriers among women

- b. Build into Women’s Studies curriculum and advocacy
- c. Raise awareness among employers
- 2. Work for economic well-being of women so they don’t have to choose between violence and survival
  - a. Opportunities for education and training
  - b. Living wage
  - c. Subsidize parents who wish to work part time while children are young
  - d. Free child care for women working or going to school
- 3. Publicize information about services available
  - a. Establish an exemption for W-2
  - b. Provide for women applying for public assistance in domestic violence situations

### **Education and Training**

- 1. Mobilize Wisconsin educational systems for support, education, and training for low income women
  - a. Involve UW Regents, Women’s Studies programs, President of System, WWHEA, AAUW
  - b. Involve students and potential students for grassroots advocacy for needed support services
  - c. Involve Alums
- 2. Become involved in implementation of Work Force Investment Act in Wisconsin, with women from the community helping to shape the programs at all levels
- 3. Press UW System to create an Educational Support Office to offer supportive services to low income women in higher education
  - a. Subsidized daycare
  - b. Grants to go to school
  - c. Living expenses

### **Empowerment and Personal Healing**

- 1. Bridge communication gaps – start at young age, within family
- 2. Develop support systems
  - a. Organize equal partnership support systems
  - b. Develop Women’s Centers in communities
    - 1. Outreach person
    - 2. 1-800 number support hotline
- 3. Build stronger communities
  - a. Small grants to peer support groups for mentoring and other programs
    - 1. Guidance and support for education
- 4. Institute writing workshops for women to express pain and share with women in similar situations
- 5. Form support and consciousness raising groups (peer led)

6. Provide classes for women
7. Provide counseling on a sliding scale
  - a. Some mental health care providers would volunteer some time.

### **Health Care**

1. Pass legislation that:
  - a. Requires social service people to provide comprehensive information on services available
  - b. Requires pamphlet to clearly state eligibility of all assistance programs
  - c. Create WEB site
2. National health care
  - a. Join with other action groups to lobby Congress
3. Reproductive Rights and Sexuality
  - a. Institute better sexuality education (Human Growth and Development Programs)
  - b. Oppose any encroachments on reproductive rights (Roe v. Wade)
  - c. Support continued schooling for teen mothers

### **Housing**

1. Provide or increase state/federal funding for low income housing services
2. Design low income housing dispersed throughout metro area – 4-5 houses per area
3. Increase availability of low income housing in job rich areas

### **Transportation**

1. Provide bus services in metro areas seven days, 24 hours
2. Design car pool systems for rural areas, accessed by 1-800 numbers
3. Grants to agencies to supply affordable, reliable, safe vehicles to low income women, using County funds available for W-2
4. Jump Start Program – distribution of GEO's to low income families
5. Use of church vans
6. Increase public transportation routes from urban to job rich areas

### **Action Statements**

1. Recognize and fund Ombudsmen/persons statewide and locally
2. Provide document system for low income people to report problems in the system, and establish a state office with responsibility of responding to problems
3. Institute tracking system for those leaving the rolls
4. Provide public education about poverty and its impact on the community
5. Enable each state to start an organization that has a collaborative structure between the poverty community, service community, and academia to change images of what poverty is all about
6. Elect people who will support this agenda

## **Contributors**

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## Contributors

### *Frances Payne Adler*

Poet Frances Payne Adler is the Director of the Creative Writing and Social Action Program at California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB). She is the author of four books of poetry. With photographer Kira Carillo Corser, Adler has four social action art exhibitions travelling the country, most recently, “A Matriot’s Dream: Health Care for All.”

### *Adrian Andrade*

Adrian Andrade is a re-entry student currently in his Senior year at CSUMB. He graduated in Fall of 1998 with a Bachelor’s degree in Human Communication. Immediate future goals include obtaining a Master’s degree in Multicultural Education and teaching at the college level.

### *Madhu Bala*

Madhu Bala received her M.A. from Punjabi University, Patiala, Punjab, India in 1986, where she was a Gold Medalist. She received a Master’s of Philosophy in 1989 and a Ph.D. in 1999 from Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, India. She has been on the Faculty of Economics, School of Social Sciences at Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), New Delhi, India, since 1989.

### *Anne Banda*

Anne Banda is a doctoral student in Urban Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Her research focuses on gender and public health policy.

### *Barbara Barnard*

Barbara Barnard is currently working as an independent consultant. She has 20 years experience in the field of child welfare.

### *Hal. S. Bertilson*

Hal S. Bertilson is a Professor of Psychology. He teaches Psychology of Women, is a Fellow in the International Society for Research on Aggression, and has served as the Vice Chancellor/Provost at the University of Wisconsin-Superior.

### *Timothy Crow*

Timothy D. Crow is Assistant Professor of German and Spanish at the University of Wisconsin-Superior. Dr. Crow completed his doctorate in Germanic Linguistics at the Ohio State University, and has studied Spanish at West Virginia University, the Ohio State University, and in Costa Rica.

***Luisa Deprez***

Luisa S. Deprez is Director of Women's Studies and an Associate Professor of Social Work at the University of Southern Maine. She is a Visiting Research Scholar at the Wellesley Centers for Research on Women, where she is devoting further study to the current federal welfare restrictions on access to higher education and their impact on the lives of poor women. Her scholarly interests center on the broad arena of social welfare policy, including the politics of policy-making, the influence of public opinion in the policy process, the impact of ideology in policy development, and more specifically on women and welfare.

***Lorie Schabo Grabowski***

Lorie Schabo Grabowski is a doctoral candidate in the Sociology Department at the University of Minnesota. She is currently conducting her dissertation research, a qualitative study of the self-efficacy beliefs of welfare program participants, using a subsample of women from an ongoing longitudinal study of youth being conducted at the University of Minnesota.

***Suzanne Griffith***

Suzanne C. Griffith is an Associate Professor of Counseling Education, Director of the School Psychology Program, and Coordinator of the Women's Studies Program at the University of Wisconsin-Superior. She has served as assistant Vice Chancellor at the UW-Superior and chair of the UW System Women's Studies Consortium.

***Sarah Harder***

Sarah Harder, a tenured English Professor and Coordinator of the Women's Studies Program at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, has worked for 20 years on issues involving women at grassroots, national, and international levels. She has established academic support services for minority, disadvantaged, and reentry students, helped establish advocacy networks of women's groups now operating in 34 states, and is currently working with women's groups in former Soviet republics to provide training in NGO management, coalition-building, institutional transformation, and policy change.

***Peggy Kahn***

Peggy Kahn is Professor of Political Science and in the Women's and Gender Studies Program at the University of Michigan-Flint. She is the co-author of *Contesting the Market: Pay Equity and the Politics of Economic Restructuring* (Wayne State University Press, 1997) and coeditor of *Equal Value/Comparable Worth in the UK and US* (Macmillan and St. Martin's Press, 1992). She has also written about low-paid women's work, work-family dilemmas, and women and unions in the United States and the United Kingdom.

***Carol Amelia Lasquade***

Carol Amelia Lasquade is the CARE Coordinator and an EOPS Counselor at Monterey Peninsula College. Carol has worked in equity education for over 15 years and is committed to assisting individuals in reaching their potential through education. Carol joyfully resides in California (a Boston transplant) with her husband, Doug, and her son, Matt, who is currently a senior at CSU, Chico.

***Laura Lewis***

Laura Lewis teaches in the Social Work/Sociology Department at Mercyhurst College. She is completing her doctoral work at the University of Pittsburgh.

***Heather McCallum***

Heather McCallum is a Ph.D. Candidate in Political Science at Stanford University and will receive concurrently a Masters of Public Policy degree from Duke University. Her primary research focus is on issues of poverty and welfare policy, especially as they pertain to women.

***Ellen Messer-Davidow***

Ellen Messer-Davidow, an Associate Professor at the University of Minnesota, teaches in the Departments of English, Women's Studies, Cultural Studies, and American Studies. Her recent work includes a series of articles on the conservative movement and *Disciplining Feminism: Episodes in the Discursive Production of Social Change* (Duke University Press, forthcoming) on academic feminism.

***Judith Pedersen-Benn***

Judith Pedersen-Benn holds a Masters Degree in Development from Michigan State University. She has worked as an adult educator and community organizer. Judith currently resides in Southeastern Minnesota where she directs a community initiative working on welfare reform. She is a member of the Minnesota taskforce on rural welfare reform.

***Paula Pemberton***

Paula Pemberton was Research Assistant on the project Monitoring the Impact of New Welfare Laws, at the University of Michigan-Flint. A former welfare recipient, she is also a community activist. She has a B.A. degree in Public Administration and a minor in Women's and Gender Studies.

***Valerie Polakow***

Valerie Polakow is Professor of Education at Eastern Michigan University. She is the author of *The Erosion of Childhood* (University of Chicago Press, 1982) and *Lives on the Edge: Single Mothers and their Children in the Other America* (University of Chicago Press, 1993), which won the Kappa Delta Pi "Book of the Year" award in 1994. She has written

numerous articles about women and children in poverty, welfare policies, homelessness, child care policy, and educational advocacy. During 1995, she was a Fulbright scholar in Denmark researching welfare and child care policies.

***Lisa M. Poupart***

Lisa M. Poupart is a member of the Lac Du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Ojibway. She is the Acting Chair of the American Indian Studies Program and an Assistant Professor of American Indian Studies, Women's Studies, and Humanistic Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay.

***Katherine A. Rhoades***

Katherine Ann Rhoades is an Assistant Professor in Foundations of Education Department at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. She has been a member of the Women and Poverty Public Education Initiative (WPPEI) Steering Committee for four years and in that role has helped coordinate WPPEI research projects in the Eau Claire region. Her scholarly interests and publications focus on women and poverty, diversity and education, and collaborative research partnerships. With Anne Statham, she coordinated the Women's Studies Conference from which this book is derived.

***Susan Rigdon***

Susan Rigdon is a Research Associate in Anthropology at the University of Illinois. Her research interests center on issues of poverty and development in China and the Caribbean.

***Andrea Jule Sachs***

Andrea Jule Sachs is a doctoral candidate in the Program in American Studies at the University of Minnesota, where she is also affiliated with the Center for Advanced Feminist Studies.

***Betty Salamun***

Artistical Director of the Milwaukee-based professional modern dance company DANCECIRCUS, Betty Salamun choreographs and performs with artists of many disciplines, and works in community settings with diverse groups such as children, elders, homeless men, and women recovering from substance abuse.

***Deborah Davis Schlacks***

Deborah Davis Schlacks is Assistant Professor of English and Coordinator of Freshman English at the University of Wisconsin-Superior. Her research interests include the treatment of ethnicity in the works of F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Sarah Orne Jewett's ecological emphasis.

*Asha Sen*

Dr. Asha Sen is an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. She teaches Postcolonial Literature and World Literature.

*Jennifer Shaddock*

Jennifer Shaddock is an Associate Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, where she teaches Victorian Literature and Cultural Studies.

*Erin Silvas*

Erin Silvas is a student of the Institute for Human Communication at CSUMB. She has been writing short stories and poetry for six years. She plans on attending a graduate program in creative writing. She is the first person in her family to attend college.

*Anne Statham*

Anne Statham is Professor of Sociology and Women's Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, where she also serves as co-Director of a new HUD-funded Community Outreach Partnership Center. She is also Outreach Administrator for the UW System Women's Studies Consortium. In that capacity, she has been the statewide coordinator for the Women and Poverty Public Education Initiative since 1994. She has published in the areas of women and work, women and poverty, and environmental identities. Along with Katherine Rhoades, she coordinated the conference that generated the articles in this volume.

*Sandra Stokes*

Sandra Stokes is Associate Professor of Education and Women's Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. She has known the founders of the Ft. Howard-Jefferson Neighborhood Family Resource Center since their early dreaming stage, and is working with the Center Programs with early childhood education students at the university.

*Patricia C. Thomas*

Patricia Thomas teaches Spanish Language and Literature at the University of Wisconsin-Superior, where she is developing a minor in Spanish and new courses dealing with Latino culture.

*Diane Michalski Turner*

Diane Michalski Turner is an Honorary Fellow in the Women's Studies Research Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She is a social anthropologist who has done fieldwork in the Fiji Islands, Papua, New Guinea, and Chicago, Illinois related to women's issues.

***Lynn Walter***

Lynn Walter is Professor of Social Change and Development and Women's Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. Her work on comparative women's political issues has appeared in *Feminist Review*, *Gender & Society*, and *The Journal of Comparative Family Studies*.

***Karen Peterson Welch***

Karen Peterson Welch teaches Composition, Technical Writing, and Women's Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. She is currently researching the issues surrounding the exploration of social and political topics in first-year writing courses.

This 266-page collection of papers from the conference **Speaking Out: Women, Poverty, and Public Policy**, the twenty-third annual conference of the University of Wisconsin System Women's Studies Consortium, offers a variety of viewpoints on the topic of "welfare reform." The authors provide historical perspectives and policy critiques, examine how welfare reform is being worked out in the various states, and report on what the idea of welfare means in other countries. Some studies offer resources and strategies for teaching about poverty in the classroom, while others discuss the experience of welfare recipients, and some analyze literary explorations of poverty. Several scholars speak from the viewpoint of having themselves been poor and/or on welfare at some point.

**Katherine Ann Rhoades** is an Assistant Professor in Foundations of Education Department at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. She has been a member of the Women and Poverty Public Education Initiative (WPPEI) Steering Committee for four years and in that role has helped coordinate WPPEI research projects in the Eau Claire region. Her scholarly interests and publications focus on women and poverty, diversity and education, and collaborative research partnerships.

**Anne Statham** is Professor of Sociology and Women's Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, where she also serves as co-Director of a HUD-funded Community Outreach Partnership Center. She is also Outreach Administrator for the UW System Women's Studies Consortium. In that capacity, she has been the statewide coordinator for the Women and Poverty Public Education Initiative since 1994. She has published in the areas of women and work, women and poverty, and environmental identities.

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