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SURVIVING WELFARE REFORM:

Battered Black Women's Strategies for Survival in Poughkeepsie, New York

by

DANA M. DAVIS

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy, The City University of New York

2001

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Approval

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

**SURVIVING WELFARE REFORM: BATTERED BLACK WOMEN'S STRATEGIES
FOR SURVIVAL IN POUGHKEEPSIE, NEW YORK**

by

Dana M. Davis

Advisor: Professor Leith Mullings

This dissertation examines the impact of welfare reform in the lives of some Black battered women, living in Poughkeepsie, New York. The research centers on understanding how Black women who are battered, access resources through social services after having left a battering relationship. The dissertation describes the regulatory nature of welfare reform policy and the strategies that women utilize to negotiate resources. The study examines the content of battered women's experiences as they attempt to create independent households within the context of welfare reform policy. Often the women's interactions with welfare caseworkers and policy mandates precipitated a range of strategies in order to get basic needs met, such as food, rent and cash.

To determine the impact of the welfare reform policy life history interviews and participant observation were the primary methods of data collection. The data collection methods linked the subjects' lived experiences of violence and poverty to the use of welfare, and the nature of women's engagement with social services. In addition, interviews were conducted with battered women's and anti-poverty advocates, employees of governmental institutions and economic development institutions. Thirteen Black

women living in the Grace Smith House Shelter in Poughkeepsie were the research subjects. Nine women of other racial/ethnic groups were also part of this study, four White women, three Latina women, one Asian woman and one East Indian woman.

While this is not a comparative study, the experiences of women of other racial groups are included to provide an overall understanding of how welfare reform regulates women. Some patterns emerged indicating that Black and other women of color are vulnerable to differential treatment. The experiences of the study participants point to some distinct differences in women's processes of achieving self-sufficiency and independent households.

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I am amazed that in the midst of their own crises, battered women spent hours talking with me about their lives. They opened their arms and their homes, once they had found them, and told me to tell what they said so things could change. I am forever indebted to the women, advocates, community residents and others whom I interviewed.

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I offer special thanks to the staff of Grace Smith House Shelter without whom my access to women living at the shelter would have almost impossible. To protect their anonymity, I will not name all of the staff and advocates who helped me, but each of you please know that I am greatly inspired by the work you do and the challenges you face.

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Ache

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INTRODUCTION

The Clock is Ticking

On March 27, 1998, I left Grace Smith House, a shelter for battered women, and went to the Dutchess County Department of Social Services (DCDSS) in the City of Poughkeepsie, New York. While I was there, I met a Black woman by the name of Lee. As I sat in the waiting room, two things attracted my attention. The first was a poster resting on an easel. The caption read, "The Clock is Ticking." Embedded in the image of the clock was the fact that things were going to change in a short while. Welfare would no longer function as it had -- "propping up the able-bodied" but, rather, through new policy, recipients would achieve self-sufficiency through work. The image of the clock reflected some of the historical and contemporary tensions that have surrounded poor and working-poor people's utilization of welfare. One long-standing tension centers on the morals, values and worthiness of recipients. A related concern is recipients' "inappropriate dependency" on government aid (Mead 1986a). The arguments suggest that long-term welfare use creates a dependency that is intergenerational and develops into a "way of life" (Lewis 1966; Auletta 1982; Rimer 1987; Wilson 1984). Central to these discussions of those on welfare and the persistence of poverty are accusations of idleness and an unwillingness to work.

The clock captured several elements in the new law meant to offset tension of the old welfare program, Aid to Children with Dependent Families (AFDC). Under the new law, signed by President Clinton, cycles of dependency would end by creating a different

program entitled Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). This program imposes time limits on the receipt of assistance so as to reduce barriers to self-sufficiency. The goal is to eliminate the "problem of dependency" through the enforcement of work (see for example Murray 1984). The measure of welfare reform's success is its inviolable focus on self-sufficiency through a one-dimensional process consisting of "attachment to work."¹ According to President Clinton, welfare reform would "...transform a broken system that traps too many people in a cycle of dependence to one that emphasizes work and independence..." (*New York Times* 8/1/96). The requirement that recipients work or be engaged in a training program to enhance their human capital or skills must be met or there is a risk of being sanctioned. Sanctions come in the form of having benefit levels such as food stamps, transfer payments for housing, Medicaid, and/or cash benefits reduced or eliminated. Embedded in the above description of welfare reform policy are regulatory and controlling directives. The control of welfare recipients has been a long-standing feature of the welfare state since its implementation in the United States in 1935. The policy includes time limits for the receipt of assistance and mandates that recipients work or be engaged in work-related activities as *the* primary path to achieve self-sufficiency and reduce dependency. However, it has been noted that "...present policies linked to efforts to reform welfare have focused on job procurement without sufficient understanding of the context, mechanisms, and processes that produce and maintain successful outcomes" (Barclay-McLaughlin 2000:53).

The second thing that became clear was that I was going to witness the challenges battered women face as they attempt to negotiate their lives within the context of welfare

¹ This term refers to being employed.

reform. The degree to which welfare reform policy would regulate Black battered women's lives and influence their ability to achieve independence was not immediately apparent. Self-sufficiency, as I found, encompassed broader meaning than that incorporated in the law as evidenced in the day-to-day lived experience of the women in this study. Through this research, I discovered women engaged in a range of strategies in their efforts to achieve self-reliance. This research, then, investigates how Black battered women encounter what I argue is the regulatory control found in welfare reform policy. I emphasize the relationship race plays in their efforts to achieve self-sufficiency not to suggest there is a causal association between poverty, violence and race, but rather to underscore the extreme expressions of gender control as reflected in stereotypes about women on welfare.

Lee told me why she was at DCDSS that morning. She was beaten by her husband, forcing her to take their daughter and leave. Many women must leave their communities to escape the violence in their lives as Lee did. She fled her abuser, left a job and an apartment in New York City, and ultimately found safety in Poughkeepsie. Because she left her husband, Lee was without money. Now homeless and poor, Lee needed help from the Department of Social Services for housing and cash assistance until she found employment and was able to rebuild her life. As a Black woman, she is like 39.3 percent of Black female heads of household who are living at/or below poverty receiving public assistance, (United States Bureau of Census 2000) although numerically

there are fewer Black women on welfare than White women.² Lee was a poor woman, which is true of a number of women who experience violence (Lyon 1998). She, like many women on welfare, did not want social services but turned to it in time of dire need. Lee was also like many women on welfare and those in this dissertation in that she defied prevailing images of Black women receiving government assistance.

The focus of this research is welfare with an emphasis on Black battered women. As such this dissertation is first concerned with exploring the reasons some Black women use welfare, and its function for those who experience violence. I show that because of these women's complicated lives and their recent experiences of victimization, the use of welfare is crucial in their ability to live a life free of intimate violence. In the process of creating this life, some battered women become engaged in a newly organized system of public assistance. This examination reveals the ways in which the social service system, through welfare reform policy, regulates the lives of women and how those regulatory practices interact with self-sufficiency. This research: 1) sheds light on the complexities of women's experiences at the intersection of poverty, violence, and race -- at least in the lives of the women in this research; 2) reveals the domains that characterize and confound ideas of self-sufficiency particularly as they reflect Black women's defiance of male dependence through the use of welfare to achieve independence; and 3) shows the mechanisms that women employ to survive when faced with poverty.

² In 1999, there were 12,687,000 female heads of households with no husband present. Of those, 3,531,000 lived below poverty. 1,883,000 (22.5%) were White; 1,499,000 (39.3%) were Black; 76,000 (23.1%) were Asian Pacific Islander; and 686,000 (38.8) were Hispanic (U. S. Bureau of Census 2000).

Rationale of Study

Black women are the focus of this study because they represent many of the markers used to define women on welfare -- Black, single, unemployed and with children. When President Clinton held a news conference on his proposed welfare legislation, he alluded to who was poor and using welfare presently by discussing how the demographics of the poor population of America had changed. He said:

When welfare was created, the typical welfare recipient was a miner's widow with no education, small children, husband dies in the mine, no expectation that this [sic]--that there was a job for the widow to do or that she could ever do it, and very few out-of-wedlock pregnancies and births. But the whole dynamics were different then (*New York Times* 8/1/96).

A close reading of this statement suggests racial coding. The statement implies that previously those on welfare were White, while currently those on welfare are non-White. The reference to a miner's widow implied that the widow was White when welfare was first implemented. The association between race/ethnicity can be drawn in part because Black men were used as strike breakers in the mining industry and not employed for the long-term, which would have qualified them for benefits (Spero and Harris 1969). Clinton's remark that the dynamic is different now than it was in 1935 implies that welfare caseloads are no longer comprised of White widows, but rather single women with children -- a condition frequently connected with Black women.

Contemporary notions of welfare are signified in relation to Black women, most poignantly expressed in media construction (Clawson and Trice 2000). Through the media, a range of popular narratives about Black women on welfare is presented to the American public (Jewell 1993). One recurring image is that Black women on welfare

have many children and are dependent upon the government for survival. In fact, on average, women on welfare have 2.6 children, only slightly higher than the average number of children non-welfare women have, which is 2.2 children (United States Department of Commerce 1995). Nonetheless, a seemingly never-ending spectacle of welfare in "blackface" (Gilens 1999; Domke, McCoy, and Torres 1999) on television, radio and in the news, nourishes this image. For example, Bill Moyers hosted a documentary in 1986 called "The Vanishing Family—Crisis in Black America." The guests on the show were young, African-American, single mothers whose children had been born out of wedlock. All of the mothers were receiving public assistance. The show centered on the teenage women's lack of concern about their status as single mothers on AFDC as well as the lack of concern about their status in relation to the children's fathers. The problem with the show was that the young women and the fathers of their children were presented as the norm (Jewell 1993:149). In Moyers' version, the Black teenage females and males were representative of the poor and of those on welfare.

In a second example, Bob Grant a New York Radio Talk show host reinforced negative images of a welfare mother in 1994. Using a "Black" accent and commenting on the problem of welfare he said: "I don't have no job, how'm I gonna feed my family?" Then Grant stated, "I wonder if they've ever figured out how they multiply like that? It's like maggots on a hot day. You look one minute and there are so many there, and you look again, and whoa, they've tripled!" (Gourevitch 1994).

Politicians contribute to negative images of women having children out of wedlock and women on welfare. One example of the politics of women's choice was former Vice President Dan Quayle's attack on popular culture. He critiqued a television

character, Murphy Brown, for her decision to have a child out of wedlock and berated single motherhood (Mullings 1995). A second example of a politician's distortion of welfare is illustrated by presidential candidate Ronald Reagan's representation of women on welfare as cheats living off the largesse of the state. During the 1976 presidential campaign, Reagan offered the public a rendition of women on welfare living well, driving expensive cars and cheating the government out of thousands of dollars. This was based on one news article of one 47-year-old Chicago woman who had been charged with defrauding the state of \$8,000. She was dubbed the "Welfare Queen" (Zucchino 1999), a phrase that describes economic dependency (Lubiano 1992:337). She became associated with Black women on welfare.

Academics have also contributed to the "blackening" of welfare and poverty, some suggesting that Black women are the reason black poverty exists and/or that they have children and become pregnant in order to acquire welfare payments (see for example Gilder 1987). Ironically several Black neo-conservatives have made similar allegations including Thomas Sowell who has noted that the problem of poor African Americans is the result of a dearth of moral values and are dependent upon government assistance (Kelley 1997).

Research finds that the media mediates White understanding of issues such as welfare, violence and behavior in relation to African-Americans. When asked what kind of picture was presented of Black people in the news, one White respondent said "I think most of it's a lot of negatives...just the violence and the welfare stories are always negative about Blacks. A lot of the violence and stuff they do to themselves. I think for

the most part they're (the stories) accurate. I think they bring it on themselves" (Entman and Rojecki 2000:35).

The images perpetuated by the media, politicians, and scholars strengthen the myths about women and welfare. The result is that Black women on welfare are offered up as "...the agent of destruction, the creator of the pathological Black urban poor family from which all ills flow; a monster creating crack dealers, addicts, muggers and rapists--men who become those things because of being immersed in her culture of poverty" (Lubiano 1992: 339). Black women, then, are seen as unworthy users of welfare--they are considered to be chiselers, brood mares and lazy matriarchs (Mink 1998; Roberts 1997; Jewell 1993). The depictions are seared in the minds of the public. They translate into Black women on welfare as the most illegitimate users of aid; their transgressions, moral and otherwise, wreaking havoc with the intentions of a welfare state that was meant to help the "deserving poor," not those characterized as undeserving.

Existing narratives of the welfare mother/queen "are not simply social taxonomies, they are also recognized by the national public as stories that describe the world in particular and politically loaded ways--and that is exactly why they are constructed, reconstructed, manipulated and contested. They are the building blocks of reality" (Lubiano 1992: 330-331). Members of society respond to these images. For example, a White woman who was on welfare stated that her support of presidential candidate David Duke--the former Ku Klux Klan Grand Wizard--was due, in part, to his support of using birth control in combination with monetary incentives to reduce the number of Blacks on welfare. She felt that Black women just have babies and go on welfare (Roberts 1997:224).

In the midst of these stereotypical narratives are alternative realities of why and how any woman, including Black women, end up on welfare. In the United States, of the 3.8 million women on welfare, about 1.5 million are Black (United States Bureau of Census 1995). They use welfare not because they are lazy, pathological or deficient, but because they frequently are unable to find work (Seccombe 1999). Advanced capitalism has shifted the need for certain types of skills from those associated with industrial labor to the higher-skill requirements related to technological society (Castells 1996; Castells 1989; Susser 1997), for which some women are not prepared. In other instances, the types of employment available are in the service industry, which typically do not pay a living wage (Edin and Lein 1997). While the rates of Black women's full-time employment rose between 1986 and 1996, so too, has part-time employment or contingent work. The part-time work has been found primarily in the service sector. Service-oriented industries have drawn primarily on women's labor, which have less demanding skill requirements and lower earnings. For example, 6 out of 10 Black female service workers were employed as nursing aides, orderlies, attendants, janitors, cleaners, cooks and maids (United States Department of Labor 1997). Part-time, temporary workers usually receive lower pay and reduced or nonexistent benefits.

Related to the issue of employment is child-care. The service sector employment options described above frequently involve working irregular hours such as nights and weekends. Accessing child-care under such circumstances is a challenge as it is often not available (Presser and Cox 1997). Some women are on welfare because they cannot afford the child-care that is required in order to work. Other women are on welfare because they cannot find the child-care they need or they do not wish to leave their

children in the care of others. There are several reasons for this, including the questionable quality of available child-care, the negative cost-benefit when real wages are seen in relation to child-care expenses, or *they* want to raise their children.

Recently, welfare utilization has been examined in relation to violence. Although the connection between violence and economic fragility was underscored by battered women's advocates in the 1970s and 1980s, (Schechter 1982) the issues of violence and poverty gained more currency in the 1990s for two primary reasons. First, many batterers victimize women and exert control in other areas of their lives such as preventing them from working. Consequently, they draw from public assistance to survive. Studies have consistently found that between 14.6 percent and 32 percent of women on AFDC were in abusive relationships (Raphael and Tolman 1997). These findings led scholars to argue that welfare clients and survivors of domestic violence are often the same population (Brandwein 1999).

Second, a woman leaving a violent situation may require supports to set up a separate household from her batterer. In this situation, welfare is used as a stepping stone toward the goal of creating an economically and socially independent household (Davis and Kraham 1995). It has been suggested that welfare use is an important path, one of several, out of abusive relationships because women's ability to extricate themselves from violent situations is encumbered by the lack of resources. In this dissertation, I propose a similar justification for welfare use among some women; that in the interest of economic independence and freedom from violence, women draw on government support. Thus, the crises of scarcity, serious material hardship (Edin and Lein 1997) and

violence -- either independently or in combination -- may propel women to use welfare as a strategy to survive.

The relationship between violence and poverty is theorized in scholarly research, particularly as they relate to the struggles of Black women. It is not because Black women experience poverty in greater numbers than other women, but because the lives of Black women on welfare are complicated when the issue of violence is linked to poverty and, consequently, self-sufficiency. Black women's experiences to be self-sufficient and the outcomes of their attempts to leave violent relationships are shaped in relation to racial stigmatization and marginalization. These concerns have received "selective inattention" (Hawkins 1987 cited in Browne 1995).

President Clinton wanted to "end welfare as we know it." His version of ending welfare as we know it translated into policy changes that have affected women in need. I offer an anthropological elaboration on the impact of welfare policy in the lives of battered Black women. In this thesis, welfare and its reform are the center of my analysis with the goal of understanding how women experience welfare reform policy. I also explore if and how women are regulated through the policy, the ways in which the policies connect with self-sufficiency, and the survival strategies used by Black women who are battered. Black women are privileged in this study because they do not generally participate in discussions about welfare with policy makers (Abramovitz 1996a:7; Browne 1995); yet they are the definitive representation of all that is wrong with welfare. Battered women are important because the connections between poverty and violence, as previously noted, are increasingly important in policy-making decisions.

I took up this exploration in the city of Poughkeepsie located in Dutchess County, New York for several reasons. First, the county implemented welfare reform policy in 1997, less than one year before I started my research. This meant I was able to examine initial impacts of the new law. Second, Poughkeepsie is a mid-sized city, a geographic area rarely explored in the literature on welfare (Connolly 2000). Typically, large urban areas such as Chicago and Los Angeles are the focus of analyses regarding welfare utilization and poverty (see for example Quint, Edin, et. al. 1999). Third, I believed I would have a reasonable opportunity to examine the issue of welfare reform in relation to violence and race. This was so because most of Dutchess County's Black population lives in Poughkeepsie, most of the county's poor live in Poughkeepsie, and the county's first battered women's shelter is located there, as is the Dutchess County Department of Social Services. Access to the services and resources, which battered women draw upon, are navigable. For example, in ten minutes, one can easily walk from the DCDSS to the Family Partnership, which houses community-based organizations and programs. The programs include the Lunch Box, which offers meals to the homeless and those in need of food, Legal Aid and the Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), which provides job training. The training programs and community work projects mandated by welfare reform policy are located primarily in the city. Accessibility to these and other resources were key in understanding women's self-sufficiency in relation to welfare reform. It was within this context that I investigated battered Black women's options, and how they negotiate their needs as a result of welfare reform.

This thesis begins with an exploration of the role that welfare plays in the lives of abused women living in the battered women's shelter in Poughkeepsie who sought

government assistance to reestablish their lives. My findings challenge prevailing notions of who is on welfare and why. Growing out of the life experiences of these women I found: 1) the reasons women use welfare are complex and repudiate simplistic conclusions about their use; 2) that self-sufficiency is not solely achieved through employment but rather incorporates other dimensions of social life; and 3) that women act as agents on their own behalf and greatly benefit from advocates' personal involvement in their lives.

What became clear in this study was that welfare reform's singular referent to self-sufficiency, so narrowly defined in terms of employment, brushes over self-defined meanings of, and dimensions encompassed, in independence. As such, I consider several dimensions in the social life of poor and low-income women that they felt were part of being independent and self-sufficient. Dimensions beyond employment are discussed as well. I make a contrast between the definition of self-sufficiency as being attached to work and the reality of enforced work as a mechanism through which women are regulated. I found that as a result of punitive practices, achieving independence and sustaining self-reliance are compromised although, obviously, not impossible.

The four dimensions I address with regard to the management of battered women in Poughkeepsie, New York are: 1) the institutional relationship with the Dutchess County Department of Social Services (DCDSS); 2) employment and educational options; 3) child-care; and 4) housing. The first dimension considered is the interaction women have with caseworkers at the Department of Social Services. Caseworkers are the gatekeepers for women on welfare. Their role is to determine the need for assistance and confirm eligibility. They provide clients with information about the range of services that

can facilitate self-sufficiency. They also have the power to sanction clients who do not comply with regulations. Within the context of welfare reform policy, they may employ diversionary tactics to discourage people from applying or following through on applications. The process of being engaged with DCDSS underscores the controlling nature of welfare reform policy.

Secondly, there is considerable regulation in employment and training options for people as they are being moved from welfare to work or work-related activities. Poughkeepsie is an interesting city in which to examine employment opportunities since the county has undergone a major economic revitalization. Although there are jobs available, the types of jobs and the wage levels they can secure are crucial factors in women's efforts to create stable households. The women I met who came to the shelter were from Dutchess County as well as other parts of New York State. Many decided to stay in the county, in part, because they believed they would find well-paid employment. In some cases, their goals were thwarted by the fact they were being channeled into service-sector jobs and were not able to access training to increase their eligibility for employment in the high-tech economy that is spreading in the area.

I then explore the implications of mandating women to work when access to child-care is problematic. Child-care has been a contentious issue with regard to welfare reform policy because it must be attainable if mothers are to participate in the wage labor force. Lack of child-care options organizes a considerable amount of women's time when they have to find work or be engaged in work-related activities. Most importantly, some women do not want to work, but rather wish to stay home with their children.

Finally, I discuss the issue of housing. The complexities of housing are examined in relation to the poor housing choices that women have. The county and the City are quite desirable locations for homeowners for two reasons. First, the cost of housing is far less expensive than in nearby Westchester County. Second, the railroad connecting New York City to Poughkeepsie and other municipalities in Dutchess makes the area increasingly more attractive to families. The housing options for women leaving the shelter are perched on the edge of an image of accessibility. In fact, poor and low-income people are restricted in their housing choices due to the increasing cost of rents.

The impact of welfare reform gains depth when viewed through these four dimensions. By exploring the four aspects or dimensions from institutional interaction to accessing housing, we can see that work, as a primary definition of self-sufficiency, is limited. The aspects I discuss serve as markers on a continuum of self-sufficiency. I place them on a continuum to open the field of analysis of welfare reform policy. I suggest a nuanced evaluation of the achievement of independence based on the perceptions of women who live at the intersection of welfare policy and everyday experience. I also broaden the analysis of the success of welfare reform policy by including strategies that Black women employ to deal with the vagaries and pressures of being controlled and sanctioned. In this thesis I show how the intersection of gender, race and violence within the significant dimensions delineated above are crucial to understanding how women are living under welfare reform. Further, these aspects serve as sites where women who are battered struggle to negotiate their lives within the constraints of regulatory representations and policies. The regulation of women by

welfare is not new. In fact, my work will further illuminate the depth of the controlling nature of welfare. However, the context of the control has changed.

Scholarly concern about poverty and welfare has resulted in social scientists' developing rich ethnographic descriptions and historical analyses (see for example Susser 1998; Gordon 1994; Abramovitz 1996a) on women's lives. By focusing on the particular aspects described above, the content and outcomes of regulatory practices are brought to light. The dimensions of women's regulation considered here reflect a range of domains through which welfare exerts control as women struggle to survive. I take the subject of welfare reform in a different direction than even those who have studied it in relation to intimate violence (see for example Kurz 1999; Polakow 1999a). This is accomplished by focusing on Black women. My inquiry picks up on Brush's (1992) argument that research on violence against women focuses on "the political economy of violence." She states that, "not all women are similarly situated with respect to resources, risks, and harm..." (246). Her comments ground and justify my choice to examine Black women. Further, this research contributes to Anglin's (1998) argument that we broaden the meaning of violence: She states:

Through structural forms of violence persons are socially and culturally marginalized in ways that deny them the opportunity for emotional and physical well-being, or expose them to assault or rape, or subject them to hazards that can cause sickness and death. In expanding our definition [of violence] to include structural forms of violence, we can better understand that social and government policies that valorize particular family forms and jeopardize others, programs that resolve local and national budgetary problems by withdrawing social support from the "undeserving" many and renewed emphases on incarceration and other disciplinary techniques produce violence in the guise of social stability and order. The net result of these, and other practices is to engender a kind of structural violence that is normalized... (Anglin 1998:145).

I attend to both Brush's and Anglin's concerns by showing access to resources are vulnerable, contingent or constrained by race/ethnicity and class. These factors do influence women's attempts to leave violent relationships. Thus, an investigation of welfare reform must incorporate an intersectional analysis. I draw upon Black feminist theory (see for example Collins 1990), which centers on exploring the connections of race, class and gender with how they are articulated in everyday life and social phenomena (Smith 1977). Analyses of this type is the hallmark of work in the United States, for example, in studies of labor (Nakano-Glenn 1992; Mullings 1986); family (Zinn 1988); and incarceration (Richie 1996), among others. My project on welfare reform is important in its emphasis on the level of institutional control imposed on battered women, particularly Black women, whose societal subordination through their demonized association with welfare serves to maintain a "hierarchy that limits [their] life chances..." (Gilkes 1994).

This dissertation demonstrates three important points. First, not all women are similarly situated with regard to access to resources. Second, the new policies contained within welfare reform greatly affect women's experiences with social services, employment, child-care, and housing, and ultimately influence self-sufficiency. Third, women act as agents on their own behalf.

Within the discipline of anthropology, analyses of poverty provide insight into women's significant activities and strategies for survival (see for example Stack 1974; Brown 1975; Sharff 1987; Susser 1986). In contributing to this body of research, the dissertation discusses two levels of survival strategies women draw upon to rectify scarce resources. The first level of strategies was self-initiated by the women and the second

level of strategies centered on the assistance advocates provided to women. Advocates are those individuals outside the formal institutional framework of government agencies. They are employed by not-for-profit, community-based organizations to assist, represent and support marginalized individuals. In this case they work with women in terms of institutional interactions, accessing housing, child-care and employment. Advocates represent a neglected group in discussions of welfare reform so I examine the role they play in battered women's survival strategies.

The first three chapters of this dissertation are descriptive. Chapter One provides a literature review of welfare and describes elements of welfare reform. In Chapter Two I describe the setting in which the research took place, providing an ethnographic description of the Grace Smith House Shelter and shelter life as well as the geographic and economic context of the city in which the shelter is located. Chapter Three introduces three battered women: two are Black (one is single with no children and the other is a single mother of four); the third is a White woman who is married with two children. The point is to examine the precipitating factors that related to these women's use of welfare -- violence. Following their stories are biographies of the 22 women who were the study participants. The chapter also includes some of participants' thoughts about welfare.

The next three chapters of this dissertation examine the four dimensions of women's experiences with welfare reform policy and the elements that I propose serve as points of regulation. Chapter Four examines the process of going into Social Services. Chapter Five discusses some key factors in women's attempts to find employment and the

role of child-care in their abilities to be self-sufficient. Chapter Six examines the challenges that women face in locating housing.

Finally, the last two chapters focus on the strategies women draw upon to survive welfare reform. In Chapter Seven the strategies discussed are self-initiated by the women, and in Chapter Eight, I turn to the specific role of advocates who also help women deal with the impact of welfare policy.

Approach and Questions

This dissertation draws on four different domains or areas as the content for the ethnographic examination of regulating Black battered women. The domains highlighted reveal some tensions in the proclamation that welfare reform is a success by showing how within each domain women's efforts at achieving self-sufficiency are adulterated by the policies that sanction them and the economics of the city in which they live.

As the women move through the process of putting their lives in order in the City of Poughkeepsie, these domains, although discussed discretely, intersect in ways that underscore the regulatory control of welfare. The process of going to Social Services in Dutchess County is very centralized, unlike, for example in New York City where there are multiple job centers. Three analytical questions underpin the research. The first concerns the range of violence in the lives of Black women and what they do about it. What are the circumstances of their leaving a battering situation? Are they economically

dependent upon men? What does it mean for the women to use welfare when attempting to extricate themselves from violent relationships?

The second set of questions concern the impact of welfare reform in the lives of battered Black women. What areas of their lives are affected by policy changes? How has the local economy influenced women's choices to create lives of their own making? In what ways is the regulation of women evident in the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996?

The third set of questions address women's strategies to create a household. What do women do to access the resources they need? How do they manage sanctions from the Department of Social Services? Each question is realized in cross cutting ways in the chapters. Depth of understanding is gained by examining women's experiences from an interjective perspective and not as discrete phenomena.

Methods

From 1996 to 1997, I searched for a suitable location to conduct this research. Although I had worked with battered and formerly battered women in New York City, I did not want to do the research in a highly urban environment, as it would have been difficult to meet with administrative personnel. After visiting shelters from Kings County to Ulster County in New York and speaking with people about the possibility of conducting my research, I finally chose Grace Smith House in Dutchess County.

On my first trip to Dutchess County, I had a three-hour conversation with the Alisa Robbins, the executive director of the Grace Smith House.³ She welcomed my spending one or two years with her staff and clients at the shelter. We arranged for me to visit the shelter in August of 1997 to present my research plans to the staff. Their support would be essential in facilitating my introduction to the women living at the shelter. The staff agreed to the research project. We decided the best way for me to become immersed in shelter operations was to complete the volunteer training program. The training is held twice a year, once in September and again in January or February. I began training in February 1998.

The four-week volunteer training at Grace Smith House served as an excellent opportunity to become familiar with the process of sheltering, advocating for, and delivering services to battered women. The issues covered in the training included: How to advocate for women at the Department of Social Services and Family Court. The training program incorporated an overview of the Order of Protection process from Family and Civil Courts. The key element in advocacy is to explain and clarify the operation of systems for women and support them as they negotiate getting their needs met through governmental, judicial and other institutions. We reviewed some of the questions that women are likely to be asked when they apply for services. For example, when a woman with a child comes to the shelter and applies for social services, she is required to go to the Child Support Unit of Social Services. To determine if in fact the woman is eligible for child support, and to ensure that she is not in a relationship with her batterer, she is sometimes asked invasive questions such as, "When was the last day you

³ I have used her real name.

had sex with him [her male partner]?" Frequently, women are disturbed by the questions and volunteer advocates are trained to help them get through the process.

There was a role-play session instructing how to answer hotline calls. For example, women are obviously distraught when they call a shelter hotline. We learned techniques to calm women down in order to determine the nature of the abuse they experienced, and not pressure them to leave their batterer but support whatever decision they chose to make. Finally, we were trained to conclude the call and confirm whether or not the woman would be coming to the shelter. As the phone conversation ended, we were told to make a special effort to remind women that if they made the call from home, they should immediately dial another number to disable the redial function which might reveal to their batterer that they had called the shelter.

I completed the training, having missed one session, and then spent the next six months, from March to August of 1998, volunteering at the shelter. During that time I referred women to Social Services, did intakes, and walked around Poughkeepsie to acquaint myself with the city.

The first six months were very awkward because my volunteer schedule was one day every other week. Sometimes I felt I had to relearn how to respond appropriately to hotline calls each time I returned and struggled to remember protocols about my volunteer duties. Also, although I had worked with battered and formerly battered women in the past (usually doing one to four hour workshops, training and interviews), very little prepared me for being in a shelter with battered women. Knife, gunshot wounds, and the physical injuries that brought women to the shelter sometimes shook me. Further, the women were not particularly interested in me except to the extent that I had

access to keys to open the closet where medication was kept and the closet that stocked food and personal supplies.

After six months of volunteering and becoming familiar with the variety of services, which battered women use, I spent more time going with women to the Dutchess County Department of Social Services. The transition from volunteering to doing the research was not difficult because there was an almost completely new group of women at the shelter by the time I began my formal research. I implemented the investigation by employing participant observation, structured and unstructured, and life history interviews, case record review and archival research. Following is a discussion of each method.

Participant observation was the primary method used for this research. I did not live in Poughkeepsie full time. I traveled to Poughkeepsie three days each week participating in activities with women and observing their interactions with advocates at community-based organizations and the staff of the Department of Social Services. I attended monthly staff meetings, community meetings, client activities and went to community events such as The Clothesline Project held at the Poughkeepsie Mall, an annual national campaign to raise community awareness about the impact of violence on women and children. Generally, I spent one night each week in Poughkeepsie. On my overnight stays, I visited with community residents, interviewed advocates at agencies and spent time with women in their new homes once they left the shelter. The nights I stayed over in Poughkeepsie, I lived with Juliet.⁴ It was she who showed me aspects of

⁴ Juliet wanted her real name used in this research.

Poughkeepsie that I might not otherwise have come to know as intimately as I did. Juliet is a formerly battered woman, former welfare recipient and an extremely well-respected community activist. She facilitated my entry into the Dutchess County Department of Social Services. Juliet introduced me to, and arranged my meetings with, the Commissioner of the Dutchess County Department of Social Services, the Director of the Section 8 Housing Certification Department, and a number of community residents with whom I shared many meals and lively conversation.

I used an approved informed consent (Appendix A) for formal interviews with the women, advocates, community residents and the staff of agencies which granted me permission to ask questions and audio-tape interviews when appropriate. I did not have unlimited access to all of the activities in which the women and shelter staff engaged, but the access that I did have was quite extensive. I was able to attend mandatory weekly meetings for all shelter residents, small group activities such as arts and crafts and, in some cases, one-on-one counseling sessions. But much of the time I sat in the large dining room where the staff generally congregated or in the kitchen and living room where the women were during the day and early evening.

Hanging out with the women – walking to the store, food shopping, apartment hunting and, in one case, visiting a woman at her place of employment facilitated in-depth conversations. Essentially, I witnessed the women negotiate their lives and self-sufficiency in a variety of situations – as they attempted to rent apartments, move into apartments, secure employment, attend training sessions, and find child-care. Some of the richest data I collected was when I accompanied women to their social service appointments because the wait at the Department of Social Services was often long --

from two to five-and-a-half hours. During these waiting periods, women would share information about their lives, hopes and frustrations. As a result of going with women to Social Services, I was asked to be a human rights monitor for a project organized through the Eleanor Roosevelt Center at Val-Kill. This involved filling out reports of violations and institutional abuse resulting from the denial of benefits or services to which women were entitled. I completed a form on only one occasion.⁵

I had wanted to go with women to their places of employment (if they were employed), and speak with their employers to get a sense of how their supervisors felt about hiring women on welfare, but that was rarely possible. In fact, only one woman allowed me to do so. The reason some women did not want me to talk with their employers was their fear of repercussion – that their benefits would be cut off, as some women were working “off the books.” Other women simply did not want to do anything that might prompt an employer to call DCDCSS. They thought that if I interviewed their employers about welfare reform, they employer might use my inquiry against the women.

Occasionally I met landlords of the buildings into which women were moving and informally interviewed them to find out how they perceived women in need of housing. The data from these interactions were documented in seven field notebooks. As a result of these interactions, I came to understand how women felt about living in a shelter,

⁵ The Eleanor Roosevelt Center at Val-Kill, located in Hyde Park, New York established a committee to monitor welfare reform. It is a five-year project that upon its conclusion will coincide with the period at which many public assistance recipients will no longer be eligible for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families benefits. The Human Rights Incident Report is completed by anyone who has accompanied an individual to social services and/or by the applicant/recipient. Testimony is taken from people on welfare or their advocates to document human rights violations in relation to welfare reform.

having to deal with the Dutchess County Department of Social Services, moving, working and the overall quality of their lives.

The participants in this research were self-selected. Most of the shelter residents were aware of my role as a researcher and I was often referred to as “the one writing the book.” Women knew I wanted to talk to them about their experiences living in a shelter and going to social services. The staff greatly facilitated the interactions I had with the women. Sometimes staff would announce my research at the general Friday meeting and ask all those who wanted to be interviewed to see me. If a woman wanted to talk to me, then she approached me. I would tell her about my research and she could decide if she wanted to participate. I was careful to make certain that women did not feel obligated or pressured to reveal their stories to me.

In addition to participant observation, I conducted formal structured interviews that I had developed and pre-tested with women at a battered women's shelter in Brooklyn, New York (Appendix B). During the initial interview, demographic data was elicited, including race/ethnicity, age, number of children, sources of income, level of education, work experience and housing status. Each woman was asked about the incident that precipitated her entry into the shelter and how she experienced being in the shelter. She was also asked a series of questions about her engagement with Social Services, child welfare, medical benefits, mental health, substance abuse, law enforcement and educational institutions. I asked about the length of time they and their birth families had been engaged with institutions, specifically with welfare related agencies. The purpose of this inquiry was to determine whether there had been long-term utilization of welfare. Structured interviews usually took one to two hours to complete.

The initial interviews segued into the life history interviews. I collected full life history data from 13 of the 22 women who were interviewed and partial life history data from the remaining nine women. Based on the content of the initial session, in subsequent discussions, a pursuing technique was used to obtain more detailed life history data. Pursuing techniques consist of asking in-depth questions to investigate a particular issue or event in the woman's life. The average length of time it took to complete the life history interviews was three to four hours for each woman. It is important to note that I have changed identifying characteristics of the women and advocates to protect their identities and have used pseudonyms for everyone in this dissertation, except where noted. In some cases I have assigned pseudonyms and in other cases the interviewees chose names specifically for use in this research.

Conducting life histories with battered women living in shelters was more precarious than I had originally imagined. First, the interviews could take three or four meetings. Some women did not always stay in the shelter long enough to complete the life histories so I missed out on some. I quickly realized that I should capture as much information as possible in my first meetings with women after they had signed the informed consent form.

The second issue centered on the fact that the women were in crisis when they arrived at the shelter. If they chose to speak with me about their abuse and their life history, I was probably the third or fourth person with whom they had shared their story. The first story-telling was when a woman called the hotline. If there was space for her, after her arrival at the shelter, she told the intake person her story again. She would then have to tell her assigned counselor the story for a third time. I often felt uncomfortable

asking women to repeat their stories to me for the purposes of research, although they volunteered. The women said telling the story over and over again was very therapeutic for them. One woman said “It’s different talking to you...you’re not managing me.” Several other women indicated that talking to me was “like therapy.”

Life history is an excellent method by which to delve into the intimate and private domains within social actors’ lives as it can capture feelings and attitudes, illuminating the events that have shaped experience (Green-Powell 1997; Bozzoli 1991). The narrative form has been considered liberating (The Personal Narratives Group 1989) offering substantive insight into the processes that create the ebbs and flows of life (Sacks 1989a). It is through life history that new dimensions in understanding experience are revealed.

However, this methodology has limitations. Shostak (1989) for example, discusses four problems with this method. First is the issue of whether or not life history can represent a group as a whole. Shostak suggests that one way of dealing with this problem is to compare the history of the teller with a broader base of material collected by others. I was able to connect the women's life histories with existing data on Black women who have experienced violence and with data on poor women who use welfare.

Second, Shostak discusses the relationship the interviewer has with the interviewee. The collection of life histories may depend on the positive or negative relationship that exists between the interviewer and interviewee.⁶ In other words, if the relationship is positive, the interviewee may be more likely to reveal substantive details

⁶ While Shostak limits her discussion to positive and negative relationships, there are a range of variants that can influence the collection of life history data. These include equal/unequal relations, gender and racial differences.

of her life. Alternatively, if the relationship is negative or superficial, less information will emerge. In either case, the shape of the life story told is influenced by the nature of the interaction. Therefore, it is important to note the relationship between the two individuals. I took the position of including my own biases and personal relationships with the women in this dissertation. What I found was that the more time I spent with each woman, gaining her trust, the more she told me about her life.

The third critique deals with the exploitative nature of collecting this type of data and who benefits from the research. This issue underscores the fact that the researcher may profit from the pain of the experiences of the interviewee with no direct benefit to the interviewee. This highlights the problem of what people get in return for sharing their lives and is the researcher culpable for doing the same. However, it must be noted that life history also contributes to our understanding of the impact of events in people's lives.

The women who chose to speak with me had experienced short- and long-term traumatic physical, emotional, and sexual assaults as children and adults. In fact, only two women had not. They sometimes cried while speaking and I would always offer to end the discussion but rarely did they want to stop. I made it clear to all I interviewed that I wanted to publish this work. It was my hope that this work might contribute to changes in social service system practices with respect to welfare reform. The women interviewed for this project did have expectations of favors. I was expected to give women things and bought food, took them out to dinner or lunch, gave them rides to places they needed to go, called landlords on their behalf, gave them clothes and sometimes put them in contact with someone who could help them. I also was expected to respond to their questions about my life, which I did. The reciprocity in our

relationships, however, was not balanced because, in the end, I had control (regardless of whether I exercised it) over how their lives would be presented to the reader. As Stacey, (1988) points out, I could not "suffer the delusion of alliance" and assume that my identity as a Black woman or a survivor of violence would equalize the relationship between them and me. Nor do I think that by merely inserting myself and discussing my relationship with them, that I diminish the inequity inherent in my position as the researcher to the women's position as "subjects."

I did make a decision to not overwhelm the reader with pages and pages of how women were victimized in their intimate relationships. I recognize that anthropologists have been criticized for omitting the presence of violence in women's lives in ethnographic descriptions. However, it is the consequence of being battered and the relationship of violence to economics, politics and policy that is the focus of this work.

The fourth critique of the life history method discussed by Shostak concerns how translating and editing the stories influence subjects' representations. It is true that not all of the women I interviewed spoke English -- two spoke Spanish and one Croatian. (I had a translator during the interviews with the Spanish-speaking women. The Croatian woman and I found a mutually intelligible way to talk about the violence in her life). I have not used their stories in this dissertation because the translations might not be accurate although observations of their interactions were not compromised and the patterns of control and regulation were just as evident among non-English speaking women.

The editing of life history interviews was done in as collaborative a fashion as possible. There were some things the women told me that had to be omitted because the

specificity of their experiences could reveal their identity. As often as possible, I tried to check the accuracy of my recording of they told me. This was accomplished by having the women review my write-up of their life history. I was not able to do this with all of the women because some had left the shelter and I lost touch with them.

A final critique not discussed by Shostak but one that nonetheless needs to be addressed, is whether or not what the women told me about their lives was true. Honestly, I have no way of knowing. To a limited degree, I was able to confirm the accuracy of some statements the women made in two ways. First, since I spent a lot of time talking with them, repetition was likely to reveal inconsistencies. Second, I was able to compare some details, such as their place of residence, age, number of children, income and even the reason why they came to the shelter, through their case files which I discuss below. Nonetheless, their earlier life histories were not verifiable. But memories, whatever they are, are the personal features of life. What one remembers need not necessarily be objectively verified. I was not able to interview women's family members or friends because they did not want to contact them out of fear their batterers might discover their location. Clemmie, whose life is discussed in the third chapter, was so afraid of contacting her family and having her batterer find out where she was that she asked me to mail her cousin a holiday card from Westchester. That way, if her batterer happened to go through her cousin's garbage or saw the envelope, he would think she was living there.

In spite of the ethical and methodological problems of life history, I agree with Shostak that the benefits of life history far outweigh the deficits. As Shostak says:

They are small compared to the goal. No more elegant tool exists to describe the human condition than the personal narrative. Ordinary people living ordinary and not-so-ordinary lives weave from their memories and experiences the meaning life has for them. These stories are complex, telling of worlds sometimes foreign to us, worlds that sometimes no longer exist. They express modes of thought and culture often different from our own, a challenge to easy understanding. Yet, these stories are also familiar. It's just this tension--the identifiable in endless transformation -- that is the currency of personal narratives, as they reveal the complexities and paradoxes of human life... What better place to begin our dialogue about human nature and the nature of human possibilities? (239).

To validate demographic, life history and institutional relationship data, I examined case record files kept at the shelter. As previously mentioned, each woman at the shelter has an individual case file. I gained permission to review their files at the beginning of the first interview. They indicated on the informed consent if their permission was granted and only one woman did not give permission. This file contains pertinent information regarding the reason women came to the shelter and copies of important documents that help them when they file for public assistance. These items include women's Social Security card, Birth Certificate, Driver's License, health insurance or Medicaid card, as well as that of any children with them at the time they come to the shelter. The files also contain signed copies of their agreements to follow the rules of the shelter, including curfews and participating in community life. The documents that were of most interest to me were the case notes. Shelter staff made notations after each meeting with a woman or each time she had an inter-agency contact (i.e., working with a housing program, mental health agency or a community-based organization). The files chronicle women's activities, appointments, and progress in meeting goals. The literature on case notes in battered women's shelters suggests that consistent charts were not always kept (Taylor and Hammond 1987). In part, this was to

reduce the possibility of those records being subpoenaed for court cases and because staff were often too overworked to make notations (Loseke 1992). However, the potential for unreliable data has been greatly reduced because New York State requires uniform data collection for reporting purposes.

I broadened the scope of my interest by exploring the role advocates play in women's lives. I interviewed advocates about the impact of welfare reform on their work and on their constituents. Consequently, I conducted unstructured interviews with a total of 19 advocates representing six different community-based organizations in Poughkeepsie. I moved around the community and interviewed the staff of Grace Smith House, Legal Services, the Community Health Workers Project, and the YWCA Battered Women's Services, among others.

Since many poor women are institutionally affiliated, the roles of officials at governmental institutions and agencies that deal specifically with various aspects of women's lives are crucial. A series of interviews were conducted with administrators and caseworkers at the Dutchess County Department of Social Services, including the Commissioner. Interviews were also conducted with staff from the Office of Section 8 Housing; a public housing administrator; personnel from the Dutchess County Private Industry Council, the Department of Labor, Chamber of Commerce and the Dutchess County Economic Development Corporation.

In all, I conducted 62 interviews; 52 were taped and 10 were reconstructed from notes. I listened to each tape and found that 11 percent ($n=6$) were not audible. Of the remaining 46 tapes, 71 percent ($n=33$) were transcribed. I used the transcribed life

histories as sources of data and incorporated field notes that chronicled conversations with the women about their lives.

Field notes that covered subjects other than a woman's life history were coded according to nine topics: housing, employment, social services, Medicaid, immigration issues, child-care, child welfare, mental health, and substance abuse. The topics with the highest frequency are the areas discussed in this dissertation. The strategies or responses that women and advocates used to address the issues mentioned above, emerged from the women's stories, interviews with advocates, and field notes.

An analytical approach employed was the use of an interpretive community. Creating an interpretive community meant I discussed what I thought I was seeing with some individuals who were part of the study. In some cases I gave them copies of draft sections that pertained to their area of specialty and/or interest. They were asked to comment on the presentation of the data. In this way, I was able to shift my own bounded conceptual thinking and validate or reject some concepts based on the interpretation of others close to the project. The interpretative community consisted of the Shelter Director, a shelter employee, a community activist, several former shelter residents, an employee from the Department of Social Services and an employee from the Office of Section 8 Housing.

Finally, I drew on archival research. I read reports and reviewed newspaper articles housed at the Adriance Memorial Library, read the *Poughkeepsie Journal* daily, and accessed the Internet to examine City planning documents and reports.

In writing this dissertation, I always started with a woman's story and wrote outward from there, building around it. This grounded method was purposeful in that I

wanted to honor and privilege women's voices, not subject them to analysis, although one does not preclude the other. It is for this reason so much text of women's lives is presented at once. I did not want to create categories out of women's lives, for that was how they experienced their involvement with social services. Therefore, to honor the wholeness of women's being, the presentation of this dissertation flows from a central point of discovery: the women themselves.

As previously stated, poor women, and Black women in particular, were not part of the debate in framing how welfare was reformed. It is my intention to present some aspects of their lives that may contribute to future debates on how welfare reform can be reformed. I do not employ Black women's voices to *illustrate points* about the controlling nature of welfare reform. Their voices are presented because I believe that they *are the point* of contemporary welfare reform. In telling the stories of Black women who were battered and on welfare, it is my hope to challenge the institutionalized practice of sanctioning women as well as to shift the stereotypical images of women on welfare. Just as important, I hope that the conditions under which women receive welfare in Dutchess County sheds light on how they, in fact, survive.

CHAPTER 1

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Some of the issues this dissertation considers are rooted in scholarship that critiqued welfare as controlling and organizing relations between men, women and the state. The state is defined here as the formal governmental system that is composed of legislative policy making and regulatory entities (see Lubiano 1992). Welfare has been theorized as a regulator of: civil disorder (Piven and Cloward 1993); labor markets in general, (Piven 1999); racialized labor markets (Quadagno 1994; Mink 1990); the family (Gordon 1994; Gordon 1990; Abramovitz 1996a); images (Collins 1990; Jewell 1993) and reproduction (Roberts 1997; 1999). In this review of welfare in the United States, I focus on its function as a mechanism to regulate women. An important quality of the welfare state is that its management of people is experienced differentially and holds a range of outcomes within the context of social difference such as race and gender. Academics have stressed the importance of race, ethnicity and class in relation to everyday life (Mohanty, Russo, and Torres 1991) and in the persistence of poverty (Kushnick and Jennings 1999). This scholarship connects with feminist theories of intersectionality (Sacks 1989b; Mullings 1994; Crenshaw 1994), which reason that it is crucial to consider how women have particular sets of experiences based on race, ethnicity and class. The functions of welfare intersect with categories of identity and simultaneously arrange dimensions of social life, which I argue, find specific articulation

in the experience of Black women vis-à-vis discrimination and unequal access to resources.

The Regulatory Functions of Welfare Policy

The modern welfare state was ushered in with the Social Security Act of 1935 under the threat of a crumbling economy and shifts in family formation. High rates of unemployment at the time led those without jobs to agitate for assistance. Mass protests took place in Colorado, Chicago and, Kansas City, among other places (Piven and Cloward 1993). There is an historical precedence that the provision of welfare regulates civil disorder resulting from unemployment. During these times the welfare state or, “relief-giving,” as it was called, was expanded to “mute civil disorder,” a tactic that has existed since the 16th century in western societies including France, Germany and England (Piven and Cloward 1993:xv). A more contemporary example of the expansion of the welfare state in response to disorder occurred at the height of the civil and welfare rights movement in the 1960s will be discussed below.

The state developed an infrastructure to “maintain families, the labor force and the general welfare of society” (Abramovitz 1996a: 215). Through the systematic redistribution of working people’s income to those who were not working, these programs filled in as a substitute wage. Its purpose was, to a limited degree, an effort to address the needs of the poor.⁷

⁷ Although poverty existed prior to 1935, the Social Security Act marked the first federal, as opposed to local response in addressing relief (see Abramovitz 1999; Piven and Cloward 1993). The federal programs that existed before the Social Security Act of 1935 created jobs under the Federal Emergency Relief

The Social Security Act established a national retirement system in the form of social security, entitling primarily male workers to social security and unemployment insurance. Upon their deaths, their wives and children were able to receive the benefits. This program has been described as “dignified entitlement” because proof or means tests were not required to secure income support since recipients had participated in the labor force. The other components of the welfare state established in 1935 were categorical programs for the elderly, the infirmed, and single mothers with children (Handler 1995; Piven and Cloward 1993; 1997). These support programs have been described as “humiliating relief” because recipients had to prove their eligibility to receive income support. Proof of eligibility was particularly humiliating for single mothers receiving Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) as they were subjected to degrading probes into their lives (Gordon 1990; Abramovitz 1996a).

Labor Market Regulation

Several scholars have astutely analyzed the regulation of labor markets through welfare (Piven and Cloward 1993; Nelson 1990). Labor markets are generally organized into three categories 1) productive labor, 2) domestic labor and 3) reproductive labor (Nelson 1990). The control of productive labor by the welfare state was (and continues to be) organized around those activities where individuals create resources or services for consumption. This form of labor was organized to meet the needs of industrial society.

Administration (FERA), Works Projects Administration (WPA), Public Works Administration (PWA), and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). (See Patterson 1994).

The political, ideological and economic interests of White men characterized labor-power relations in the early stages of the welfare state centering on their needs. The meeting of their needs was accomplished through the provision of Social Security to men in mostly White, male-dominated industries. For example, agricultural laborers, private domestic servants, local state and federal government employees, workers in non-profit, charitable, scientific, literary, and educational institutions, could not receive unemployment insurance. The end result of these exclusions was that the welfare state responded to the needs of White industrial workers. Consequently, a hierarchical order of privilege, which was both raced and gendered, constructed and maintained poverty. Most of the workers falling into the excluded categories were White women, Black women and Black men (Quadagno 1994).

Embedded in the regulation of productive labor markets was gender. The ideological interests of White men carried over into domestic labor, which sustained the household in favor of a benefit system that reified White women who were formerly attached to a husband -- the miner's widow of whom Clinton spoke. A rise in female employment before and after the depression presented a challenge to patriarchal dogma organized around men's roles as breadwinners. Working women were viewed as taking jobs from men, compromising their children's well being, and stepping outside the boundaries of acceptable gender roles (Abramovitz 1996a). To correct these transgressions, employers fired and barred women from employment.

Yet, many women required funds to care for their children in the absence of a husband. Thus, in designing the program, ADC granted benefits to their children. Funds

were provided to states from the federal government to establish programs for children who received the federal grant.⁸

Aid to Dependent Children and its subsequent programs, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and now Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), was the relevant framework through which race and gender gained particular meaning due to racialized ideas of gender roles. Patriarchal ideology and normative constructions of the family were reinforced through ADC, which supported women's domestic roles by allowing them to stay home and care for their children. However, this permission was only awarded to certain mothers. The moral excuse of engaging in domestic labor was the purview of White women who were widowed with children, lasting from the early 1900s to the mid-20th century.⁹ These women met the standards of moral fitness and worthiness because they challenged neither patriarchal institutions of the family nor the patriarchal economy.

Single parents, however, were under great suspicion because they worked, even though they *had* to work in order to provide for their children. The popular belief was if a woman worked, she decreased the possibility of marriage and the maintenance of the male-headed household. Relief was denied to certain groups of women – those separated, divorced, never married, or of color, thus they were forced to work in the paid labor market (Quadagno 1994; Handler 1995). These women, classified by their racial,

⁸ Financial aid for the mother or caretaker was added in 1950.

⁹ The first ADC program was enacted by the Illinois Fund to Parents Act in 1911. The goal was to support mothers and their families if they were fit and proper (see Leff 1983).

immigrant and/or marital status, were socially stigmatized since they did not conform to appropriate gender roles.

Deemed unworthy of assistance, they were in juxtaposition to those who represented the true cult of womanhood (read: White woman). While White mothers who were widows were regulated by maintaining the domestic sphere and restricted from engaging in productive labor through the dispensation of relief, women of color, single women and immigrant women with children were also regulated. However their regulation took place in the *absence* of the virtue accorded to White women through their *exclusion* from receiving ADC benefits. Women of color, single women, and immigrant women were forced to work in employment sectors that met the needs for cheap, pliable labor in a growing industrial society. Thus, Black women were less likely to be employed or to earn sufficient wages. They were relegated to the lowest wage earning jobs, which increased their vulnerability to poverty (Harley 1988).

The need for Black female labor distorted Black maternalism, and negated their role as homemakers. The fact that they worked was used against them in evaluating the Black family and household structure. Negative historical constructions of the Black family were the transcript for many scholars who framed the Black family as degenerate and disorganized. In his study on Southern Blacks, sociologist Dollard (1937) noted:

[The Negro woman's] economic independence puts her in a position to challenge the assumption of the strict patriarchal position by the Negro man. The family among lower-class Negroes seems, by and large to be a much less stable unit than in the White group, to exercise less coercive control over children, and to liberate them earlier for productive activity (414).

The "depraved condition" of the Black family was blamed on Black women. In trying to understand the problems in the Black community, sociologist E. Franklin Frazier (1939) explained that the Black family and the transmission of African kinship and family relations had been destroyed by slavery. Among his findings was the lack of stability among Blacks, in part due to the matriarchal household structure. The problem with the Black family and its compromised viability was blamed on the female head of household structure, which displaced male dominance. The currency of these claims, along with the need for Black labor, were the central reasons Black women were restricted from getting aid in the 1900s. One example of the impact of exclusion in racial terms was the uneven allocation of aid. In 1935 only 15 percent of Black family heads were certified to receive public relief even though nearly 50 percent of African-Americans were unemployed (Jewell 1993:106; see also Skocpol 1988.) The demonization of the Black family continued. Nearly thirty years after Dollard's and Frazier's arguments, Moynihan (1965) reported that the dominance of Black women in the family was contrary to the normative patriarchal family. He hypothesized that this matriarchal structure led to poverty, welfare and a host of social ills.

Revisionist claims regarding the vitality of the Black family and the positive attributes of Black women's maternalism followed the civil rights movement. The pathology of the Black family was eloquently challenged in the work of, for example, historian Herbert Gutman (1976). He drew upon census data, birth records, and marriage applications to discern the structure of the Black family during slavery. Gutman found that the Black family was indeed based on a nuclear model and that the Black family had

not been destroyed. The strength of the Black family has been illustrated by other scholars as well (see for example Ladner 1971; Mullings 1986; Hill 1999).

Beginning in the 1960s there were a series of social and economic upheavals that specifically affected Blacks (Amott 1990), increasing their vulnerability to poverty. Black migration from the South to the North resulted in concentrations of Blacks in urban areas (Patterson 1994; Jones 1992). Many Blacks believed they would be able to find work but, in fact, did not. Unrest in urban Black communities that had simmered in previous decades came to a boil in urban environments with subsequent demands for civil rights.¹⁰ As Handler (1995) notes, “along with civil rights there was a legal rights revolution. The federal courts and welfare rights activists forced open the ADC gates” (28) and the Democratic Party worked to placate urban Blacks as they tried to secure the Black vote. In fact Skocpol (1988) argues that the War on Poverty in the 1960s, which included increased access to public assistance, was the result of Black demands on the Democratic Party as more Blacks migrated to urban areas. This serves as another example of the use of welfare to regulate discontent.

"The Color of Welfare"

The rapid rise in the number of Black families headed by females (Brewer 1988) combined with Black women's participation in the welfare rights movement, had the

¹⁰ For a detailed analysis of the role of the Civil Rights Movement in making the welfare state more responsive to Blacks, see Quadagno 1994.

¹¹ The title of this section is taken from Quadagno 1994.

effect of enabling women to claim their right to income support (Piven and Cloward 1979; West 1981). Through the National Welfare Rights Organization, women demanded that the state ease restrictions on eligibility rules (Abramovitz 1996b). In the 1950s and '60s, economic need, the success of grassroots organization and the civil rights movement resulted in the relaxation of ADC's rigid eligibility rules altering the historical unresponsiveness to Black women.

Consequently, the number of Black women receiving aid expanded. The distinguishing features that had made women deserving of assistance due to White privilege blurred as Black women drew upon income maintenance to deal with the poverty in their lives. Welfare utilization by Black women created a crisis (Walters 1999) that resulted in undermining Black women's entitlement to assistance through the perpetuation (intentional or not) of negative images. As Black women came to be disproportionately represented on the ADC rolls, the proliferation of unfavorable images worked to de-legitimize them as recipients. The popular construction of Black women on welfare was a raced sexual-political image¹² and cemented a negative association between Black women and welfare. Images and stereotypes contributed to the content of ideology. As Mullings (1994) states:

How ideologies -- used here in the sense of production of meanings -- are generated, maintained, and deployed is intimately related to the distribution of power. Dominant ideologies often justify, support and rationalize the interests of those in power; they tell a story about why things are the way they are, setting out a framework by which hierarchy is explained and mediating contradictions among classes, between beliefs and experiences (266).

¹² This is the term I use to describe the political implications of Black women on welfare at the intersection of race and gender.

The terminology most analogous to Black women who use welfare included then, as they do now, lazy, single parents, dependent, inner city, crime, and culture of poverty, among others. The point I am making reiterates my discussion in the introduction -- that welfare is almost unquestionably associated with Black women and the terms used reference racial ideology of their welfare utilization. Stereotyping imposed stringent rules on Black and single mothers to make them ineligible. These included "suitable home," "man in the house," and "substitute father" rules. These rules frequently rendered Black women unable to access assistance (Bell 1965).

I suggest that under the current welfare system, there are sets of rules that jeopardize women's ability to access services. The sanctions and mandates that organize women's lives must be understood within the context of the historically constructed controls that Black women encounter. The idea of Black women's independence -- independence from violence and independence to make choices based on women's value systems -- is challenged through the creation of dependency by restricting access to resources.

Whereas ADC was once only for single parent families and payments were made only for children, it was transformed into a new program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). This program provided income maintenance to help the entire family. The welfare rolls grew and a series of programs to entice people to work were developed. One was the Work Incentive Program of 1967 which permitted clients to keep the first \$30 in monthly earnings, plus one-third of the remaining earnings.¹³

¹³ This was known as the "thirty and a third" rule.

The increasing numbers of Black-single-mother recipients raised the ire of conservatives. The historical regulation of the Black family took on a new twist, in part, based on Moynihan's report (1965) blaming single mothers for poverty. Further, the 1960s were replete with riots and protests. According to Quadagno (1994), the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders determined that Black male unemployment contributed to problems in urban areas. The logic was that Black male unemployment forced Black women to work, which was an enigma for the Black family structure. Black families bore the burden of responsibility for social ills, including riots. It was believed that children growing up under the condition of female headed households were "likely participants in civil disorder" (Quadagno 1994:125). The solution to the urban turmoil caused by Black women's working was the implementation of incentives to lure "Black males to become family breadwinners and for Black women to stay home with their children" (Quadagno 1994:125). The assistance came in the form of the Family Assistance Program (FAP), proposed by President Nixon, a work incentive program to for men so that Black women could interrupt their children's tendency to be delinquent. In other words, FAP was expected to help stifle rioting, which would also placate the public, and build a Republican base of supporters. The plan, however, died in the Senate in 1972.

From that point on, work-related programs became the thrust of policy related to welfare, which was ironic because poverty among Blacks worsened during the same time period -- between the 1970s and the 1980s -- Black unemployment rates soared. According to Quadagno, during this time period Black unemployment was at 13.6 percent, the percent of children born into a single parent family was 62.6 percent and

inner cities were in decline. Conservatives maintained that these conditions were caused by the welfare state. Beginning in the 1980s, it became politically expedient to erase dependency (Solinger 1999). Conservatives embraced scholarly arguments, which suggested that crime, unemployment and single parenthood were *caused* by welfare use (Gilder 1981) as opposed to structural deficits. Mead (1986b), for example, argued that the welfare system creates dependency because recipients are able to collect benefits without any responsibility to “give back.” These views constituted an attack on government intervention as a strategy for addressing poverty. The assumption was, if programs like AFDC did not exist, then poor people would work and would also be able to sustain the normative two-parent family. Conservatives argued that welfare encouraged Black women to avoid marriage and bear more children in order to receive increased benefits (Gilder 1987).

Reproduction and Welfare

Growing concern about women giving birth out of wedlock gave way to yet another regulatory component of welfare -- that of reproductive choice. There is a long history of asserting control over women's reproductive capacities in general (Petchesky 1995) and, more specifically, the reproductive capacity of women of color (see for example, Rodrique 1990; Lopez 1987). Welfare reform policy is a more recent instrument of that control.

In Dorothy Roberts' *Killing the Black Body* (1997), she makes the point that one goal of welfare is to reduce the number of children born to women receiving public

assistance. Policies aimed at this goal have taken a number of forms including the use of the Family Cap Law, a birth-detering provision. As Roberts (1997) explains:

Child exclusion more accurately describes the denial of benefits for certain children born to welfare families. Ordinarily, the state determines a standard of family need according to the number of family members, sources of income and other factors. Under the family cap, a family's standard of need is not adjusted upward to accommodate the new child. These laws are premised on the assumption that the promise of benefits entices women to have additional children (210).

New Jersey was the first state to institute the family cap in 1992. The law provided no exceptions, including births that result from rape, incest, failed contraception, or multiple births. Incremental increases in benefits were eliminated. For example, with the birth of a fourth child, a family of three receiving AFDC was forced to survive on a benefit level calculated for a family of three.

Another example of reproductive regulation through welfare is to market birth control incentives, specifically Norplant. Norplant is a synthetic hormone released in low dosages, which suppresses ovulation and prevents pregnancy for up to five years. The FDA approval of Norplant in 1990 was immediately linked to its use of the control of the "underclass," a pejorative term frequently associated with poor Blacks (Kimmelman 1990 cited in Roberts 1997).

Restrictions on Black women's reproductive capacity have been connected to welfare primarily because although Black women comprise six percent of the U.S. population, they represent one-third of AFDC recipients. Most of the Black welfare recipients live in inner cities which, is where Norplant has been dispensed (Roberts 1997). The campaigns to distribute Norplant have targeted teens living in Baltimore, Los Angeles and Chicago. Coercive strategies have been used to recruit Norplant users. For

example there was the case of the Tennessee law in 1993 mandating that notification of free Norplant implants be sent to all public assistance recipients. Politicians in other states such as Kansas, Connecticut, Louisiana, Arizona, Colorado, Ohio, Florida and Washington have offered financial incentives to welfare recipients if they agree to use Norplant. The financial incentive that has been introduced as legislation would have provided welfare recipients a one-time payment of \$500 to use Norplant with a \$50 bonus each year the Norplant stayed in place. The most coercive form of reproductive regulation through welfare with regard to Norplant were the bills introduced in the states of Maryland, Mississippi and South Carolina which would require that all recipients of welfare be mandated to get Norplant inserted as a condition of welfare benefits. Clearly, welfare policy has evolved in a way that is closely connected to representations of the Black family. The representations have contributed to a desire to control Black women's reproduction. Welfare policy, then, has evolved in a way that is closely connected to representations of the Black family and is integrally connected to controlling Black women's reproduction.

The regulatory functions of welfare policy incorporate several aspects of social life: the management of civil disorder, productive labor, domestic labor, family formation, images and reproduction. Embedded in each we find gender- and race-specific forms of domination. The policies inform practices that maintain hierarchical arrangements and continue to support white privilege. The question is: How are the historically constituted regulatory practices of welfare articulated within the context of contemporary welfare reform policy?

Welfare Reform

On August 22, 1996, President William Jefferson Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). The Act replaced the AFDC program that has existed since the 1960s for women and children and is now known as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). The Act also replaced Home Relief for Single Adults, Jobs Opportunities and Basic Skill Training Program (JOBS), and emergency assistance with the Safety Net Program, a state funded program.

President Clinton did not initiate the changes in welfare. Rather, he completed a process of ideological fusion between decreased liberal support of the welfare state and conservative sentiment regarding the moral impropriety of government assistance. Prior to the 1980s liberals generally considered welfare to be an entitlement, and upheld the right of AFDC mothers not to work, although typically they did work (Handler 1995). Conservatives have considered AFDC a problem since 1967. AFDC has been viewed as a crisis by successive presidents and Congress. Each administration has tried to pass or, has successfully passed, legislation that required and prodded recipients to work through incentive programs. The enactment of the Work Incentive Program (WIN) in 1967 illustrates the point. The WIN program made receipt of welfare contingent upon work and adult participants and children over age 16 had to be employed to ensure assistance. If a recipient did not participate, her grant was reduced. The program was not successful, as it was largely symbolic. In 1971 Congress enacted WIN II in which mothers with children over age six had to participate in employment and direct job placement was emphasized over education and training.

Following the WIN program was the Family Support Act of 1988 (FSA) which had the support of liberals and focused on providing education and training to move people from AFDC to work by guaranteeing child-care and work-search related assistance. JOBS, a program of FSA, promoted job search and job readiness activities. It was the Family Support Act that signaled the first shift in liberals' previous acknowledgment that women on welfare did not have to work. This ideological shift emerged alongside women's increased participation in the paid labor force, which proved that if non-welfare women with children could work, women on welfare could also work. The centerpiece of the 1996 welfare reform was the mandate that recipients work as a way to reduce dependency. However, stable jobs were not available to many seeking them.

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families is a block grant from the federal government, which provides states with an annual Family Assistance Grant. Prior to 1996, every dollar that a state appropriated for AFDC was matched by four dollars from the federal government. Now, funding is provided in the form of block grant and the Family Assistance Grant may only be used to assist households with children or pregnant women. There is a five-year lifetime limit on the receipt of federal funds for all individuals, although states may determine a limit prior to five years. The best known component of the new program is the requirement that recipients meet increasing work participation rates and all able-bodied welfare recipients must work full time after two years of receiving aid. In addition to work requirements, other aspects of the law include denial of TANF funding to pregnant teens under the age of 18 and forcing women with

young children to go to work or be engaged in work-related activities -- unless their children are under the age of six and the parent or guardian cannot find child-care.

States were given considerable discretion in designing their work programs and a great deal of flexibility to determine the mix of services they would provide. However, they are subject to sanctions and performance awards. In other words, states must move recipients into jobs or risk having their block grants reduced. Alternatively, if they do well in moving clients to work, they may share in a \$1 billion set aside¹⁴ as a bonus for their effort. In New York, work and immediate attachment to work-related activities are the tenets of the state's new program. Educational and training programs are only made available to clients to the extent that they can be counted toward meeting the participation rates of work-related activities. In 1997, 25 percent of all families receiving TANF had to participate in the mandated activities. Welfare reform policy mandates that participation rate percentages increase incrementally so that by 2002, 50 percent of the states' families must be engaged in work-related activities. A recipient must be involved in a work experience program twenty to thirty five hours per week within two months of initial receipt of aid. Mothers with infants as young as three months are required to work outside the home unless they cannot find child-care.

New York State Governor George Pataki initially wanted to institute even more draconian measures in welfare reform policy including allowing an entire family to be cut from assistance rather than just withholding the mother's portion if she did not comply with the work regulation. He appealed to conservatives with his proposal that

¹⁴ Set aside is the amount of money designated for performance awards between fiscal years 1999 and 2003.

the message to the public be "...that welfare is temporary and...a bridge to self-sufficiency" (Liebschutz 2000:58). Through PRWORA, states may set up residency periods for women moving from another state. New residents of New York State receive reduced benefits for 12 months, the higher of 50 percent of New York's benefit level or the benefit level received in their former state. However, New York State is bound by Article XVII of the New York State Constitution. The Article reads: "The aid, care and support of the needy are public concerns and shall be provided by the state and by such of its subdivisions, and in such manner and by such means, as the legislature may from time to time determine" (Lurie 1998).¹⁵ This means New York State must simultaneously follow the guidelines of reducing TANF caseloads and maintain aid to the needy. Since New York State's constitution prohibits termination of aid, Governor Pataki and the New York Legislature agreed that New York should have a time limit beyond which punitive action against recipients is taken. Thus, the New York State welfare law provides for a switch from cash aid to non-cash aid when time limits have been reached. For example, a county's Department of Social Services may pay rent directly to a landlord with remaining benefits to be accessed through the use of an electronic benefit card system which can be used to purchase goods and services. Essentially, welfare reform has resulted in the elimination of grants.

Critics have argued against welfare reform on several levels stating that its punitive measures are primarily directed at women and have "disabled almost every aspect of women's citizenship" (Mink 1999:6). Others charge that welfare reform

¹⁵ Article XVII was made a constitutional amendment made in 1938 during the Depression.

was built around a growing process of pathologizing women (Solinger 1999). For example, Mead describes welfare recipients as "semi-socialized." He says, "They are remarkably unresponsive to economic incentives...[the purpose of policy is] not to expand the freedom of...recipients. It is, in fact, to *constrict their freedom* [emphasis mine] in necessary ways" (Mead 1986b, cited in Solinger 1999).

As women's participation in wage labor increased, dependency, which at one point was assumed to be normative, was deemed inconsistent with ideas of self-sufficiency. It has been noted that mandatory work requirements imply that recipients do not work when, in fact, they do and always have (Handler 1995). The mandated work is viewed as a form of slavery since some of the work in which participants engage is not paid labor, but rather required, in order to receive their benefits (Boris 1999; Mink 1998). Welfare reform is also viewed as narrowing recipients' citizenship. While funds are shifted to individual states for the implementation of TANF, community residents and welfare recipients are neither invited nor required to participate in program design (Naples 1999). Naples also observes that at the same time PRWORA was passed, citizens' rights were diluted. To cite an example, she states that legal service lawyers cannot file class action suits on behalf of welfare recipients, prisoners or migrant laborers, as of 1997. Mink (1998) discusses the narrowing of citizenship through welfare reform because it reduces welfare as a social right, which she argues it should be in the first place. Welfare, she states: "Cannot be gender-neutral, for it should assign economic value to a role mostly performed by women, care-giving" (Mink 1998:19). She argues we should re-conceive welfare as the income owed to persons who work inside the home caring for, nurturing and protecting children. Kittay (1999) argues that welfare reform's focus on work bases

citizenship on a male model of an independent wage earner and that it "makes a mockery of feminist demands for fulfilling and well-paying, non-familial labor. To be compelled to leave your child in a stranger's care or with no care at all and to accept whatever work is offered is another form of subordination, not liberation" (Kittay 1999:191).

The dependence that welfare reform is so desperate to correct belies a truth about independence. To be dependent, as Solinger states, "is the absence of the capacity to make sensible choices" (Solinger 1999:8). Yet women do make sensible choices but they do so within limited options. The idea of dependency also distorts notions of what it means to be independent and self-sufficient, that one has the resources to maintain oneself and no other supports are necessary. Neither is achievable in the perfect sense because the circumstance of poverty means that one does not have access to resources. Circumventing victimization of violence most certainly requires supports. Further, Black women's ability to achieve independence has been structured within the parameters of systems structured to maintain dependence. Their use of welfare to create separate households can be seen as an act of independence in circumstances where many of the choices available to women are bad ones. The women in this study demonstrate this point. Women need social and economic supports in the face of violence, poverty, and economic changes in the city in which the women in this study live. They should have support because of vulnerable employment, inappropriate training, inaccessible child-care and unaffordable housing options. Further, work alone as a requisite for self-sufficiency does not consider the intersection of poverty and violence.

Poverty and Violence: The Connection to Welfare Reform

Violence against women in the United States is an epidemic. Between 1992 and 1996, approximately 8 out of every 1,000 women age 12 or older experienced victimization (Greenfield, et. al. 1998). For the most part, however, ethnographers have not incorporated such taboo subjects as violence into their analyses when examining poverty. Bourgois (1995) suggests two reasons for the absence of the topics of intimate violence in ethnography. The first is the functionalist tendency of anthropology, which imposes order on its subjects. This, he argues, translates into a form of self-censorship that does not allow ethnographers to expose sensitive issues that defy order. The second is the methodological consideration of participant-observation and the potential danger inherent in witnessing and reporting on aggression.

The experience of violence against women has been situated within the context of poverty by a limited number of anthropologists since the 1930s who have contributed to our knowledge of the relationship between the two. For example, Powdermaker (1939) described the presence of intimate violence in the lives of poor Blacks in the south and the irony of women not using court systems because of racism in the criminal justice systems that they felt excessively punished men. Other anthropologists have described incidents of Black male violence against women and the role of poverty and male stress as factors that precipitate violence against women. Drake and Cayton (1945) found this to be the case in their research in Bronzeville, as did Leibow (1967) whose research on Black men in Washington, D.C. revealed similar reasons for the abuse of women. Yet violence and poverty raise concerns not necessarily about causation, but because leaving

abusive situations are often hampered by economic deprivation (Kenney and Brown 1996; Martin 1976; Okun 1986).

Researchers have made connections between poverty and violence having concluded that large numbers of women on welfare report physical abuse. For example, in the state of Washington, one report found that 60 percent of the women on assistance were abused (Washington State Institute for Public Policy 1993). Curcio (1997) found 39.7 percent of women in a welfare-to-work training program in Passaic County, New Jersey, were abused and they stated their partners tried to prevent them from obtaining training. In Worcester, Massachusetts, a five-year study of homeless and poorly housed mothers, the majority of whom were on AFDC, found that 32 percent of the women were currently in battering relationships (Bassuk, et al. 1996). In New York City, a survey of 500 female clients involved with preventive service child welfare agencies, found that approximately 49 percent of the clients reported violence in their intimate relationships (Mayor's Commission to Combat Family Violence n.d.). Interestingly, few of these studies examine race. Race constitutes an important part of this study because Black women report violence to a greater degree than other women (United States Department of Justice 1998), are more vulnerable to control by the state, and make up the largest percentage of women on welfare. These issues will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three. It is crucial to state however, that the relationship between violence and poverty is not only a Black issue.

In the first part of my thesis, I examine the use of welfare by battered Black women as a safety net from violence. The analysis does not claim causality, but rather draws from observations about how income support can help women who are survivors

of violence from the perspective of the women. I should clearly state that violence may not be a *main reason* that women use welfare but is one of many and one that is important based on the findings discussed above. Some scholars suggest that the connection between poverty and violence raises concerns about how poverty is caused, exacerbated or prolonged by abusive relationships (Raphael and Tolman 1997; Davis 1999).

Changes in welfare were met with a renewed focus on the needs of battered women because welfare, it was posited, served as a mediating factor that *helps* women. Welfare serves as an important economic support for battered women since some women are financially dependent upon their batterers (Davis 1999) or, as I found, financially abused by their batterers, i.e., batterers take women's money or food stamps. The point being emphasized is that women's utilization of welfare is a strategy used to extricate themselves from the violence in their lives and form new households.

Welfare reform has been criticized because of its impact on women who have experienced violence (see for example Raphael 1999; Brandwein 1999; Kurz 1999; Polakow 1999a). The hardships of violence would prevent women from complying with their state's work requirements. The strict time limits on assistance may push families deeper into poverty because women may not be able to comply with workfare requirements or gain employment in five years. Consequently, women would lose their welfare benefits, forcing them to stay with their abusers. Male violence undermines women's ability to work (Pagelow 1981). Abusers sabotage women's attempts to work and *leave* welfare. Further, the long-term effects of abuse may create a *continuing need for welfare*; welfare child support reporting requirements can *add to the risk of abuse*; prior child sexual abuse in the lives of some women and their children may lead to need

for welfare; and current child abuse may lead to need for welfare. These concerns alerted critics to challenge welfare reform policy to make it flexible and more responsive to the circumstances of battered women (Davis 1999; Kurz 1999). Flexibility in the policies would help women as they disengage or try to separate from violent situations. Some battered women who leave abusers must have access to financial resources or face acute poverty. Flexible policy would reduce financial constraints and barriers to recreating households.

As the threat of welfare reform took shape, the perspectives about the relationship between the two gendered issues of violence and poverty solidified. Support came from Senators Paul Wellstone (Democrat, Minnesota) and Patti Murray (Democrat, Washington). Together they sponsored the Family Violence Amendment to the Federal Personal Responsibility Act. The Family Violence Option (FVO [Sec. 402(a) (7)]), permits states to: 1) screen for domestic violence both for candidates applying for assistance and for those being dropped from assistance programs; 2) refer victims of domestic violence to counseling; and 3) make a determination whether certain welfare requirements should be waived for abused women, such as time limits, having to apply for child support and work requirements that would unfairly penalize women for mandates they may not be able to meet while in or leaving an abusive relationship (Kurz 1999:143). As a result, domestic violence liaisons were hired to work in or with Departments of Social Services.

My criticism of the Family Violence Option is that race is not addressed. For example, a collaborative study by the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund, The Legal Aid Society, Civil Division, the Urban Justice Center and the Women, Welfare and

Abuse Task Force (Hearn 2000) sought to determine if welfare applicants in New York City were being screened for domestic violence. The research found that clients or potential clients were not informed about services available for domestic violence victims. The findings also showed that of those who took the survey, most welfare applicants and recipients had not received the domestic violence screening form. Fifty-eight percent of the participants reported that they were not referred to a liaison. Eighty-eight percent were not told about the Family Violence Option waivers when they first applied for assistance. While the report represents an important discussion of the FVO, it fails to offer an analysis of the findings based on race and ethnicity to determine if there are any differences in women's experiences. A literature search on the subject of "the option," as it is also known, found no analyses of its implementation in relation to Black women and the potential for racially disparate exemptions. I found disparities do exist and may be due to institutionalized forms of racism, which operate subtly.

Historically Black women have rarely been viewed as victims of violence because they were said to lack virtue, an argument made by James (1996), and Ammons (1995). This neglect has led to ineffective responses to Black women (and other women of color) as victims of violence in personal, informal, and formal help sources including social services (Hawkins 1987; Asbury 1987; Richie 1996). To take one example, Barbee (n.d.) describes her experience of being attacked by a Black man in a public venue and having passersby ignore her calls for help. She had the opportunity to ask one woman why she ignored her pleas for assistance and the woman replied she thought they were together. Barbee's analysis of this response is that there is something inherently acceptable and normal about Black violence. Black women who experience violence are bound by

constraints of unworthiness in relation to victim services. The question of women's limited access to resources if they are battered, Black and on welfare become more complicated because their status as victims of violence does not necessarily summon up the sympathy to ensure their protection or use of services. The negativity that shrouds Black women as victims of poverty is similar to that which reduces their credibility as victims of violence.

The data from this research suggest that Black women are less likely to receive information about the Family Violence Option, which is supposed to be universally available. It is very possible that under-notification of the option may certainly undermine self-sufficiency. For example, without the exemption, women are mandated to work. But current and former male partners have been known to sabotage partners' efforts including but not limited to harassing women at work and withholding child-care.

Strategies of Survival

Identifying dimensions of self-sufficiency and their connection to welfare reform in the lives of Black battered women shows how Black women are regulated. Although this is important, alongside an exploration of regulation, one must also consider the actions that women take to negotiate control. Black feminist theory (Collins 1990) argues that Black women's oppressions must be contextualized by Black women's resistances and resilience. The same may be said of Latina, Native American and Asian Pacific Islander women. The subtleties and power of regulation can and have been dislodged through women's organizing strategies (Amott and Matthaei 1991); political activism

(Nicola-McLaughlin and Chandler 1988); and the use of social networks (Stack and Burton 1994).

This dissertation illustrates the strategies women use to ensure their survival due to restricted access to public assistance, regulation and decreased accessibility to jobs and housing, all of which can interfere with their ability to remain apart from their batterers. Black women in this study were engaged in practices used to overcome lack or anticipated lack of material resources. The women viewed their practices as sustainability plans.

In describing assaults on the viability of the Black working class from the 1800s through the 1990s, Kelley (1996) notes that efforts to minimize or circumvent Blacks' desire to succeed are resisted. As I suggest in Chapter Seven, the same is true of Black battered women. They resist restrictions place on them based on their own ideas of what their lives should be like. In the face of limitations resulting from welfare reform, women develop mechanisms that enable them to become independent.

One illuminating study of the subject of poor Black women's survival strategies was Stack's (1974) work on the role of kin networks. Similarly, Edin and Lein (1997) examine a range of survival mechanisms that unskilled and semi-skilled mothers incorporate into their everyday lives. They describe the use of personal networks, side jobs and institutional networks to access material resources. Women's personal networks, which include family, friends and male partners are used for cash and in-kind services. Other strategies such as side jobs included reported work, unreported work and illegal work. Women also rely on institutional networks such as public and private agencies. Seccombe (1999) identified the use of formal and informal networks among women using

welfare and, like Edin and Lein and Stack, found that networks smooth income and resource flows. Battered women frequently draw on similar networks to address violence in their lives (Bowker 1984; Hoff 1990).

The data show that Black women are engaged in survival strategies that have been discussed by other researchers, but also reveal that women engage in additional practices such as "depending on the kindness of strangers" and employing speech acts in exchange for some resources such as housing and medical benefits. Women's ability to deal with economic and social uncertainty was also facilitated by advocates. I focus on advocates' work outside of the scope of their jobs and the ways in which they provide assistance to women.

CHAPTER 2

THE SETTING: GRACE SMITH HOUSE SHELTER FOR BATTERED WOMEN IN POUGHKEEPSIE, NEW YORK

Introduction

In some ways this is a multi-sited ethnography. It begins at the Grace Smith House Shelter for battered women and almost seamlessly moves to the City of Poughkeepsie in Dutchess County, New York, and then to the Dutchess County Department of Social Services. I spent as much time in the shelter as I did in the City and at Social Services. The connection between these sites was brought about because the women in this study, with the exception of four -- one who moved out of state and the others who moved to another county or other areas in Dutchess -- lived in the shelter, moved to the City and drew upon the resources of DCDSS to assist them. These various locations require context as they were the relevant spheres of women lives, sometimes simultaneously. For example, there is a time limit for staying in the shelter. As a result, women are immediately thrust into navigating the city if for no other reason than because the services they and/or their children can receive are there. If they are not already connected to Social Services, attempts are made to immediately connect women to the agency. The exception is when women pay for their own stay at the shelter because they have an income and/or refuse to go to DCDSS. In other words, within 24 to 48 hours of arriving at the Grace Smith House, women are literally living at the intersection of a shelter, the city and Social Services.

What follows is an ethnographic description of both the shelter and the city in which it is located. This discussion draws upon empirical data. The detailed description of the shelter, the county of Dutchess and the City of Poughkeepsie are provided in an effort to connect the reader with the community over time and space. In this section, I provide an historical overview of shelters in the United States and, more specifically, discuss Grace Smith House for battered women. This is followed by a portrayal of Poughkeepsie where going to Social Services, finding employment, accessing child-care and obtaining housing take on particular meaning based on the political economy of the City at the time of this research.

Oh Sister Shelter Me

Prior to the 1970s, the United States had no governmental policy to address the housing, welfare and employment needs of battered women (Dobash and Dobash 1992). Until that time, women found shelter from violence in a variety of places, some with walls and some without. In the history of the United States, poor women as well as those with means have hidden in other people's homes, crawl spaces, and in other states (Davis 1998).

The battered women's movement grew out of the efforts of local groups, which coalesced into a social movement in the 1970s. Initially the battered women's movement was composed of White women who struggled against the history of patriarchal ideology that rarely questioned the right of a man to beat his wife. Members of the movement exposed the severity of violence against women, challenging the invisibility of woman

abuse. Schechter (1982) contends that there are structural bases of male dominance and that violence against women results from sex/gender relationships rooted in a capitalist economy and the privatized nuclear family, the same origins that many use to critique the welfare state. One strategy of the movement as it attempted to increase public awareness of domestic violence was to position battering as a social problem (Kanuha 1996; Loseke 1992). The issue was sufficiently politicized that municipalities and localities received funding to address the particular needs of battered women and their children (Fraser 1990). This was the context in which services for battered women were developed, including shelters and safe houses. Individually and collectively, women found ways to protect other women, in some instances transforming their homes into safe spaces, buying houses and renting apartments for battered women and their children to alleviate homelessness and maximize protection. The strategies developed to address domestic violence encompass four broad approaches: community organizing and education; advocacy; law enforcement and court systems, and support services including safe homes and shelters. By 1982 there were legislative efforts to protect women and shelters in every state in the country and by 1990 there were 1,500 shelters for battered women in the United States.

A hard-won battle by the anti-violence movement was the passage of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) in 1994. VAWA allocated \$1,620,000,000 in funding, for all states from 1995 to 2000. Grants were used to remedy the systemic barriers that survivors of violence face. The strategy to reduce barriers included offering education and training for judges in State and Federal courts, conducting research, and increasing

funding to battered women's shelters (New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence 1997).

Shelters have two primary goals. The first is to offer a secure escape from violence and the second is to serve as a "stepping stone to independence" (Loseke 1992:32). Shelter staff provides referrals, individual and group support, and advocacy to help women negotiate bureaucracies and help them recreate their lives. Just as important, shelters offer an alternative reference group that validates and connects survivors with others who experience similar victimization (O'Brien 1994). Since the needs of battered women go beyond safety, shelter staff offers assistance in accessing housing, identifying mechanisms to alleviate poverty, securing legal protections and advocating for battered women's rights. Assistance in these areas facilitates women's ability to leave abusive relationships and helps them to start over. Historically, women's experiences with agencies dealing with human services have been humiliating (Martin 1976). Feminist researchers found that some caseworkers at welfare agencies do not support battered women. There is a disparity between women's assessments of their abuse and the social service worker's interpretation that the problem is not that serious. They would advise women to return home and wait for things to settle down (Dobash and Dobash 1979). Thus, shelters offered more than safe space, they are an alternative to the offensiveness of traditional human services (Hoff 1990).

The utilization of welfare to assist women extricate themselves from violence was another outcome of the battered women's movement.¹⁶ Beginning in 1978, New York

¹⁶ There are scholars who argue that the politics of highlighting the particular experiences of "special interest groups" (such as those who have been raped or battered), has led to social inequity. The public representation of "special interest groups" by advocates, they suggest, has resulted in uneven distribution of

began funding domestic violence shelters. At that time, New York was in the midst of a fiscal crisis and on the brink of bankruptcy. With no funding available to erect housing for battered women, the New York City Council decided that funding domestic violence shelters could be paid for in the same way as homeless shelters: by using funds that people receive from social services. A reimbursement scheme was developed to direct money, which would ordinarily be made as payment to the client or as direct payment to a landlord, to the shelter based on a per-diem rate. The funding scheme in New York was, and continues to be, unique in the United States. Shelters in almost every other state receive funding through block grants, not through reimbursements. The money comes from the New York State Department of Social Services, which administers payment for housing and cash benefits. As a direct funding agency they have implemented a series of guidelines that make the reimbursement contingent on rules and regulations developed by the Department. For instance, women are not permitted to stay out overnight. The rationale is that, since the Department of Social Services pays for a woman's stay at the shelter, if she is not there by midnight, she has not stayed overnight and technically the shelter can not claim payment.

Regulations such as this can be trying for women. When I conducted exploratory research in 1997-98, I visited several shelters in the State of New York. At one shelter in Kings County, a resident told me that the curfew rule conflicted with a very serious situation in which she was involved. This young woman was the mother of three children. The two oldest children had the same father, who was not her batterer. He

resources, such as welfare (see for example Gilbert 1995). This perspective minimizes the importance of violence against women as a serious social problem.

lived in another state and was dying of cancer. Upon entering the shelter, she had been informed about the rule regarding overnights but chose to ignore it because the children's father wanted to see them. There was no way she could make it from New York to Southern Jersey and back again before the curfew. She decided to break curfew and was subsequently asked to leave the shelter.

Although the battered women's movement has been successful in raising the public awareness of violence against women as a social problem and as contributing to the development of support services and the shelter system, the movement has not been without criticism. First, shelters have been criticized for replicating the hierarchical power dynamics inherent in patriarchy with clear divisions between staff and clients. Professionalization of staff has contributed to this dilemma as many shelters hire staff with degrees in social work. Formerly battered women with experience are less frequently employed or have non-managerial positions. The use of professional staff rather than lay people implied that women required a therapeutic environment. Thus, staff stratification becomes evident as distinctions are made between non-professionals and professionals who were perceived as most capable of providing services to clients.

A second criticism of the shelter movement concerned the delivery of services to women of color because they lacked cultural competence (Richie 1996; Davis 1999). Women of color advocates have confronted service providers for not being sensitive to the particular needs of women of color, and victim service providers have had to admit that, women of color under-utilize services due to lack of cultural sensitivity on the part of staff. It has been noted that the majority of women in general did not seek assistance from social services for fear of being badly judged (Dobash and Dobash 1979).

Research has shown that African-American women are less likely to use shelter services than White women due to unequal treatment (Donnelly, Cook and Wilson 1996) and staff's lack of cultural competence (Lynch 1996; Hankins-Jarrett 1998). Some activists contend that shelters employ too few staff of color. Other criticisms include shelters' insistence that women not contact family members. They argued that rules demanding secrecy and isolation were counterintuitive for women with very strong community ties who did not want to be isolated from their social networks. An African-American woman, Lynn Paulson, who was an activist in the battered women's movement and now employed with the New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence, shared her thoughts on shelters in relation to the experience of Black women:

I was a member of the Women of Color Task Force of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence in the 1980's. We wanted to create a pool of women of color in positions of power and authority in local communities. But there was racism within the battered women's movement and a lot of women were excluded from the work. The clientele at many shelters were women of color, but the racial make up of the clientele was not represented in the staffing. The programs had been developed out of middle class white values, and not relative to women of color and poor women.

For example, there was little understanding of culturally different parenting skills. So Black women were chastised for how they raised their children; maybe they spanked them. Also, there were no domestic violence programs in communities of color. This meant Black women had to step outside their community to survive, as did Asian and Hispanic women. There were rules about who could visit and who could not. For Black women it was difficult to be completely secretive to their kin and ministers. Also the shelter staff did not have knowledge or information about where Black women could get food and hair products. All of these things made relocation for Black women difficult.¹⁷

¹⁷ This quote is from a telephone interview on 5/28/97 with Lynn Paulson, the Director of Community Coordination at a New York State Office that deals with domestic violence.

Irrespective of the critics, the need for shelters continues. Over 1.5 million women are victimized annually either raped or experience physical assault by an intimate partner (Tjaden and Thoennes 1998:2 and 5). In New York State, 4,848 battered women and 6,591 children received residential services from domestic violence programs in 1995 and 15,434 adults and 8,695 children received non-residential services. Nonetheless, a total of 23,164 persons were denied shelter in 1995, primarily due to lack of available space (New York State Department of Social Services 1995a).

The Dutchess County District Attorney's Office reported a total of 1,285 domestic violence arrests in 1997 (Fisher-Hertz 1998). But the need for services is greater than indicated by the District Attorney's Office. Two agencies that deal with domestic violence have statistics that reflect higher numbers of people needing assistance. For example in 1997 the YWCA Battered Women's Services received 18,500 hotline calls for assistance. Grace Smith House handled nearly 1,700 hotline calls. The Y helped 2,725 survivors of violence in 1997 and Grace Smith House sheltered 179 in the same year (Vellucci 1998). If they need a place to go and there is room available, a woman and her children can utilize the services of one of 91 approved residential services in New York, including Grace Smith House (New York State Department of Social Services 1995a).

Grace Smith House

In 1977 a group of women from Dutchess County formed a task force that identified a need for domestic violence services. The group developed a plan to initiate a hotline and create housing for battered women in need. Around the same time in 1978,

the Board of Deacons of the First Presbyterian Church of Poughkeepsie developed a response to the needs of battered women and children. After several years of trying to find funding for a shelter, it was decided to use the parsonage of the Church as the first shelter space. The opening of the shelter coincided with a new law that permitted women leaving their spouses due to domestic violence to receive assistance from the Department of Social Services.

The original name of the shelter was Grace House – drawing from a biblical reference referring to the mission of the Church. However, that name was already on the list of charitable organizations. The Church decided to name the shelter Grace Smith House, after a former Church member. Grace Smith was the wife of William W. Smith, II, a grandson of one of the Smith Brothers, creators of Smith Cough Drops (Grace Smith House Newsletter 1996). She was an active member of the First Presbyterian Church of Poughkeepsie and had participated in many civic activities. Funds from the Smith Family had originally been used to build the Church's parsonage, which at the time, was not in use. The decision was made to transform the parsonage into a refuge for women fleeing abuse. The shelter formally opened its doors in 1981. According to Jean Ann Richardson, the first executive director of the shelter:

It was a four-bedroom house with four beds in each room and 1 small room with two beds. We were able to negotiate housing for 17 people. There was no privacy and it was very difficult. That was how we ended up building a new shelter.

The new Grace Smith House is located on a different street on a residential block in the City of Poughkeepsie. It is in an old house to which an addition was built to accommodate more women and children. The original house is where most of the staff

offices are located. On the first floor of the original house are a kitchen and a large dining room where staff typically spend their time when not counseling women. The former living room in the old house is now office space for the child advocate and a case manager who deals primarily with housing issues. The second floor of the original building has one bathroom and three offices; one for the Finance Director, another for the Information Systems Manager and an office for the Shelter Director.

The new addition to the house is where the women live. It was designed based on the design deficits of the previous shelter, which had neither enough play space for children, nor private space for women. On the first floor, there is a front office that serves as a multi-purpose space for counseling sessions and the sleeping area for the overnight staff. There is a playroom for the children as well as a child therapy room with a door leading to the backyard. There are three bedrooms, one full bath that is wheelchair accessible, and a half bath. There is also a laundry room, smoking room, and a recreation room, which is off limits to children. The kitchen is large and spacious with cabinets for each woman to keep her own food, if she wants to buy special items not provided by the shelter. Adjacent to the kitchen is a large dining room for congregate meals, often decorated with crafts and posters made by residents and children who participate in the arts and crafts program. The living room looks out on to the backyard and is furnished with sturdy This-End-Up, type furniture that can withstand romping children. The second floor also has a laundry facility, five bedrooms, two bathrooms as well as an office for the house manager. Each bedroom is named after an important woman in history such as the Susan B. Anthony room.

The increasing number of battered women, combined with a shortage of housing for women who left the shelter, precipitated Grace Smith House to do two things. They opened a second shelter in 1996 in a more rural area of Dutchess and they received funding to operate a Section 8 subsidized complex. The organization has an annual budget of \$1 million dollars with sixty percent of the income coming from the Department of Social Services reimbursements. An additional \$126,000 comes from rentals income passed through the Housing and Urban Development and Rural Opportunities. Remaining funds are raised through federal and state grants, the United Way, and individual contributions.

Making the decision to come to the shelter is full of mixed emotions. There are many issues women have to contend with, particularly if they have children. The immediacy of need and potential danger however, require that women make decisions quickly. Women need and want the safety, yet simultaneously they have a lot of trepidation about coming to a shelter. Much of this trepidation is because women are angry they have had to leave *their* home to live in a strange place. The following is an excerpt from my field notes on shelter life one month after I started volunteering:

April, 1998 - A Day in the Life of a Shelter

I arrived at the shelter at 8:45 a.m. Margaret, Anne and Lucy were in a jovial mood. They sat at the large dining room table on the staff side of the building, eating breakfast. We talked about the weather and where the Poughkeepsie Journal was (the women need the paper to find jobs and apartments). The phone rang and Margaret picked up. She thought I should respond and take on my first hotline call. On the line was Trudi a woman from Ghana. While she spoke I checked the Rolodex with an

alphabetical listing of every resident. All potential admissions are checked to see if they ever lived at Grace Smith House and if there are any restrictions on their readmission. There were none.

Trudi said she wanted to leave her husband because he allowed their adopted daughter to hit her. We stayed on the phone for thirty to forty minutes while she decided if she wanted to come to the shelter. She could not decide how she felt about leaving her house. She did not want to disrupt her daughter's life, nor did she think she should have to be the one to go. Trudi came to this country from Ghana two and a half years ago with her birth daughter Jane who is 10, her husband Sam and an informally adopted daughter Mari who is now 17. Sam has turned Mari into a co-wife. He encourages her to hit his wife, knowing enough about U.S. values and law to not hit Trudi himself. But he does beat Jane with sticks. Recently, Mari slapped Trudi and bit her fingers, drawing blood. Trudi was frightened and called Sam to tell him she was bleeding and requested he drive her to the hospital. She placed the call at 4:30 p.m. but he did not come home until 10:00 p.m. When Sam arrived, Trudi asked to be taken to the hospital. He told Mari to lock the car doors and not let Trudi in. After much begging, he permitted Trudi to get in the car. Instead of driving her to the hospital, he dropped her off at the police station. She was crying uncontrollably. It appears that Sam's plan was to have the police see her in this agitated state so there would be a witness to her "irrational" behavior.

Trudi was also hesitant about coming to the shelter because she feared that while filling out paperwork, Sam might go to school and pick up Jane. She wanted to make sure that if she left him, she would have custody of Jane. I repeated Trudi's concerns aloud and Margaret gave me cues in the background. She mouthed I should tell Trudi

that having Jane with her was the most important thing because temporary custody of children is given to whomever has the child when the application is processed. Once Trudi felt comfortable about that, her next issue was about getting her things from her house. Margaret whispered to me that shelter staff might accompany a woman one time, along with a police escort to her home. At first, Trudi wanted us to hold a bed for her until 4:00 p.m. but I told her that the shelter would have to give a bed to whoever called. There are only have twenty beds for women and children. We were nearing 16 today and at that rate of occupancy, beds get filled very quickly.

Trudi agreed to be picked up at DCDSS at 11:45 a.m. Margaret and I drove there together. We met with her caseworker who took us to the room where Trudi was making phone calls and crying. She was very afraid -- she was shaking and crying the whole ride back to the shelter.

We came back to the shelter and sat in the front counseling office. I did my first intake. I had Trudi sign permission and release forms, copied her Medicaid card and driver's license. I placed all the materials in her case file. Every resident has a file with intake information. There are also contact sheets, indicating all the community and case management contacts made with, by and on behalf of a resident.

The phones were ringing off the hook today. Kids running in and out of the playroom. Lots of noise. In between these distractions, I informed Trudi about the mandatory House Meetings on Thursday nights and the group meetings on Friday at 10:30 a.m. Also, she would have to follow curfew rules and sign out when she left the building. Trudi told me she was so happy to be at the shelter. All she wanted at that moment was to sleep and "get things together."

While I completed the intake, Margaret called the court to explore the next steps for Trudi to get an order of protection (OOP) and temporary custody of Jane. She also called Jane's school to arrange for her to be picked up before her father arrived. We finished the paperwork then left to pick up Jane from school.

When we arrived, the headmaster, Mr. Alonzo, invited us to sit in the lunchroom so we could discuss why Jane was being picked up. As Trudi spoke, tears streamed from her eyes. Mr. Alonzo challenged Trudi, saying that nothing could possibly be wrong because her husband was such a nice man. Besides, he said, Jane never told anyone at school that there were problems in the house. When Trudi told him she was leaving her husband because he beat her, Mr. Alonzo responded, "Well you can't just leave him."

Went back to shelter. I took Trudi on a tour and helped her get settled in her room. From the supply closet we got sheets, towels, and toiletries. Trudi asked for hair grease, but there was only petroleum jelly. (She refused the petroleum jelly). In the large kitchen there was some drama going on about who was supposed to clean dishes, but we continued with the tour. I informed Trudi that all residents take turns making dinner for everybody in the house. She wondered aloud if they might eat a traditional dish from Ghana.

While getting Trudi and Jane settled, Margaret was on the phone getting information about ensuring Trudi's custody. She found out that Trudi had 15 minutes to make it down to the courthouse to file a complaint and request custody for the Judge to hear tomorrow. We jumped in the van, drove to Dutchess County Courthouse and signed in. As we were standing at the sign-in desk, Trudi and I both felt someone behind us. When we turned around, Trudi looked petrified. "That's my husband," she whispered, "I

had a feeling he was following us all day. "Sam just stood there quietly looking at us with his hands in his pockets. I thought he might have a gun or knife, but all he wanted was for Jane to come to him. He asked me if he could take his daughter. I summoned up enough courage and firmly said, "No!"

The legal advocate had just come out, assessed the situation and quickly took us into her office to get Trudi to discuss what had happened. It was so difficult to get her to understand what Trudi was afraid of. There was a cultural dissonance because the violation and violence were not only physical, but also moral. Throughout the entire process, Trudi kept repeating, "He's so smart, he knows not to hit me, but he hurts me. He beats Jane with sticks. He gets our 'daughter' [Mari] to hit me. He holds my Passport and papers and tells me I can't leave him." It took almost an hour for her to tell the advocate enough information so that the Petition for Custody could be filed and looked upon favorably by the Judge.

Margaret came back to court to relieve me. When I met Margaret in the waiting area, we discovered that Trudi's husband was simultaneously filing for custody. Sam's presence meant that I had to have an escort sneak me out of the building in case he decided to follow me.

During their first 24 hours at the shelter, residents must complete an application for public assistance, which hopefully will cover the cost of staying at the shelter. The application is dropped off at DCDSS for the woman by a staff person, intern or volunteer. Supposedly, this reduces the amount of waiting time for her first interview. Even if she has public assistance, her budget has to be changed because her housing allowance is now paid to the shelter. If she does not apply for public assistance or is turned down by

DCDSS, she may be asked to pay some portion of the cost of her stay at the shelter, as little as \$5 a day.

As residents, women are expected to fully participate in shelter life, which includes going to group and individual meetings. Some of the meetings serve to educate women about the dynamics of abuse and to reduce their feelings of isolation. Residents must attend all group meetings during their first two weeks at the shelter after which some are optional. Two weekly meetings are never optional; the mandatory Thursday night meetings and the Friday morning meetings. The Thursday night meeting is facilitated by the house manager during which time cooking and cleaning responsibilities among residents are allocated. Friday morning meetings are used to develop cohesion among residents, discuss community issues such as how gossip is hurtful and to reinforce the rules of shelter life.

If she has children, the woman will meet with a child advocate and perhaps a child specialist. The woman may be assessed by a substance abuse counselor and throughout her stay will interact with a number of staff and/or student interns. Typically, one person will also be assigned as her caseworker, although her case may be handled by any one of 10 staff or student interns. From the moment they settle in, someone is assigned to help the women through the process of becoming housed. Women's lives at the shelter are focused on leaving since residents are only permitted to stay for 90 days, (although she may return at a later date, if necessary).¹⁸ Thus, shelters have only a short-term capacity to provide safety (Smolick 1999). Women have only limited time to piece together a new

¹⁸ Returning to shelters in New York may be problematic under welfare reform laws that limit the total amount of time a person can receive assistance. If a person has used up their time on assistance, but is victimized by violence and goes to a shelter, under the present law there will be no reimbursement.

life, if that is what they choose to do. Or, they arrange to repair their old life. In addition to addressing the psychological and physical scars of having been battered, every effort goes toward self-sufficiency -- finding housing, employment, child-care, legal, criminal justice and medical assistance, if necessary.

Many women complain there are too many meetings and too many rules and regulations that conflict with their own sensibilities. For instance, some women resent rules against physically disciplining their children or having to get permission from staff to have another woman watch their child. Both Hoff, (1991) and (Loseke 1992) have discussed the problem of imposed structure on women's lives in battered women's shelters. This is not the case in shelters worldwide. In Namibia, for example women have very few structured activities while living in the shelter. Although they have to participate in domestic chores, they are not mandated to attend support groups and have far fewer rules to follow (Davis 1997).

One of the more challenging rules that women experience is the constraint on their freedom to come and go as they please: a violation of curfew can result in expulsion from the shelter. Grace Smith House did not always have curfew rules, but found it necessary to institute them when the need for shelter beds grew. As more women needed a place to stay, staff recognized that if those who stayed out overnight had someplace to stay, then their bed space should be made available to a woman who needed it. Women who break curfew are issued a written warning by the staff. This warning involves the woman's signing an agreement acknowledging her infraction with the promise not to do it again. Sometimes women do not tell the truth about why they stay out after curfew. If and when staff discovered the truth, there is a great deal of discussion about what to do.

For example, in November 1998, one resident, Georgina, had stayed out past curfew twice. Each time she stayed out, she said it was because she had to work overnight at the Stop 'N Shop. During staff meeting, a caseworker pointed out that Stop 'N Shop is not open 24 hours. By the third time she broke curfew, there was a lengthy back-and-forth around the dining room table as to whether or not Georgina really wanted to be asked to leave, since she continued to break curfew. Staff wanted to know what she was doing. Was she testing their trust? Several days later, Georgina broke curfew a fourth time and was asked to leave the shelter, but it was an agonizing decision.

Staff struggle with how much flexibility they should offer women who break curfew and other rules. They recognize that the rules of shelter life are sometimes in direct contradiction to the way in which women themselves envision this period of reprieve from the violence in their lives. In some cases, a woman's direct refusal to do something or a confrontation sometimes results in a "diagnosis" of her behavior as being "non-compliant." Georgina, as an example, was considered non-compliant. She was diagnosed as engaging in passive-aggressive behavior, saying she would not break curfew and then doing it again.

Yet sometimes, non-compliance results from differences between women's values and beliefs and those of the staff. Michelle, another resident, rarely put the dishes in the dishwasher when it was her turn. Some felt she was lazy and did not want to be part of shelter life. She did not clean quickly or complete other assigned tasks without substantial prompting. Several one-on-one conferences were of no use, to the great frustration of staff. An interview with Michelle in 1998 reveals differences in her skills

and the skills she was presumed to have by the staff. When I asked her what she thought about shelter life, here is what Michelle said:

I don't like the curfew. But I only have to be here a little while. You constantly are told what to do. Some of it, I don't know. I don't know about running a dishwasher. At home we wash dishes by hand. When they say it's my turn to vacuum, I don't know what to do. I had linoleum in my place, so I always washed my floors with a mop. I can't have visitors and I can't go to the City (New York City). I'm used to having people over. The other day I had 15 people come up to see me from the City. We went down to the Waterfront and they stayed all day from 11 in the morning until eight that night.

While Michelle was considered to be lazy and non-participatory, what she told me was of her embarrassment about her inability to do what was expected of her. Michelle did not want to ask anyone what to do. She thought she might appear stupid or inept. This is not to say that staff had no justification in thinking that Michelle was not responsible. She certainly engaged in her fair share of avoiding doing assigned tasks on a number of occasions as did many women.

Shelter staff is burdened with constant crises. They take turns being on call by beeper and work with women to develop achievable goals in terms of the woman's personal trauma of victimization, the trauma of her child, any substance use issues she may have, and preparing her to leave. What may appear to be a simple problem in the life of a shelter resident can turn into a monumental project. In May of 1998, shortly after I had started volunteering, a woman I'll call Traci, had been admitted to the shelter from a hospital, which had neglected to give her the prescription she needed to have filled. Traci did not have any insurance to cover the cost of medication, yet it was essential for her recovery. Sometimes when a woman needs emergency funds for an item, shelter staff call Catholic Charities. In this case, Traci's physician was nowhere to be found and a

hard copy of the "scrip" or prescription was needed in order for Catholic Charities to process the request for emergency payment. Contact was made with the secretary in the doctor's office who first had to check the validity of the prescription. Then a copy of the "scrip" had to be faxed to a pharmacy that would accept payment from Catholic Charities instead of the consumer. Another copy of the "scrip" had to be faxed to Catholic Charities.

All was going smoothly until Catholic Charities demanded an original copy of the prescription. This was impossible to get because the doctor could not be located. The pharmacist agreed to call Catholic Charities and validate the legitimacy of the prescription. After finally accepting the word of the pharmacist, Catholic Charities agreed to release permission to pay for Traci's medication. Four hours later, after calls had been made to 1) Catholic Charities; 2) Traci's Doctor; and 3) The Pharmacy --Traci's prescription was filled. The tenacity of staff to get women what they need is beyond admirable.

Issues such as that described above occur regularly throughout each day. These issues along with women's admissions and departures, make it difficult to stay on top of what is happening at the shelter. To address this issue summaries of daily events are logged in the "shift change" book. For example, the four-hour process of obtaining medication for Traci was reduced to a three-line description in shift change. All staff, and interns who work more than twenty hours each week read the book when they first come in. Shift change is a journal that reflects the daily goings on at the shelter. The reader has an immediate sense of what has gone on prior to her arrival for work, volunteering or interning. It logs the tensions that have arisen among women and among staff and

women. The log also updates who has come and gone, concerns about children and overall shelter life. Shift change also chronicles the moments when absolutely nothing has occurred (which are rare) and when creative resolutions to problems have been generated. For example one entry referred to putting dinner plates in all the windows of the shelter because one of the residents thought her batterer had found out where she was living. This particular resident thought she heard someone trying to get in through her window, and the plates served as an extra sensitive security system. If any window was opened, the plates would fall down and everyone in the house would know to call the police immediately.

Grace Smith House is a haven of safety, as described by Trudi, and a place of imposed order, as described by Michelle. It is from this place the women begin to rebuild their lives before moving out on their own. If they choose to establish new households, typically it is in the City of Poughkeepsie.¹⁹

"Reed-Covered Lodge by the Little Water Place"

Poughkeepsie is located in Dutchess County a bucolic area referred to as the Hudson River Valley, equi-distant between New York City and Albany. Dutchess is one of the six counties²⁰ that comprise the Hudson Valley Region, and was founded through the passage of the Colonial Assembly Act as one of the 12 original counties formed in New York Province. The county is 805 square miles with thirty miles of Hudson River

¹⁹ According to the 1999 Shelter Statistics Report, only seven percent of women returned to their batterer. After leaving the shelter, 27% lived on their own or with family or friends.

²⁰ The six counties are Westchester, Rockland, Putnam, Orange, Dutchess, and Columbia.

shoreline on its western border. The eastern border is formed with the state of Connecticut.

Henry Hudson forged the Hudson Valley in 1609 as he sailed up the Hudson River. The River, which was designated as a National Heritage River, contributed to the development of the area as it became home to many Dutch and German settlers between the 1600s and the 1800s. The beauty of the Valley was the inspiration for the Hudson River School of painting in the 1830s (Davidson 1974). Its landscapes, spectacular mountains and river scenes continue to be a major attraction for tourists. Throughout the 19th century, the dominant industries in Dutchess were the manufacturing and shipping trades. Textile mills thrived and later on when railroads connected the county to New York City, it became the "leisure playground" for many wealthy New Yorkers including the Astor and Vanderbilt families, who donated money for the development of major institutions in the county. As such, Dutchess is replete with libraries, historical societies, institutions of higher learning, as well as a number of national and state historic sites. The county's long list of famous residents have included: Nelson Rockefeller, Averill Harriman, Matthew Vassar, founder of Vassar College, Robert Livingston who signed the Declaration of Independence and negotiated the Louisiana Purchase, the Smith Brothers, creators of cough drops, and journalists Lowell Thomas and Edward R. Murrow.

Today, Dutchess County is home to 259,462 residents (United States Bureau of Census 1990) of whom 88 percent are White. Residents live in one of thirty municipalities including the City of Poughkeepsie, which has the largest Black and Latino population of all the districts in the county. Table 1 shows the racial distribution of the population by municipality.

Table 1. Population of Dutchess County By Race, 1990

MUNICIPALITY	Total	# White	# Black	# Native American	# API*	# Other	# Hisp
Beacon (C)	13,243	10,466	1,989	12	96	680	1,870
Poughkeepsie (C)	28,844	18,859	9,078	101	439	367	1,086
Amenia (T)	5,195	4,876	252	8	27	32	75
Beekman (T)	10,447	8,888	1,350	15	148	46	883
Clinton (T)	3,760	3,662	52	3	31	12	74
Dover (T)	7,778	6,983	629	20	81	65	201
East Fishkill (T)	22,101	20,721	483	37	773	87	557
Fishkill (T)	17,655	14,543	2,470	12	404	226	1,671
Hyde Park (T)	21,230	19,823	920	17	364	106	390
LaGrange (T)	13,274	12,502	286	18	405	63	286
Milan (T)	1,895	1,852	28	7	5	3	48
North East (T)	2,918	2,838	55	5	19	1	26
Pawling (T)	5,947	5,806	79	9	33	20	106
Pine Plains (T)	2,287	2,244	29	3	4	7	35
Pleasant Valley (T)	8,063	7,813	137	9	80	24	121
Poughkeepsie (T)	40,143	36,011	2,264	36	1,595	237	982
Red Hook (T)	9,565	9,178	131	16	207	33	148
Rhinebeck (T)	7,558	7,221	224	5	67	41	154
Stanford (T)	3,495	3,405	61	5	7	17	45
Union Vale (T)	3,577	3,456	72	1	36	12	49
Wappinger (T)	26,008	23,762	1,035	29	997	185	881
Washington (T)	4,479	4,285	164	6	8	16	77
Fishkill (V)	1,957	1,849	65	1	32	10	51
Millbrook (V)	1,339	1,292	36	3	2	6	18
Millerton (V)	884	867	11	0	6	0	6
Pawling (V)	1,974	1,936	22	1	3	12	40
Red Hook (V)	1,794	1,763	12	1	17	1	11
Rhinebeck (V)	2,725	2,619	62	0	25	19	56
Tivoli (V)	1,035	1,025	5	1	4	0	7
Wappingers Falls (V)	4,605	4,210	176	4	177	38	184
Dutchess County	259,462	229,194	21,788	374	5,826	2,280	9,765

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

* API - Asian Pacific Islander

It is clear that the non-White population is clustered in six areas; Beacon, the City of Poughkeepsie, Beekman, the Town of Fishkill, the Town of Poughkeepsie and Wappinger.

The county is considered to be wealthy, as the median family income is \$49,305 and the per capita income is \$25,946 (Dutchess at a Glance 2000). In terms of employment, 13 percent of the private sector jobs in the Hudson Valley are located in

richness and there are a higher percentage of professional and technical workers in the county than in the entire Hudson Valley Region or New York State. The area has attracted a growing number of jobs in high-tech, high-wage industries (Surdey 2000) in large part due to the presence of IBM and smaller technology companies. Yet there is racial disparity in certain occupational categories. For example, Blacks make up 6.1 percent of the labor force in the county (Dutchess County n.d.) yet they are over-represented in three occupational categories: they are 14.3 percent of the service workers; 23 percent of the operatives; 7.2 percent of the laborers. Meanwhile, as managers, professionals and technicians, they are under-represented. Blacks make up 3.4 percent of officials and managers; 3.7 percent of professionals and 4.8 percent of technicians. Alternatively, Whites make up 88.6 percent of the labor force and are equally or over-represented in the managerial/professional, technical and occupational categories 93.5 percent, 89 percent and 91.6 percent, respectively. They are under-represented as service workers and operatives, 80.5 percent and 83.9 percent, respectively. Further, while the unemployment rate for the county as a whole was 3.9 percent in 1999, the Black unemployment rate in the county was 8.9 percent -- the highest rate of any other minority group (Dutchess County Economic Development Corporation 1999).

Poughkeepsie is incorporated as both a town and a city. Residents frequently remind visitors not to "get the Town and the City mixed up." The Town is the location of Vassar College and is the suburban sprawl that surrounds the City. The City, which has its own police force, is the county seat of Dutchess. The name is a mispronunciation of the Wappinger Indian word "Uppuqui-ipis-ing" which means "reed-covered lodge by the little water place" (City of Poughkeepsie: Origin n.d.). The founders were an Englishman

and a Dutchman who bought a tract of land from the local Indians, a portion of which is now the City of Poughkeepsie. Their intent was to attract settlers -- a mission accomplished after two Dutchmen leased 48 acres for 10 years, built a stonewalled house, and cultivated crops. The date of their lease, June 9, 1687, marks the settlement of Poughkeepsie (City of Poughkeepsie: Origin n.d.) In 1777 the hamlet of Poughkeepsie was the capital of New York, shortly after the British burned down the first capital of New York in Kingston which is just across the Hudson River. The City was also where the first slaves in New York State were manumitted after the legislature approved a scheme for gradual abolition in 1799 (Groth 1997).²¹

The City of Poughkeepsie was designated a heritage area through The American Heritage Area Act enacted by Congress in 1997. The juxtaposition of history and modernity is evident as the MetroNorth train approaches the Poughkeepsie Station after a less than two-hour ride from New York City. One of the most noticeable things is a large, abandoned brick building with yellow paint that has aged over time. The building is embossed with lettering that reads "Sedgwick Machine Works, J.D. Thompson & Co., Inc. Founded in 1858." This is the first clue that the City, as well as the county, was once dominated by a strong manufacturing presence. Opposite this building lies a hi-rise Section 8 subsidized housing complex, the Rip Van Winkle. To the west of the train station lies Poughkeepsie's two and a half mile shoreline along the Hudson River called the Waterfront District, which encompasses 175 acres of preserved land.

²¹ It should be noted that the "enlightenment and the ideology of freedom" were not compelling factors in manumitting slaves. For a thoughtful discussion on the meaning of manumission to slaveholders in Dutchess County, see Groth 1997.

From the moment one exits the train and enters the station, remnants of the City's historic grandeur are apparent, beginning with the architecturally impressive high-domed train station built in 1918. The area immediately north of the train station is called Mount Carmel. Walking away from the train station, the view of the Hudson River and the Kingston Bridge leading to Highland Falls is a spectacular backdrop to this primarily Italian enclave. The perimeter of the City is dotted with small homes, many of which were built in the 1940s and '50s. The City's housing stock consists of 13,112 units of which fifty percent is fifty or more years old (United States Department of Housing and Urban Development 1995). Several old brick, wood and, stone residences and commercial buildings, erected in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, still stand.

The streetscapes in downtown Poughkeepsie illustrate the irony of the City's historic grandeur and the contemporary problems of urban life. Walking up Main Street from the train station, an historic pub stands in contrast to public housing. The palatial former home of Matthew Vassar, founder of Vassar College, is currently the Cunneen - Hackett Cultural Center, which offers dance, music, drama, lectures and film, and has an art gallery that promotes local artists. This area, along with the commercial district, was devastated by the county's economic downturn in the 1990s, some of which I observed. Just across the street from Cunneen - Hackett are residential buildings in front of which drugs are bought and sold. This part of Main Street is well known as an area where drug sales and prostitution take place (LeBrun 1998). In the late 1980s and early 1990s, New York City drug dealers found eager consumers to the North of New York City in places such as Middletown, Albany, Hudson and Poughkeepsie (Blackman 1995). Drugs coming from the City of New York caused drug use to spread and, in fact, the largest drug

bust in the county took place in Poughkeepsie in 1994 when 416 pounds of cocaine was found -- worth an estimated \$20 million dollars (*New York Times* 1994).

Market Street runs perpendicular to Main Street and is the location of two historic buildings, The Bardovan, New York's oldest theatre, which opened on February 1, 1869²² and the old County Courthouse at the corner of Main and Market Streets, where New York State delegates ratified the U.S. Constitution. A step away is the Main Mall, a failed effort at economic renewal. The Main Mall was created along three blocks of Main Street in 1976 in response to the development of several large strip malls in the Town of Poughkeepsie on Route 9. The original plan was for the shops in the Mall to compete with the suburban sprawl that was "infringing upon what had once been a captive retail market"(City of Poughkeepsie 1998:5-1). Many businesses have closed since the Main Mall's heyday in the late 1970's, evidenced by the number of unoccupied storefronts. In 1988, a design firm performed a façade study and found that out of 160 buildings surveyed, 18 had vacant first floors (City of Poughkeepsie 1998). I found 26 buildings boarded up or empty with "For Rent" signs posted in the windows.²³ This included the Luckey-Platt Building, which was Poughkeepsie's main department store beginning in 1869. The 100,000-square-foot building closed in 1981. The Mall is architecturally diverse with buildings and stores flanking either side of a wide, brick-paved promenade.

²² The opera house was the site of town meetings, celebrations, performances and political rallies. The Jubilee Singers of Fisk University concluded their first national tour with a performance there in 1872. Members of the Barrymore family performed there and Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Theodore Roosevelt appeared for rallies. Currently popular artists and performances are billed at the Bardovan including Ballet Hispanico; jazz singer, Cassandra Wilson and the South African musical group, Ladysmith Black Mombazo.

²³ This figure is based on a neighborhood mapping of downtown Poughkeepsie, which was conducted in December 1999.

Throughout the downtown area are hair shops, music stores, insurance companies, check-cashing businesses and stores with partially empty shelves. Interspersed between these service economy establishments as well as in various locations throughout the city, are empty storefronts with names like *Statz Office Equipment*. These offices had risen and declined alongside IBM when it was king of the Hudson Valley Region.

As with the rise and decline of offices and manufacturing, so, too, has Poughkeepsie's population. At the turn of the century the City of Poughkeepsie had a population of 24,029 (City of Poughkeepsie 1998). By 1950, it had increased to 41,023. The population has been decreasing since then through residents' departures to the outlying areas of the county. Now, about 11 percent of the county's population live in the City of Poughkeepsie and based on the 1990 Census, there are only about 4,000 more people than had been living there in 1900, a total of 28,844 residents of which 31.4 percent are Black. Poughkeepsie is a poor city with 11,874 households of which 52 percent fall into the low-, very low- and extremely low-income categories.

According to the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development's Consolidated Plan (1995), 38 percent of the households in the City of Poughkeepsie earned less than \$17,499, whereas the median household income for the City was \$34,211. In April 2000, the unemployment rate in Poughkeepsie was 4.9 percent, almost four times that of the Town of Poughkeepsie (Resident Civilian Labor Force Summary n.d.). For those who are working, major employers include the City of Poughkeepsie, Vassar Brothers Hospital, Central Hudson Gas and Electric and the City of Poughkeepsie School District. The largest private employer in the area is IBM. Shelter staff, volunteers

and community residents told me their family members presently work or have worked for the company. Several shelter residents told me they wanted to work there.

Big Blue: Father IBM

In 1941 IBM subsidiary, Munitions Manufacturing Corporation, bought 215 acres of land along the Hudson River. One year later, the plant was producing aircraft cannons and Browning rifles. In 1944 the company began to produce typewriters (Pugh 1996) and had 350 employees at the plant. As the company expanded, it built a 250,000 square foot plant on Route 9 in the Town of Poughkeepsie. Although it is in town, 11 minutes from the City by car, many city residents are employed there. The growth of IBM was astounding evidenced by increasing annual revenues; in 1957, annual revenue was \$1 billion dollars and in 1970 revenues totaled \$7.5 billion dollars. As the corporation grew fiscally, its physical presence also grew. In addition to the Poughkeepsie plant, two other plants followed, one built in East Fishkill and the other across the Hudson River in Kingston. By 1980 revenues were at \$26.2 billion dollars and in 1990, revenues hit \$69 billion.

The Poughkeepsie location, which today is the site for the production of mainframes and sales, has been called the "Homestead" of IBM. In its heyday in 1989 the company employed 30,000 people in the Hudson River Valley Region, representing a little less than 20 percent of its worldwide employees (Surdey 1992). Big Blue²⁴ was the largest private employer in the county followed by the Dutchess County Government.

²⁴ Big Blue refers to the company's corporate logo.

For fifty years the Hudson Valley and Dutchess County, in particular, were dependent on IBM. At one point, the company supported one in three jobs.

Big Blue helped the Hudson Valley become one of New York State's most stable manufacturing economies. As a major manufacturer faced with little competition, IBM perpetuated "a job for life" image. The company's presence can be felt in many spheres of Poughkeepsie life, if not in present terms, then most surely in historical memory.

The father, uncle, brother and/or husband of *almost every person* I met worked, had worked or wanted to work for IBM. For example, 65 year-old-June, a volunteer at the shelter, discussed the role IBM played in her own life:

My husband was a career "Beemer." We moved to Poughkeepsie and the company helped us get a house large enough for seven kids and my mother. We lived 10 minutes from IBM. Everything was all about IBM. They took care of everything. IBM's Country Club was just on the other side of our property. We could go to the Country Club. In the summer they had a camp for the kids of employees. IBM was our father.

IBM's presence has marked the lives of many in Poughkeepsie. Even I reckoned with the company's influence one day as I tried to get a cab at the train station as described in my field notes:

May, 1999

Although I generally walked everywhere in the City, today I had to take a cab to the Town of Poughkeepsie. Usually when I arrive at the MetroNorth Train Station there are several Jamaican men pointing as they say: "Taxi Miss? Taxi Sir?" If one nods yes, they direct the person to the appropriate car or van -- "Over there, the second van." Or,

“Go to the Blue Car.” People walk up a slight incline and climb into a vehicle with several other people. Two cab drivers explained to me that the men negotiate who is going to which locations—so as not to duplicate runs, to maximize the amount of money that can be made, and to reduce competition. They alternate who goes to certain places, because the fares are unevenly distributed depending on the area of town one is going to. If you want to go north of Main Street, there is one cab. If you want to go to Vassar College, you get in another cab. It is very orderly and effective. If you do not get in a cab within 10 minutes of the train’s arrival into the station, you may not get in one for quite some time as they coordinate their runs so that they pick people at the time of the train arrival and not in between trains.

Today, I made the mistake of stopping in the ladies room and by the time I emerged from the station, there was only one van left -- a white van. I rushed over and asked if I could be taken to Hudson River Housing on South Road. The driver abruptly said, “No! I’m only going to IBM.” I told him I was going in the direction of IBM, and was willing to be dropped off after everyone else had reached his or her destination. But the driver was only willing to carry “Beemers” or people doing business with IBM. After calling another cab company, waiting nearly 45 minutes and finally reaching my destination, which turned out to be 11 minutes from the train station. I suspect that the first driver anticipated that he would pick up people from IBM to bring them back to the train station or to lunch and did not want to be bothered with my fare.

The company is the preferred place of employment for several women in this study, although only one had actually worked there. The woman had relocated from New

York City to Poughkeepsie, in part, because she wanted to work for IBM as an administrative assistant. She secured a temporary job but was later laid off, as were thousands of others when the company downsized.

Corporate downsizing was one measure of the global job crisis that began in the 1990s. It resulted from the dynamics of labor saving technologies and the expansion of international labor markets. In the United States, the global crisis was realized as the nation's recession took hold in July 1990. Firms such as General Foods, Nestle's Foods and General Motors announced plant closings, consolidations, mergers or workforce reductions (Surdey 1992: 2). The recession had an impact on IBM and in 1991 the company posted its first ever loss of \$1.4 million. To alleviate financial loss, IBM reduced its mid-Hudson workforce by 2,000 people. However, this plan to decrease its workforce was not viewed as particularly alarming to people living in the region because IBM had a policy of job security and full employment. The reduction came mostly in the form of voluntary departures. Additionally, although twenty percent of the company's worldwide workforce was located in the Hudson Valley, only seven percent of IBM's worldwide workforce was located in Dutchess and Ulster counties. Their combined share of job elimination amounted to 1,750 people (Williams 1992). Some argued that the two counties could handle that kind of job loss because "Beemers" could be absorbed into smaller manufacturing firms. The problem was that manufacturing was no longer the economic draw, technology was, as evidenced by the growth of three major companies that went public in 1985; Microsoft, Novell and Sun Microsystems. A rapidly shifting

technology market caused IBM to form alliances with firms to improve its technology and expand services.²⁵

IBM was not the only employer in the county that downsized. Other major employers in the area including Wassaic Development Center; Dutchess County Government; Harlem Valley Psychiatric; Hudson River Psychiatric Center; St. Francis Hospital; the U.S. Postal Service and the Fishkill Correctional Facility, which collectively employed 9,455 people, were being pressured to trim staff. This was particularly true for psychiatric centers experiencing declining revenue (Gibbons 1992). The combined layoffs contributed to a County unemployment rate of 7.1 percent in 1992 (Cappa 1993).

Early in 1992 IBM developed a restructuring plan. The plan included the elimination of 25,000 jobs worldwide. In Dutchess that meant another 3,000-3,500 jobs would be lost. The company joined the ranks of AT&T, General Motors, Sears and Roebuck and GTE that, combined, had layoffs totaling 324,650 employees in the three years ending in March 1994 (Barnet 1996:39). In late 1992, IBM stated that it intended to eliminate an additional 3,500 jobs, for a total of 7,000.

The announcement was so alarming that the *Poughkeepsie Journal* set up a telephone hotline to keep people apprised of IBM news. The Journal even altered its layout format to accommodate analyses of IBM's pending cuts. On Wednesday, February 24, 1993, Big Blue officials announced its expected layoffs at the IBM Conference Center (formerly the IBM Country Club). Six thousand jobs were eliminated at the three mid-Hudson plants. At the same time, the Harlem Valley Psychiatric Center closed down.

²⁵ Joint ventures were established with Siemens A.G. of Germany and Toshiba of Japan. IBM also formed a new company with Sears called "Atlantis" to provide computer network services (Surdy 1992).

The Hudson Valley Region's total job base decreased by 7.6 percent (Surdey 1992). In June 1993, the county's unemployment rate rose to 11.2 percent, the worst in New York State. June was the second straight month that Dutchess posted its worst unemployment rates in the 24 years that such statistics had been kept (Cappa 1993). In addition to driving up unemployment, IBM's downsizing shrank the region's tax base and consequently reduced spending. A study by the Marist College Bureau of Economic Research found that for every IBM job lost, it would cost the mid-Hudson region \$52,000, based on an average salary of \$35,000 per year (Williams 1992).

Layoffs continued for both professionals and non-professionals, although not at the rate of the early 1990s. Several people I met had felt the impact. To cite one instance, I quote Jayson, a community resident in his mid-thirties. He talked about his hopes of working at IBM and what ultimately happened:

I came up here from Florida in 1988. I wanted to be a "Beemer." My uncles were two of the first Black men hired to work in the South and transferred to Poughkeepsie in the '60s. I wanted to be an engineer, but when I got here, all they had was work in the kitchen. I took it, thinking I could work and get a good salary and go to school. But I never got to that point. They didn't think I should be going to school, saying it interfered with my job -- as a cook? Anyway, I got laid off, and been driving taxis irregular ever since. That company's been bad for me and the City.

Poughkeepsie, the once storied place to live, was no longer -- at least for some residents. There was not enough job generation to absorb those who were unemployed and IBM had eliminated 11,170 jobs in Dutchess by December of 1994.

The economic travesty caused by shifts in the global economy was realized on a local level in Dutchess and other cities (see for example Bluestone and Harrison 1982; Nash 1987; Pappas 1987). The county and the City of Poughkeepsie experienced

population decreases, loss of businesses, increased filings for bankruptcy and increased taxes to cover basic needs such as garbage pick-up. Re-employment did not happen as quickly as many had hoped because the wages drawn by companies absorbing former employees of IBM did not equal what Big Blue had paid. In addition, the fact that IBM had paid top dollar for the property it leased caused Dutchess to have the highest commercial property taxes of all the nearby counties, making it less attractive for new businesses. As a result of IBM's departure the local glut of commercial office space drove down prices. Further, real estate sales slowed down. IBM and related industries had accounted for fifty percent of one realtors' housing market in the late 1980s, but in 1993 its share dropped to 10 percent of the housing market (Auster 1990; Auster 1993). The resale price of homes in the county by January of 1993 fell to less than \$130,000, when they had once been \$140,000 or above (LHeureaux 1994).

Realizing that the county and City had relied too heavily upon one corporation, plans were developed to diversify the economic base. One way this was to be achieved was by marketing the properties IBM had built to companies in similar industries. Gerald McDonald, then president of the Dutchess County Economic Development Corporation (DCEDC), commented that the quality of surplus space resulting from the cutbacks would be attractive to new companies (Williams 1993).

The Dutchess County Economic Development Corporation went into high gear to transform its previously dependent relationship with Big Blue. The goal of the DCEDC, then, was to generate economic diversity. DCEDC continues to rectify mistakes of the past. Its stated goals in 1999 were to increase the absorption of space in vacant buildings, retain existing jobs, and produce payroll dollars (Dutchess County Economic

Development Corporation 1999). In fact, the Corporation won an award in 1999 for its marketing efforts to attract, retain and expand business, develop the workforce, and tourist promotion.

DCEDC developed strategies to market the millions of square feet of vacant commercial and office space. The Corporation used economic forecasts to identify future labor needs. Local economists suggested that the county focus on four areas for business development: high-tech manufacturing, information systems, agriculture and tourism industries. The high-tech manufacturing and information systems development made a lot of sense because those who had been laid off could be re-skilled to work in these industries. There were enough people out of work who could fill positions in small companies. The idea was that small companies, with fifty employees or less, were better for the economy than one company that hired all the human capital in a given area. Therefore, if one or two companies closed down, the impact of unemployment would be less severe.

Agricultural development was particularly important because this industry has always been very important in the state of New York. Up until this point there had been no attempts to develop the agricultural base of Dutchess. For example, helping people set up farm stands and coordinating farmer's markets. The development of the tourist industry also seemed to be an excellent area for growth given the historic beauty of the county and the city. With the presence of several wineries, old homes, biking trails, Country Fairs, and antique shops, the region could be well positioned as a tourist

paradise.²⁶ However, those were jobs, which for the most part, required specific skills. The service sector, which offers jobs at low wages, was also targeted as a major growth area for the county. The only professions or industries that offered high weekly wages were for physicians and drug manufacturing. It was projected that home health care services, child day-care services, cleaning and maintenance service and school bus transportation would pay between \$228 and \$291 a week in wages. Other positions, such as nursing, counseling, accident/health insurance and residential care were projected to offer average weekly wages of \$404 and \$425 but require higher levels of education (Surdey 1992).

I have spent considerable time discussing the positive attributes of Poughkeepsie and Dutchess County. Yet, there is another side to Poughkeepsie. There are two economies in this area resulting from several processes, most notably the changing economy evident in shifts from manufacturing to technology. The presence of a high-tech sector does not serve the interests of many of the poorer residents lacking in skills necessary to work in the industry. The emphasis on developing a technology-based industry in the area has relieved some of the employment loss among more highly skilled individuals. However, the focus on securing a labor force for the service sector keeps some women with lower skills in an economic bind. Further, work opportunities are influenced by the economic growth of the area because as Sassen (1996) notes, growth requires low-wage workers as a necessary part of the infrastructure. Those workers may

²⁶ According to the DCEDC's *Annual Report* (1999), the Dutchess County Tourist Promotion Agency has played a tremendous role in marketing the cultural and historic value of the County and the Hudson Valley Region. Tourism increased and in 1999, tourists spent \$431 million. Tourism is now one the top two employers in the region and visitor's dollars help keep local business healthy.

be found in the population of women on welfare. One finding from this research was that women had difficulty securing employment that paid a living wage in the City or in the surrounding Town. They had difficulty reaching jobs in the Town or other parts of Dutchess due to lack of transportation.

Second, revitalization efforts have stepped up processes of gentrification (see Smith 1996a; Smith 1996b). The efforts of the DCEDC and the tourist industry have contributed to renewed interest in the area for both residential and commercial purposes. Alongside revitalization has come an economically induced spatial arrangement that relegates certain people to certain geographic locations. More highly skilled residents are contesting for some of the space in the city that had fallen by the wayside, thus limiting the availability of rental options.

Although Poughkeepsie is reveling in Dutchess County's comeback after several years of decline, a disparity exists in the City. One might say that there are really two cities of Poughkeepsie. The first is the Southside. This Poughkeepsie has a variety of old and historic buildings for sale, which can be renovated to suit almost any purpose. It is where homeowners and businesses purchase and renovate old buildings. Homes in this first city cost upwards of \$85,000.²⁷ The "other" City of Poughkeepsie is known as the Northside. It was here that most of the women lived. This is the city with an "urban" population, predominantly Black and Latino, where some Victorian houses sell for as little as \$38,000. There are fewer affordable places to live for low-income and poor residents.

²⁷ The figures for the cost of houses are based on listings from the April 7, 2000 issue of the *Poughkeepsie Journal*. Sec. D:3.

Living in Poughkeepsie poses challenges. On the one hand, there is a vibrant local economy that has meant some have almost limitless options. On the other hand, not all have benefited from the region's prosperity. Poor women are ushered toward low-wage, service sector employment. For these women, choices are narrow. Many of the women in this study had very low incomes when they arrived at the shelter. They were poor, living on the periphery of an economically resonant community. The women were stranded in the midst of reform policies that make them even more vulnerable to poverty and were expected to take and accept what was available to them. Why? Because needing welfare obliterates personal choice.

CHAPTER 3

VIOLENCE AND POVERTY

Introduction

Recent research reports that violence is more prevalent in poor households. For example, rates of non-lethal, intimate violence have been documented as higher among Black women age 16 to 24 in households in the lowest income categories (United States Department of Justice 1998) as compared to White women. The data showed rates of victimization of women by an intimate of 21.3 per 1,000 in households with less than \$7,500 and rates of 12.3 per 1,000 in households with incomes of \$7,500-14,999 (United States Department of Justice 1998). A more recent report shows that women living in households with lower annual incomes experience violence seven times greater than women living in households with the highest annual household income, 20 per 1,000 versus 3 per 1,000 (Rennison and Welchans 2000).

Kurz (1999) suggests two possible explanations contributing to the higher rate of violence among the poor. Her first argument draws on the work of Collins (1988) who indicates that it is possible that men in low-income groups legitimize violence more than other men, as they hold more traditional gender ideologies. She also suggests that higher rates of reporting violence among poor women is due to the fact that lower income men have fewer ways of controlling women than other men. In other words, men with higher incomes can more easily control women by restricting their limited resources whereas men with lower incomes may resort to violence. So poor women report physical violence

more frequently. Raphael (2000) expounds on the latter point referencing the research of psychiatrist James Gilligan (1996) who argues that poor men's inability to provide for their family exacerbates shame, which is transformed into violence. Raphael adds that women's economic potential, in relation to men's own economic castration, might be a trigger of men's violence. A final explanation may be that poor people are more subject to institutional surveillance and interventions, which could account for higher rates of reporting.

The use of welfare among battered women is related to the fact that batterers isolated some battered women by controlling their access to financial resources. According to Davis and Kraham (1995) those women who are economically dependent upon their abusers are more likely to experience serious injury. They have no other means of economic support. However, in some situations, men may be economically dependent upon their intimate partners; this may be the case among low-income men. Researchers have found a connection between domestic violence and women's increased human capital such as education and higher incomes.²⁸ Thus, violence may be present whether a woman is economically dependent upon a man or he is economically dependent upon her. In the latter instance, women may utilize welfare or need to continue their use of assistance in order to separate from abusers and to set up independent households.

²⁸ Raphael (2000) cites a range of studies illustrating these points drawing on research from forthcoming work including Riger and Krieglstein, and Brush.

According to reported incidents of violence Black women are at much greater risk of non-lethal, intimate violence²⁹ and the average annual rate of victimization from 1994 to 1996 for Black women was 12 per 1,000 compared to 8.2 per 1000 for White women (U.S. Justice Department 1998). In fact, Black women experience intimate partner violence at a rate of 35 percent higher than White females. They also experience intimate partner violence at a rate of 22 percent higher than women of other races/ethnicities (Rennison and Welchans 2000). However, very few studies specifically examine the use of welfare by poor Black and other women of color victimized by violence. There is little data examining race, income and violence in an intersected analysis. Yet we know that Black women are victimized at greater rates than White women are, and we know that Black women are over-represented among those who are poor. Although the research points to an association between these variables, an analysis of the association is beyond the scope of this research. However, what this research does offer is a particularized view of managing poverty -- within the context of welfare reform and the impact it is having on one sub-group -- battered Black women.

In this chapter, I present the stories of three women to illustrate the connection between violence and welfare use. Their stories demonstrate the complexities of women's need for welfare and point to why the use of assistance was an important factor to help them achieve freedom from violence or fear of violence. Their stories are followed by brief biographies of all the women who were part of this study. The biographies provide some insight into the circumstances that put some women in contact with social services.

²⁹ Non-lethal forms of intimate violence include rape, assault, and aggravated assault.

This is followed by a discussion of the Black study participants' perceptions of welfare. In amplifying the women's words, we also gain insight as to why they use welfare, challenging many of the myths about Black women's irresponsible use of government support.

Sherita

When we met in 1998, Sherita's nose was broken and one eye was stitched up. Shortly before coming to the shelter, she had attempted to extricate herself from a battering relationship that she had been in since early 1998. Sherita comes from a working class family and was raised in the Bronx, New York. Her father was a factory worker and her mother a homemaker. She had a "good childhood, was well fed, well clothed and really didn't want for anything." Although good, her childhood did include some disruptions that she did not like. When she was eight, Sherita's parents decided that she and her two brothers, Mike and Andre, would live with their paternal grandparents in New Jersey. They would see their parents on weekends. This decision was made because Sherita's parents wanted the children to be able to attend a better school than the one in their neighborhood. Several years later, after her mother and father divorced, the children came back to live with their mother. The divorce did not interfere with Sherita's relationship with her father. Throughout high school, she visited her dad and grew fond of his new girlfriend. Sherita's mother struggled to make ends meet with intermittent assistance from welfare. In fact, her mother used welfare for a total of three

years. Sherita sometimes laughs at this, because her mother now works for the New York State Department of Social Services.

Sherita completed high school and went to community college for one year, although she had been looking forward to attending college along with her friends:

I really wanted to go to Howard University in Washington, D.C. I thought I'd be a social worker or something. I had visited my aunt down there and thought she could help me. But my mother and grandmother did not want me to be far away from home. I was really mad about that.

Shortly after graduation, Sherita began to date her best friend's brother, Lawrence. They were married one year later when she was 19 years old. They had a good time during most of their marriage. All the while they were married Sherita worked as an administrative assistant for a small company. Although Lawrence drank sometimes and did some social gambling, they had money in the bank and a "very nicely furnished apartment." Sherita neither drank nor gambled. She was family-oriented and really wanted to sustain a positive home environment. She loved Lawrence and was very drawn to his close knit family. The two would make an annual sojourn down south every summer for Lawrence's family reunions where Sherita was welcomed with open arms.

Things went well until the last two years of their 19-year marriage when Lawrence started staying out all night and spending money recklessly. He was not physically abusive, just irresponsible. She was not interested in "going down" -- she worked too hard. So, in 1997, Sherita ended the marriage:

I had finally had it with my drunken, gambling husband. I realized he was not going to grow up after 19 years of being together. I left him knowing it would be hard and knowing that I would be alone, which is something I never was. I started my new life in a new location.

The new location turned out to be Dutchess County where her brother Mike had moved several years ago, after his marriage to Elena. When Sherita made the decision to leave her husband, her brother Mike came to the Bronx and packed her up. He drove her car with her belongings to his home in Beacon and she lived with him and his wife for a few months. Because she had worked as an administrative assistant, Sherita quickly got a job at IBM. That was a primary motivation for Sherita's moving to Dutchess in the first place, as opposed to anywhere else.

IBM had begun to rehire "line" staff, but mostly as a flexible labor source. Sherita was hired as a long-term temporary worker with no health benefits. She drove to the office each day and took her lunch to save money. Things went well for several months and then Mike's wife, Elena, began to make Sherita feel very unwelcome. Around this same time Sherita's car broke down and she was unable to get it repaired. IBM was located about 25 minutes by car from the house and her brother never offered to help her fix the car, nor to take her to work. Transportation was a problem because by the time Sherita got off from work there were no buses going back to Beacon. A friendship forged with a woman on the job was Sherita's saving grace, allowing her to work for a little while longer. But tension continued to mount between Sherita and Elena:

I would come home at night, hungry after a hard day's work. There would be Elena in the kitchen cleaning the oven or mopping the floor, at like 11:00 p.m. She was going out of her way to make me unwelcome. That's why I moved into a rooming house. That's where I met Joey.

According to Sherita, she and Joey met early in 1998. They were drawn to each other because they were both lonely. Joey was on medical leave from his job with Metro North and did little to pass the time. They started hanging out and ultimately moved in

together. Shortly after the move, Joey began to use cocaine. Around the same time, Sherita was let go from her temporary job at IBM. Sherita went to the Dutchess County Department of Social Services in Poughkeepsie to get job placement and emergency assistance. She was sent out on interviews, but the jobs paid so little she did not think they were worth it. She wanted an administrative assistant position but those were few and far between. Sherita landed another temporary job, located in an area where there was no access to transportation on the weekends. When she was called to work one weekend, Sherita could not get to the office and she was fired. That is the reason Sherita was sanctioned by DCDSS. The firing was assumed to be her fault.

I couldn't get to the job because of transportation reasons. When I went back to DSS to get emergency funds, they (DSS) said I wasn't eligible because I refused to work. But that was not true, I *couldn't* work. The job called for me to work on Sunday and they needed me on Sunday, but I couldn't get there. DCDSS sanctioned me for 90 days, so I couldn't get any food stamps or nothing.

Joey started fighting with Sherita. She knew he was out of control because of his drug use and she confronted him. He was sneaking – going into the bathroom and staying there for long periods.

I noticed things he would do like go into the bathroom and stay there. Or if I gave him what little money I had, I wondered “why isn't there any food?” He couldn't hide it no more. He would give me money to hold and before the night was out, he would want the money back. He belittled me a lot, saying stuff like ‘I'm the one giving you a place to stay.’ Or, one minute we could be talking like you and I right now, sitting across from each other. He'd be getting high, he'd be calm, cool and collected. And then he would snap. I might go into the bathroom and he'd follow me, close the door and next thing I know I'm on the floor. He'd be holding on to my neck screamin' at me ‘WHOSE TAKIN' CARE OF YOU?’ I had to get out of the apartment. I had started staying with the neighbors because he was being abusive. I had to get out of there. I went back to Social Services again to see if they could help me find a place.

I go back to DSS and see this worker. I forget her name. She started off by being nice to me. But when we got to her office she turned on me. She said to me 'So you can't keep a job?' [She was referring to the job that Sherita had lost]. I said to her, "It must be that file, 'cause that file is all wrong." I said to her, "If we're going to talk about that, I might as well leave." I knew the sanction and the job thing was in that file. But I'm more than that file. We never talked about why I was there in the first place or that I checked the box saying I was in a violent relationship. *I mean I had checked the box on the form and she just didn't pick up on it.* All we talked about was the job I got let go from. So I had to tell her I was homeless living in some people's apartment in order to get some help.

They did not help her. Meanwhile Sherita found a job that she could get to by bus. She started working at K-Mart, making \$120 a week before taxes. It was not much but it was all she could make and the low wages were a barrier to moving. Sherita would have to wait until the sanction from DCDSS was lifted. After that she planned to apply for social services to help her out with rent. Sherita continued to stay at the neighbors' apartment and hoped Joey would not bother her. He did and harassed her frequently. Sherita became tired of living with the couple and wanted to get her own place quickly.

After the three-month sanction, in September of 1998, she again went to DSS for emergency assistance. She was given a budget of \$350 for an apartment. The worker gave her listings for apartments and Sherita found one. Social Services had to make sure the place was inhabitable before they would let her move into it. It was just a matter of a week or so before she could move. In that time, Joey beat Sherita, she explained, "almost beyond recognition."

Sherita came to the shelter and again had to file for social services to ensure payment to the shelter. She went with an advocate who informed the caseworker that Sherita had checked the box for domestic violence on her application. The caseworker said Sherita never checked it. In truth, the caseworker had overlooked this each time

Sherita had come to social services. This time, when she reviewed the paperwork, there it was, checked off. The caseworker looked scared to death and apologized to Sherita. "I think I could have sued them for what happened. There is a woman on site at DSS especially for that [the Domestic Violence Liaison] and I never got to see her." The caseworker's apology was too late. Sherita's nose was broken, one eye was swollen shut -- she could not see. Joey had punched Sherita in the mouth, loosened several of her teeth and split her lip. On her shelter intake form it is noted, "She has injuries from the beating that will need further attention." The attention required was, in fact, surgery. The reapplication was approved and Sherita received Medicaid, a housing stipend, food stamps and a cash benefit. Since she had lost the other apartment, Sherita searched and found another into which she moved in November of 1998.

Sherita initiated her relationship with DCDSS for two overlapping reasons; lack of resources and the need to get away from Joey. With a job that paid so little, there was no way for her to secure an apartment. Sherita was at risk and, in her estimation, welfare could help save her life.

Clemmie

Clemmie looked nervous as she stepped off the train at the Yonkers, New York's MetroNorth Train Station. She constantly checked over her shoulder and held tightly on to her daughter's arm. We walked down the steps to the street leading to my car. A very handsome young man walked by and 19 year-old Shawnice commented to her mother,

Clemmie, “Homey,³⁰ don’t look so bad, do he?” “No he sure don’t,” Clemmie laughed, “but you don’t need to be getting’ up with nobody.”

It was a cold November day shortly before Thanksgiving and as we drove through the streets of Yonkers, Thanksgiving displays were in the windows of shops. Clemmie spotted a number of establishments that cashed checks and disbursed welfare payments. She thought any of them would allow her to use her benefit card to get her cash and food stamps using the Payomatic machine.³¹ “There’s one!” she said. I pulled over really fast and she jumped out of the car and ran inside the store. Shawnice immediately locked the door while saying, “We gotta be safe.” In what seemed like less than a minute, Clemmie knocked on the window for us to let her in. “They won’t take the card, they say I got to go to the borough the card was issued in, in order to get my money.” We drove from Yonkers to a check-cashing place in the borough in which she used to live. Clemmie got out of the car and, again, Shawnice quickly locked the door. This time Clemmie successfully carried out her transaction and returned counting her cash. As she got in, she thanked me for picking her up at the train station. As we drove back toward Yonkers, Clemmie said aloud, “I wonder what time the next train leaves for Poughkeepsie.” I looked at the time and realized that it would leave from Yonkers in five minutes and we would never make it.

Rather than have them wait an hour for the next train, I offered to drive Clemmie and Shawnice back up to the shelter. Although it was cold, it was a beautiful fall day, a

³⁰ Homey is slang for “homeboy,” someone with whom there is some sort of shared identity.

³¹ Payomatic is the electronic transfer system, similar to an automatic teller machine that permits social service recipients to access their benefits.

good day for a relaxing ride for a woman on the run. Clemmie seemed relieved she would not have to go back to Poughkeepsie on the train. Shawnice quickly settled in the back seat, pulled her coat over her head and fell asleep. This ride began a one-and-a-half-year relationship of revelations that I never expected. There are stories about Clemmie and her family that cannot be told because her experience with violence is so marked by uniqueness that anyone who knows anything about her might be able to figure out who she is and, therefore, where she is. That which is told has been altered to protect her and her family from any potential danger.

Clemmie is a 38 year-old African-American woman. Prior to coming to Grace Smith House she lived in one of the poorest congressional districts in New York State. She has four children; two daughters, Shawnice, 19 and Lena, 18; and two sons, James and Henry who are 15 and 9, respectively. She is not married and lives only with her children.

Clemmie grew up in a family of five children. The children; Doretha, Jake, Sonia, Clemmie, and Angie all lived with their mother. When Clemmie was 16, her mother became ill and sent the kids to live with her eldest daughter, Doretha, who became a "mother" to Clemmie and her siblings. Doretha, who worked in the finance industry, was financially stable and moved her siblings/children into her home on Long Island, where they all lived comfortably. Because Clemmie was such a responsible young woman, she was elevated to the role of co-parent. She was the only person with house keys -- none of her other siblings were given a set of keys. They all had to organize their arrival at home, according to Clemmie's schedule. Being who she was and is, no one ever had to worry;

when Clemmie said she would be home, she'd be there. Very little exciting happened in the three years Clemmie lived on Long Island.

At age 19 Clemmie became pregnant. Not wanting to burden Doretha, she moved from her home on Long Island into an apartment that accepted Section 8 subsidies that she lived in for 19 years when she was forced to leave due to violence. Clemmie's first three children all have the same father, Allan. The last child is by Tony. Clemmie tried to negotiate positive relations between her children and their fathers. Sometimes this was possible with Allan, but to a lesser degree with Tony. But even without a partner, Clemmie did an excellent job raising her children, based on their scholastic achievements.

Clemmie remained extremely close to her family and taught her children the value of family. Often they would all spend weekends at her "mother's" house. Never having been able to attend college, Clemmie instilled in her children the importance of education. She spent considerable time working with them on their homework and fostered every spec of genius she observed. Her three youngest children have all been successful students achieving scholarships to elite private schools or being placed in accelerated programs in public schools. "The children were on the right track," in Clemmie's opinion. They were independent and very focused on their education, except Shawnice who was bored by school and although she did well, dropped out.

Clemmie was the center of her children's life and they, hers. As the children grew older, they did not need her as much as they once did. Clemmie felt there was something missing in her life. She wanted to be with someone who needed her. This is the reason that she became involved with a man whose name she never mentioned the entire time I knew her. She only referred to him as her "batterer" or, "he." As we drove up the

Taconic Parkway, Clemmie told me the details of how she came to the shelter. She did so with tears streaming down her face and in a soft voice.

I've known him for quite some time, almost 12 years. We had been friends and we saw each other around the way. We started hanging out together about a year ago. In the beginning he was very nice. He would invite me over and we would go the movies. He would get tickets for my boys to go to basketball games. But within the last three months, he's been really obsessive, yelling at me in the street pushing me, and one time in front of the kids, he took out a gun and put it in my mouth.

Clemmie was terribly afraid that "he" would harm her or her children. He was abusive in from her childrens' friends. Clemmie was disturbed because he threatened to hurt her, family members and friends.

I told my family about him, but everybody was afraid of what he was gonna do. He scared my children. So it got to the point that when he would come over and ring my bell, I'd put on my clothes, meet him downstairs and tell him I was just on the way to his house and we would leave. That way he wouldn't do nothing in front of the kids.

He started checking up on me, calling my "mother's" house to make sure I was there. He couldn't call me at home 'cause he never knew I had a phone. Whenever he would come over, I would hide the phone, so he never knew.

He got friends who work for social services in New York City. He always knew when I got my food stamps or my check and would come over asking for money. His friend would tell him. That's why I had to use my benefit card someplace else, so he wouldn't be able to trace me. That's why I needed you to pick me up so he wouldn't know where I was living by where I used my card."

The more Clemmie tried to extricate herself from the relationship, the more violent he became. She would stay at friends' houses for long periods so "he" could not find her. One of her sisters had to move so that "he" wouldn't continue to harass her about Clemmie's whereabouts. Other family members, including her "mother," told her

not to call "until this whole thing got straight." Her younger sister Angie, who lived in the same neighborhood as "he" did, put up a pretense of hating Clemmie, so he wouldn't hurt Angie or her children.

Clemmie and the children came to Grace Smith House in the fall of 1998. "He" had asked her to sell some drugs and she refused. He got angry and started hitting her. His anger increased over the next few days. To keep distance between the two of them, she decided not to answer any knocks on the door.

A couple of nights after he asked me to sell, me and all the kids were at home and he come banging on the door. I told the kids to be quiet so he wouldn't know we were there. He was screaming at the door for me to let him in and was he trying to break it down. Finally the building security called the police and they came to take him away. When they did, he was yelling 'Bitch I'm gonna kill you and your kids.' I called Victims Services, a number my sister gave me. They told me there was room up here, [at GSH] so we got on the train with no money. I had to ask the conductor to let us on for free and we came up here in the middle of the night.

She was glad to be safe living at the shelter but the hardest part of being there was the absolute lack of connection with her family. The estrangement was gut wrenching and sometimes Clemmie talked about killing herself because she missed them so much.

Clemmie was on social services for a number of years. She is one of the 41.6 percent of Black women in the study who said they were on public assistance at the time we met, due to domestic violence. She was a long-term user but the complexities of her life made her utilization necessary. Clemmie started receiving social services when Henry was five because he had severe asthma. Prior to that, she worked in construction and as a salesperson at a large department store. She only used welfare because she wanted to be home in case Henry had an attack.

Clemmie's story represents a contradiction in what is believed about welfare mothers. First, although a long-term user, it was primarily because of her son's illness. Second, she has not raised "pathological" children whose futures lie in being on welfare. Her ability to stay home and raise them the way she saw fit contributed to their achievement, in her opinion. Clemmie's current use of welfare is not nefarious and one could not consider her to be lazy. Within the first three weeks of living at the shelter, she worked off the books for a woman who ran a day-care program out of her home. She did so because she needed some income to pay for her daughter to return to college. Unfortunately, the work was sporadic. If the woman wanted to pay Clemmie that day, she would call her. If she didn't want to pay her, she would not call. Clemmie was not economically dependent upon her batterer. In fact, he expressed his control over her through his economic abuse of her funds, she needed continued assistance to rebuild a home for herself and her children.

Jocelyn

It was very hot one July morning. The only reprieve from the heat was in the shade of the large trees in front of the shelter, which was where Jocelyn and her daughter Jenny, were heading. Jenny was holding a jar covered with a lid that had holes punched in it.

The holes were to give the caterpillar inside some air. Jocelyn, a White woman who is in her late 30s, had been watching the caterpillar for several days and knew it was about ready to go through its metamorphosis and become a butterfly. She invited me to

come outside with her and Jenny, her daughter. We sat out there for about an hour-and-a-half. Although I had done Jocelyn's intake to the shelter a month before this day, we had rarely spoken since then. Jocelyn was remorseful and isolated herself from the other women and the shelter staff. As we all sat quietly, Jocelyn held an almost one-sided conversation. Neither Jenny nor I asked her questions. Jocelyn just randomly reminisced as if no one was in her presence.

Jocelyn was born in a small town in Upstate New York. The house in which she grew up had a lot of land surrounding it, which as she explains, is the reason she loves nature. As a child she spent quite a bit of time catching caterpillars and watching their transformations. The process mesmerized her. Her love of nature extended to other areas; Jocelyn loved to horseback ride. There was such a sense of freedom riding horses and she "begged her parents to let her take lessons at the stables nearby their home." That was where she met the man who was her first husband and the father of her two children, Joshua, age 20 and Jenny, age 13. The other thing Jocelyn loved to do was paint. "I love to draw nature scenes, leaves, trees and flowers. She [Jenny] doesn't paint as much I did. I was really good at it, but I probably won't be able to do it anymore, with all this nerve damage."

Jocelyn looked sad as she spoke of what she might not be able to do anymore while sitting in the shade of the tree just in front of the shelter. She talked about how she regretted having left the "real" country, as she called it, down in Virginia, and moving to Dutchess County. If she had stayed she might not ever have met Gus.

In early July, Jocelyn was in a "motorcycle accident," at least that is what she told me when I did her intake. Hospital personnel, in collaboration with the YWCA's Battered

Women's Services Program, had called Grace Smith House on Jocelyn's behalf to see if there was any room available for her. The "accident" involved Gus, Jocelyn's husband of one year. He ended up with a scratch on his arm. She ended up in the hospital with her jaw wired shut, head trauma, dilated eyes, a broken arm and seizures. No one really believed that there had been an accident, primarily because as shelter and hospital staff coordinated Jocelyn's release from the hospital, she had to be discharged in secrecy. The reason for the secrecy was that Gus had stalked Jocelyn during her recovery.

Gus was a police officer whom Jocelyn had known for a year before they married. He was charming and handsome, she said. Gus wanted Jocelyn to be a homemaker but Jocelyn had other plans. Although Jocelyn had graduated from high school, she decided to go back to school and get a college degree. She asked Gus to pay for her classes, which she did not think would be a problem. After all, he made about \$50,000 - \$60,000 (with overtime) a year and owned the house they lived in, which she believed was almost paid off. But Gus refused.

Jocelyn's desire to go to school was so great that she found a job cleaning homes to pay her way. Around this same period, Gus began to be very intimidating. Through wired teeth, Jocelyn told me how Gus really frightened her. He would yell if she looked at him. "If he doesn't like what I cook, he squeezes my face so hard my jaws ache." Sometimes Jocelyn, Jenny and Gus were all watching television and Gus would just ball up his fist, and shake it in Jocelyn's face. Other times he would grab her arm and leave marks.

Gus' abuse was not limited to Jocelyn. On several occasions he pinned Jenny up against the wall by holding her arms above her head. He also directed random outbursts

toward Jenny that frightened her so much, she no longer brought her friends over to the house. After each incident, Gus would say he did not remember doing anything to either Jocelyn or Jenny. Jocelyn wanted them out of that house before things got any worse.

To complete Jocelyn's intake, I had to get a copy of her identification. She asked me to look in her wallet for her license, which I did. As I pulled it out, she said, "I used to look good. That photo was taken a year ago." It was startling how different Jocelyn looked sitting in front of me, than in the photograph. The license photograph showed a smiling, cheerful woman. At that moment, she appeared much older than her 37 years, circles under her eyes, a shadow of a person. Jocelyn had been slowly beaten down.

Jocelyn had no source of income, now that she was not living with Gus and unable to work. She was not eligible for unemployment because she had been working off the books cleaning houses. Jocelyn needed welfare.

The Women of Grace Smith House

Each of the stories described above highlight the role that violence played in the lives of the three women, making social services a necessity. Violence and economic stress, in fact, made welfare a reasonable resource. The stories show the many-sided factors that connect violence to welfare utilization. Sherita was the only person who had been on welfare growing up. And then, it was just for three years. As an adult, she required assistance to become independent. Clemmie never had welfare, although she did live in a subsidized apartment. Her use of welfare began under the stress of her son's illness. Prior to that, she had worked. The longevity of her use, six years, was connected

to her desire to stay home and take care of her son. Although her youngest son was now nine, because of the violence in her life, she needed welfare to stay alive and take care of her children. In Joceyln's case, her need for welfare emerged out of having been somewhat economically dependent upon her husband. There was no feasible way for her to go to work given that she was on anti-seizure medication. Violence and economic need made welfare a reasonable resource for each woman.

Sherita, Clemmie and Jocelyn are three of the 22 women who were part of this research and three of the 125 women served by Grace Smith House the year I conducted the study. I interviewed 22 women; 13 were Black, 4 White, 3 Latina, 1 Asian and 1 Indian. As Black women, Sherita and Clemmie, represented 33 percent of the shelter's total population (Grace Smith House 2000). As a White woman, Jocelyn represented 41 percent of the shelter's population.

The average adult shelter resident stayed at Grace Smith House for 23 days. She was between the ages of 30 and 39, White, originally from Dutchess County, with an income of less than \$9,999 at her time of entry to the shelter. She had less than 12 years of education and was more likely to be single than any other marital status.

The average study participant was between 30 and 39 and Black. She was just as poor as the larger Grace Smith House client base with an income of less than \$9,999 at the time of shelter entry. Most, 64 percent, of the women interviewed were single and 58.3 percent had children. Less than half, 36 percent, had a high school diploma. In spite of the common factor of violence and economic need among many of the study participants and shelter residents, there were differences between the Black women in the study and the overall shelter residents that deserve mention. In comparison to the overall

shelter population, Black women in the study were more likely to have a high school degree/GED or some vocational training than the other women. Thirty-six percent of all the study participants (n=8) had experienced sexual abuse as a child. Among the Black study participants (a total of 13), 54 percent (n=7) had experienced sexual abuse as a child. This data was not available from the Grace Smith House records.

The characteristics of all the women in this study in comparison to the client population of the shelter as a whole in 1999 are outlined in Table 2 on the following page. The total Black female population of the shelter is similar to the Black population of Poughkeepsie overall, 33 percent and 31.4 percent, respectively. Poughkeepsie has a total of 11,874 households, of which 17 percent were households headed by women. Grace Smith House data does not capture whether or not a woman is the head of household, but rather focuses on marital status.

There are other limitations in making comparisons between the shelter residents and the overall Poughkeepsie population. Data for Poughkeepsie is not organized by gender. For example, of the total households in Poughkeepsie (11,874), 18 percent had incomes of less than \$9,999. What is unknown is the percent of the total households with incomes under \$9,999 headed by women. Among the shelter population, a higher percentage of women are poor than the general population. Seventy-four percent of the women had incomes of zero to \$9,999 at the time they entered the shelter.

Table 2. 1999 Comparative Demographics: Grace Smith House Clients and Study Participants

	GSH (N)	GSH (%)*	STUDY (N)	STUDY (%)
Total Women	125	100%	22	100%
AGE GROUP				
<=19	10	8%	4	18%
20-29	45	36%	4	18%
30-39	48	38%	11	50%
40-49	20	16%	2	9%
50-59	2	2%	1	5%
Unknown	--	--	--	--
ETHNICITY				
White	51	41%	4	18%
Black	41	33%	13	59%
Latina	22	18%	3	14%
Asian	2	2%	1	5%
Other	9	7%	1	5%
INCOME LEVEL				
None	39	31%	2#	9%
Under 9,999	66	53%	13	59%
10-14,999	14	11%	1	5%
15-21,999	3	2%	2	9%
22-29,000	0	0	0	0
30,000+	3	2%	0	14%
Unknown	0	0	1	5%
CITIZENSHIP				
U.S. Citizen	109	87%	13	59%
Documented	11	9%	6	27%
Undocumented	5	4%	1	5%
Unclear	0	0	2	9%
EDUCATION				
<12 years	46	37%	4	18%
H.S./GED	34	27%	8	36%
Some College	23	18%	2	9%
College Grad	17	14%	2	9%
Vocational	3	2%	5	23%
Unknown	2	2%	1	5%
MARITAL STATUS				
Single	66	53%	14	64%
Married	39	31%	5	23%
Separated	9	7%	3	14%
Divorced	8	6%	0	0%
Widowed	3	2%	0	0%
COUNTY / ORIGIN				
Dutchess	84	67%	13	59%
New York City	23	18%	6	27%
Westchester	5	4%	0	0%
Out of State	3	2%	2	9%
All Others	10	8%	1	5%

*Percentages may add up to more than 100 due to rounding

#Both individuals were students and had no reportable income

Source of Grace Smith House Data - 1999 Shelter Statistics Report

Biographical Sketches

The statistical data in no way accurately depict the women who are living at Grace Smith House. What follows are biographical sketches of the study participants, including Sherita, Clemmie and Jocelyn. The names that are starred (*) represent women whose stories are more fully examined in this dissertation.

Michelle is a 22-year-old mother of one. She is Black/Hispanic and grew up in Brooklyn in a working class family. Although her father used drugs, her mother kept the family financially solvent. She feels like she grew up in a “good old American family.” Growing up, Michelle recalls being on social services only for a short period, when her father was unemployed for about a year. The father of Michelle’s child, Al, was a drug dealer and user. On at least one occasion she cooperated with the police to have Al arrested. Michelle has had a variety of jobs to ensure that her child would not want for anything.

Susan is a 36-year-old White woman with 6 children. She has worked primarily in the service industry at fast food restaurants. She has been in and out of shelters since 1992 and recently crossed state lines to get away from her abuser. Her batterer stalked her in the state she originally came from, forcing her to come to New York to get away from him. Susan has been very engaged with systems for most of her adult life ranging from child welfare agencies, the Division of Youth and Family Services, criminal court, family courts and housing authorities. She wants the best for her children and has worked hard to confront the sexual abuse that she and some of her children experienced. Susan is illiterate, probably due to a learning disability that had not been dealt with effectively. Her lack of literacy skills has meant her employment options must be limited to those that do not require her to read.

Joanne* is a 28-year-old African-American mother. She has one child, a boy named JD who 5 years old. She is pregnant with her second child. She has worked mostly as a cashier and administrative assistant. Joanne grew up in a middle class household, her father, a minister, and her mother, a homemaker. She was sexually and physically abused by her father, which consequently caused her to be placed in a group home at age 15. At 18 Joanne attended community college, where she met the father of her children. When they first met, he was very good to her and later in the relationship became jealous. Joanne was never on social services until she left the father of her children.

Jennifer is a single African-American, 23-year-old woman. She works in children’s services and grew up living with “a strict father,” her mother and her sister. Her parents separated when she was 11 but she has a good relationship with both of them. Jennifer had been living on her own since she was 18. She had been with her boyfriend for just

about a year when she came to the shelter. Jennifer was very independent and did not need him for money, which she believes, is the reason that he beat her. Her only involvement with social services was as a result of being battered. She wanted help so she could continue her education.

Sherita* is a single, African-American, 38-year-old woman. She grew up living with her mother, stepfather and two brothers. Although she feels she has superficial relationships with her mother and other family members, Sherita often bears the emotional brunt of taking care of them. Sherita was married at age 19 and left her husband after 19 years due to his gambling and drinking problem. Her batterer is someone she met after she moved to Dutchess County. Her need for social services began shortly after he started beating her.

Clemmie* has four children and is a 38-year-old, African-American woman. Her daughter Shawnice is 19 and, Lena is 18. She has two sons, James 15 and Henry 9. Clemmie, was not on social services as a child but has cycled off and on since the birth of her youngest son who has severe asthma. She was never in a battering relationship. The man she met has alienated her family from her and his threats to kill her and her children forced her to move to Dutchess County from New York City. When she left New York City, Clemmie had to file for a new Social Security number because her batterer had friends who worked for social services and was able to track her down.

Angela is originally from Spain. She is 35 and was married to a nuclear physicist. The household income was over \$75,000 per year. She has one son Elmo, 13 and one daughter Eugenia, age 16 from two other relationships. She has never received public assistance and at the time I interviewed her, she still was not getting assistance. Angela and her former husband met during his vacation in her native Spain. He pursued her and ultimately convinced her to move to the United States with her children and marry him. He isolated Angela and would not allow her to work. He also exposed himself to the children.

Joelle is a 20-year-old, African-American woman who is originally from Madison, Wisconsin. Since she graduated from high school, she has worked mostly as a housekeeper. She was in college but had to leave because of lack of money. As a child, Joelle was adopted. She told me that she experienced sexual assault five days per week from the age of 5 to 8 stating, "It was always in the house, a cousin, an adopted sibling – someone." She came to Poughkeepsie to see what it was like and met a guy who beat her almost all the time.

Solange* is 42 years old. She has 2 children. She completed college and has worked in social services most of her adult life. She is African-American and has been in a battered women's shelter five times. Solange's husband was economically dependent upon her because he kept losing jobs. They had been married for 8 years and he was a cook. She did not find out until much later in their relationship that her husband was not able to read, which was why he rarely kept jobs. Solange spent some of her time as a teen in a

foster home where she was sexually abused. The abuse has manifested in a particular itself disorder that Solange rarely discusses. She has been engaged with social services as a client for much of her adult life.

Leslie* is a 19-year-old, pregnant, African-American woman. She was in the army when she found out she was pregnant. She has an estranged relationship with her mother who used to beat her. Leslie's boyfriend became abusive shortly after he found out she was pregnant. She chose to leave him and subsequently came to the shelter. She is very committed to finishing her education and being a good mother to her child.

Martha is a 19-year-old, African-American woman. She originally came to Dutchess County from Chicago with a young man she met while there. He turned out to be a drug dealer and was using her to sell drugs. He beat her in a hotel room after he planted drugs on her when the police stopped his car. She has lived most of her life in foster care and was sexually abused as a child.

Khadija is 19 years old, and attends college. Her parents are immigrants from India and are Muslim. They have been quite strict with Khadija often following her to and from school. She has an African-American boyfriend whom her mother despises. Her parents tend to use severe punishment against her when she does not act according to their wishes. Her mother and father hit her, which is why she came to the shelter. Her immigrant status was unclear.

Iliana* is 23 years old. Iliana is an Afro-Latina, born in the Dominican Republic. She came to the United States at the age of 18. Iliana has three children and had just given birth to the third child when we met. The father of Iliana's two oldest children was emotionally and verbally abusive to her, so she left him. The father of her third child also "showed signs of being abusive," so she ended their relationship.

Jocelyn is a 36-year-old White woman who grew up in Pennsylvania. She has two children, one 20, and the other 13. Her husband, who is not the father of her children, constantly made threatening remarks to her and the youngest daughter. After being hospitalized as a result of a car accident, Jocelyn began to fear for her life. Her husband was stalking her at the hospital and began threatening hospital personnel.

Gloria* is a 40-year-old African-American woman who has several children. She has had an alcohol abuse problem throughout her life and had been at the shelter several times before I met her there. She was beaten and thrown out of an apartment she shared with a boyfriend.

Trudi* is in her 30s. She came to the United States from Ghana. She has one birth daughter and an "adopted" daughter whom she and her husband Sam brought with them when they left Ghana. The husband has transformed the nature of his relationship with the "adopted" daughter so that she now is treated as a co-wife. Trudi is on social services while she is attending school to finish her Bachelor's degree in computer programming.

Her husband has a full scholarship to a private college as well. She has a life-threatening illness.

Wenny is a 42-year-old Chinese immigrant. She and her husband, who are legal permanent residents, have done well for themselves since immigrating, raising two children and owning a business. He recently began to threaten her and brandished a gun several times in front of the children. She went to court to secure an order of protection. While there, she saw some business clients (including the judge) and was devastated.

Drita is a 60-year-old woman from Eastern Europe. She has five adult children and many grandchildren. She left her husband because he had beaten her for almost 40 years. She does not speak English very well and although she is a legal permanent resident, has had tremendous difficulty in securing any type of benefits.

Elizabeth* who is 39, was born in Jamaica. She has dual citizenship in the United States and Great Britain. She has two children by her husband, whom she met in college. She has been separated from him for almost four years because he was abusive. She went on public assistance after the birth of her youngest child who, at birth, was hospitalized for almost a month. This same child seems to have learning disabilities as well as severe asthma. Since the separation, her husband frequently threatens her and has banged her head against walls and doors.

Yvonne is from South America. She is 37 and has two children, both of whom were born in the United States. At the time of our interview, her immigrant status was unclear. Yvonne's husband grossly mistreated the older child, who was not his, by locking him in closets and suspending him upside down when he misbehaved.

Josie* is a young, White woman in her 20s with one daughter, Shaneva. Shaneva's father, Luke, had promised that Josie and he would be married but the wedding never took place. Josie left Luke because he was trying to control her every move and had begun to hit her.

Linda is a 19-year-old Black woman from the Caribbean, with one son. She is estranged from her family because they abused her. Linda was never able to access social services because of her immigrant status. Her parents and her boyfriend battered her. While at the shelter, she was depressed and had gynecological health problems that made it very difficult to do any kind of planning for her departure from the shelter.

The biographies of these women are very condensed versions of much longer life histories. Even in these condensed versions of their life histories, we see some of the details that may define women's engagements with a range of social service institutions.

While these women do not represent all battered women, the particularity of their experiences can provide insight into some of the needs of battered women as they try to establish different lives from the ones they had. For each one, vulnerability to poverty or increased poverty was imminent.

Black Battered Women's Perceptions of Welfare

Overall, 27 percent (n=6) of all the study participants had been on welfare at some point in their lives. Four of the six were Black. Of the Black women in the study, (n=13), 31 percent (n=4) had been on welfare at some point in their lives.

Although more of the Black women, 69 percent, (n=9) had only been on welfare as a result of their recent experience with violence (in other words had not been long-term users), they were, in no way, immune from the negative images of Black women on welfare. In fact, they were very clear about how they were perceived because they were battered and were on or needed to be on welfare. The women's feelings about social services were not based only on their interactions with the Dutchess County Department of Social Services, however their sentiments were exacerbated by the way they were treated when they went to DCDSS. The women understood how society at large and some social service workers felt about them and they made every effort to transform these ideas and images.

The anger the women expressed about their interactions with social services emerged from the informal conversations and observations. I never asked the women directly how they were treated by caseworkers. Rather, in describing the kinds of services they needed, their feelings surfaced. I paid attention to things that should have been said,

but were omitted. Billig (1995) suggests that analysis in texts should include the significance of omissions, things that should be said but are missing and “ordinaries” -- things that are too common to be noticed -- and are, therefore, left unsaid. For example, none of the women ever said that someone thought of her as a “welfare queen.” However, the way some described their conversations with the staff at the DCDSS, and based on meetings they had with the staff at which I was present, they defended themselves as if someone had called them a “welfare queen.” The ordinariness of the perception is so common that no one talked about it, but it informed their conversations. They would launch into lengthy explanations about how long they had been on social services and that they would only need it “for a minute.” The women would “read” the perceptions of social service staff without any direct reference having been made.

Another example is that women were typically not aware of the phrase “culture of poverty” connoting welfare use is passed down from parent to child, among other features. However, they were aware that the public and the staff of institutions perceived people receiving welfare caught up in an intergenerational cycle of welfare use. An analysis of my field notes reveals that neither the women nor their families had, generally, been on social services their whole lives. The “ordinaries” that emerged from the data suggest that the women experienced social service workers as believing they were long-term users of welfare.

The women who had ever received some form of social service assistance, remarked it was intermittent and the result of crisis. The Black women had typically been on welfare for one to three years, as children or teens and welfare was not a way of life for them. Some comments made were:

“I *DID NOT* (emphasis, hers) grow up on social services. We got it for one year, when my father was laid off.” Michelle

“I was taught assistance is not something you should build your life on. We never were on it.” Elizabeth

“ My mother was on SS for three years; she told us that it was something we *DID NOT* (emphasis, hers) want to be on – them making you cry and all that.” Sherita

“I wasn’t on it growin’ up, and I really don’t want it now.” Clemmie

The women offered unsolicited explanations of the circumstances of their utilization of welfare. Their reasons fell into three categories: As children, they were on social services because 1) a sibling was ill; 2) their father left their mother and/or battered her, so she left him; and/or 3) their parent was unemployed for a short period of time. Only two women had been engaged with social services continuously from childhood. “I been in the system my whole life. I know it ‘cause of children’s services and foster care, but I don’t wanna be on it now.” One reason this woman wants nothing to do with social services is that all her life she has felt the stinging gaze of caseworkers who looked at her, “like I was a drug addict or something.”

The way they were examined and questioned when at social services was painful for many of the women. They reported that they felt the disdain when at the Department of Social Services. Assumptions about the characteristics of women on welfare figured quite prominently in the questions they are asked in relation to their request for assistance. Leslie, for example, was angered by the implication of the questions she was asked about her pregnancy. She felt that the worker thought she was a teen-age, baby-

making machine. Iliana, a Latina, had similar feelings when her caseworker “found out” she was pregnant (see Chapter Five).

Women in the study used welfare for three main reasons: The first was due to a child's illness. Three of the women had cycled on and off welfare, because one or more of their children were sick. Prior to their children's illnesses all three women had worked and felt good about the jobs they had. Their use of social services was strategically organized to deal with the child's illness, which was severe enough that they wanted to be full-time caretakers. In each case the child had severe asthma. Two women reported:

“Look, I've always worked to keep my family together. I've had construction jobs, worked at department stores, whatever. After I had Henry and he became ill, I'd always get called to pick him up from school. I couldn't keep a job like that. So I had to be let go. Since I couldn't get unemployment, 'cause the job was off the books, I went on social services.” Clemmie

“I had a job as a community worker. I was good at it. But my child got sick, so I took unemployment. And when that ran out, I went on social services. I had to take care of my child.” Elizabeth

The three women who cycled were Black, representing 13.6 percent of the total women in the study and 23 percent of the Black women in the study.

The second reason Black women in the study utilized public assistance was because either they or their partners had lost their jobs temporarily. The women used public assistance to relieve the financial stress of being unemployed. The stress of limited resources resulted in an escalation of verbal and physical abuse, so public assistance actually helped them mediate two pressure points, economics and violence. However, in some instances, the women's partners used up the resources the women had acquired, such as food stamps or cash benefits, as quickly as they came in for their own

personal needs. From their perspectives, social services was critical in helping women manage the violence or the threat of violence in their lives.

“He ain’t had no job. So I had to go on. I used to get food stamps and WIC checks. He would steal them and sell them for cocaine. I was not having that. I had to take care of my kid. He couldn’t support the family.” Michelle.

“He wasn’t working, so I went to them to get help in 1997. I needed \$100 to get my car fixed so I could go to work. They didn’t give it to me, so I lost my job. Then he starts getting crazy. I had to go back to them to help me get out.” Sherita

“We were on it when he would lose his job, but that’s all. It wasn’t for long.” Iliana

Public Assistance was a mechanism to secure protection and increase the economic stability of the household always in relation to a very specific crisis.

The third reason the women accessed social services was a direct result of violence in their lives. At the point the women’s partners or ex-partners began engaging in abusive behavior, the women went to social services in an attempt to create a separate household. Fifty percent (n=11) of all the women in this research and 41.6 percent (n=5) of the Black women stated they were receiving public assistance as a result of violence. For three women in particular, social service utilization was a process in which they slowly became more involved over time in relation to the violence they experienced. These women had initiated their contact with social services in 1996, prior to the implementation of welfare reform almost two years before I met them. First, they had applied for food stamps and then utilized available training to increase their job market skills. In each case, they planned to draw on the assistance of social services in their

effort to access separate households. However, the violence in their lives escalated, creating a diversion from the original goal. This caused the women to have to rework their plans, making social services even more necessary.

Sometimes the women said that when the system worked, it was helpful because it could help them begin anew. However, not one woman *wanted* or *expected* to have a long-term relationship with the Department. But, as one woman stated, "A lot of us have real needs. But when we have need, we get looked at and treated badly. They don't do nothin' for you." This comment, that "social services don't do nothin' for you," although frequent, contradicted other sentiments. Over time, what they meant was revealed.

The three Black women with children and all of the single women felt that welfare reform exacerbated their sense of scarcity. The very fact that they *could* have their cases closed or their cash benefits reduced made them feel very vulnerable. The women did not believe there was not enough information available to help them understand exactly when their benefits might be reduced or eliminated. The reduction or elimination of funds always came without warning. Public assistance was "a help," but it was not comfortable. Even the women who were not imminently affected by case closure argued that "shutting a person out was only going to create more poverty because people are going to be in and out of employment, just like they always were."

There was tremendous resentment about how the "work first" approach compromised women's future ability to be gainfully employed. Lack of attention to education was a problem. The regulations do not support women who want to go to school to secure an Associates or Bachelors Degree. The women knew that getting ahead

is determined by whether or not one has a degree -- not a certificate as a personal care worker, but a degree that would sustain and advance them in the job market.

Finally, the women felt that going to social services was dehumanizing. They had to “fight for every piece of something,” and this wore them out. The fight led them to expect only the worst outcome so they seemed to always be ready for the next battle even if it never came. Face-to-face interviews were considered to be degrading, because stereotypes about poor people, Black people, and women who have experienced violence were most obvious during the interviews. The questions asked of women who had never received welfare, during the face-to-face interviews included their use of substances and criminal activities. The women felt the line of questioning placed them in categories that society had constructed about who was poor or in need -- Blacks. As one woman stated, “They think only we [Black people] use it.” Several single women vehemently argued how incredible it was that in a country as wealthy as the United States, only a person with children could get assistance. All of the young single women without children expressed a desire to go to school and each had made an inquiry at DCDSS about potential resources to reach that goal. They noted the system sent out a double message. As one young woman stated “They will only help you if you are pregnant or have a child of a certain age, but they hate you when you are or do.”

In this chapter, I show the complex interaction of violence and welfare use. Because women risked their lives if they stayed in their homes, so moving was the obvious choice. Yet dominant paradigms tend to stereotype women on welfare, relying on the logic of bad choices. Based on this logic, women are at fault. In the three stories and the biographies presented, we see some of the circumstances that required women to

rely on government assistance. We find that women cannot be stereotyped as lazy, incompetent, unmotivated, or perpetuating intergenerational welfare use. Further we find that there is no one narrative of their welfare use.

In each instance, the most recent use of welfare was for the purpose of independence and self-sufficiency; quite a contrary depiction to the personal deficit analysis used to castigate women on welfare. Each woman's story may serve the purpose of challenging negative frameworks that define what it means to use welfare. The challenges are found in the particularity of their experiences and in relation to the gendered reality of violence and poverty.

That said, elements of the women's stories are elaborated on in later chapters: social service staff/recipient dynamics; employment, training, child-care and housing. Many of these elements have a place on the path of most women's lives. Although these elements are treated discretely, in reality there are few fine distinctions or sharp cut offs that separate the dimensions. Rather, they blend together showing the complexity of battered women's needs.

CHAPTER 4

TERMS OF ENGAGEMENT: GOING TO SOCIAL SERVICES

Introduction

The processes of obtaining the basic requirements of everyday life for those who are poor or low income include a series of micro-steps involving multiple interactions with multiple institutions. Jones (1995) notes that "...to be poor means that one is dependent on institutional bureaucracies such as the welfare system, public housing authority, the health care system and the courts" (192). It was with these organizations, among others, that every woman in this study became involved and social services became the most relevant environment in which the women interacted. As such, interacting with agencies influenced behavior, relationships and states of mind (Jones 1995). It is within these complex institutional relationships, that power over women's lives is articulated. I take up this inquiry to contribute to Jones' (1995) observation that a more detailed analysis of the institutional arrangements entered into by poor and low income individuals is necessary. When a woman is poor, battered and in a shelter, there are a number of institutional bureaucratic relationships that must be developed for her to accomplish each task of ensuring her basic needs are met. She will need social services to find an apartment, have the utilities turned on and obtain health care, find child-care and purchase food. In addition, there are a number of ancillary organizations (i.e. real

estate offices, grocery stores, furniture shops) with which poor and low-income women must also interact.

This examination addresses the first dimension in understanding how welfare reform policy, through its focus on investigating and diverting women, challenges their abilities to be self-sufficient. In this chapter, I draw upon the experiences of two Black women, Gloria and Leslie, to underscore what it is like to be in relationship with social services.

Waiting in the Waiting Room

On a sunny afternoon, I walked from the shelter to DCDSS on Market Street. I had gone to drop off paperwork for the shelter for the reimbursement of a client who had stayed one night at Grace Smith House. Even if a woman only stays for one night, the shelter submits a reimbursement for her stay. It is not always paid but they try.

The DCDSS office has been fashioned out of the former YMCA. A newly constructed building adjacent to the former Y houses the administrative staff. Once you have entered the building, there are two sets of double glass doors. One set of doors is not for public use. Only Dutchess County Department of Social Services staff can enter using a card swipe. The other set of doors leads to the waiting area. The waiting area has a set of floor-to-ceiling windows looking out onto Market Street. Need is visible to all who pass by the building from the street, one can see row after row of people sitting on plastic chairs waiting to be seen by any number of DCDSS workers.

Behind a long, plexiglass window, on the left side of the room, sits the frontline workers who manage the flow of clients. The design is similar to that which one sees in a bank. The spatial segregation reinforces the social dichotomy of a class system and renders those waiting visible (Weissman 1992). In this architectural expression of panopticism, clients sit in rows of chairs that do not face the front line workers. Yet, from their positions, the workers can witness the activity of almost all of the clients. The clients face the office of the county Sheriff. A similar spatial arrangement was found at the State Service Center in Massachusetts which dealt with the needs of the homeless and mentally ill (Desjarlais 1997). There, the Capital Police maintain a centralized spot at the entrance to the building. The logic of these spatial evaluations relates to the economics of power (99), which Foucault considered to be the manifestation of disciplinary power in the industrial age. The components of this power incorporate confinement, surveillance and detailed organization of human action (Desjarlais 1997:96). The Sheriff's location at DCSS and the Capital Police in the State Service Center is a replication of the architecture of discipline.

The conceptual design has been used in other institutional architecture besides the prison and clinics, as Foucault described (1973; 1979), to buildings which organize "social care." The architecture created a "space of exact legibility" (Foucault 1980:154) where persons are easily identified. Those sitting in the waiting room are plainly observed by the Sheriff and the frontline workers.

The windows create a physical and psychological distance between the workers and the recipients. Foucault contends that the model of power inherent in systems of visibility spread throughout the industrial age. He suggests they pattern the technologies

of prison and medical practices toward the production of tangible knowledge and docile bodies suited for capitalist production (Desjarlais 1997:96). A DCDSS Supervisor informed me that the front-line workers, or pre-screeners, never wanted the plexiglass window separating them from clients, but when DCDSS moved to its present location 10 years ago, administration felt this was the best design arrangement.

Above each window is a number with a set of descriptors that organizes where people are to go, based on the reason they are there. The first is Window #4, which has a sign that reads Administration and Conferences. The general population rarely goes to that window. It is reserved for people on official business with administrative staff. It is to Windows one through three that Social Service recipients will go. Window #3 is for Medicaid, Special Investigation, and Children's Services. Window #2 is for Food Stamps, HEAP, Lost Food Stamps and Adult and Family Services. Window #1 is for Public Assistance and New Photo IDs. Over the 23 months of my research, I have stood either alone or with women who were battered at all four windows.

On the floor, approximately two feet from the window, running its length, is a strip of worn red tape. The instructions read *DO NOT CROSS THE LINE UNTIL YOU ARE CALLED*. One knows to approach the window after a worker has nodded his or her head. You state your name and the purpose of your visit. The Pre-Screeners fill out an orange card, stamp it using a punch-in clock, and instruct the individual to "Sit down, we'll announce your name." When a name is announced, instructions are given to pick up one of three phones mounted on the walls. The different color phones help clients to distinguish the one they are to pick up so they can speak directly to a caseworker. As a

result, conversations between recipients and caseworkers are easily overheard and recipients, or potential recipients, plead their cases to ensure receipt of assistance.

Because the counters are so low, about crotch level to someone five-foot-three-inches, the pre-screeners rarely look at anyone standing in front of them. In fact most of the time they talk to the other workers. It is quite a feeling to have a human being make no or little eye contact. One gets the sense they are insignificant.

When I first started my research, Maria, the director of the shelter, suggested that if I was going to go to DCDSS with the women, I should always be there before 9:00 a.m. Anybody who wants to be seen should be there by 8:45 in the morning to wait for the doors to open. This is a necessity because, after 9:30 a.m., one runs the risk of not being seen at all. The entire DCDSS staff goes to lunch between 12:00 p.m. and 1:00 p.m. and there are no appointments taken during that hour. So if one gets there after 9:45 a.m. in the hope of being seen before noon that probably will not happen. Once one has entered the Social Services building, one is now on institutional time -- the schedule set by an organization where there is little or no negotiation about one's personal time constraints (Susser 1982).

The waiting room is buzzing with activity. Children are running around, babies are crying, laughing or being fed. People bring breakfast, lunch and/or snacks because they never know how long they will have to wait. Talk and gossip abound as people greet each other and catch up with those whom they have not seen in a while. Gossiping helps pass the time. The transparent nature of DCDSS goes beyond the windows facing Market Street and the plexiglass windows on the counter. It is carried over into the transparency of human interaction. Relationships are established while waiting and, on one occasion, I

witnessed a relationship ending. People publicly share their hopes and dreams for jobs and housing. The revelation of others' private lives also occurs. This is the backdrop to ringing phones, names being announced over the intercom system and people pleading their cases to workers to have their benefits reinstated.

DCDSS is primarily a woman's space. Men typically accompany their girlfriends/wives/sisters/cousins/nieces/friends. They make sure they are situated, then go outside to smoke a cigarette or conduct "some business" on the pay phone. Most of the men seem to have another world they enter and DCDSS is not it. If it is, it is "only for a minute." However, a few men are there to secure assistance for themselves and come with their "boys."³² They use the waiting room as a space to socialize and, in some cases, reinsert themselves into the community, particularly if they have been away. One conversation I overheard one morning took place between a young, Black man and a young, White woman. Both were waiting to be seen by a caseworker. "I've seen you around the way," the young man says to the woman. "I'd like to come visit you some time. Tell me about yourself." The young woman responds, "I'm 23, got five kids and getting divorced. I'm tryin' to get assistance for me and my kids." The young man says, "Yeah, I'm tryin' to get on, too, but just for a minute 'til I get a gig." The conversation lasted about 10 minutes during which time they revealed to each other that they had each been in jail. In fact the young man informed the woman that he had a monitor on him because he was on probation. This mutual experience seemed to bind them and a date was made.

³² "Boys" a colloquial term used among young men to describe male companions.

The importance of his comment regarding the monitor was revealed later when the young man, talking to one of his boys, said “Getting assistance is going to be hard ‘cause there is always a conflict between waiting to see a caseworker and the time I have to see my officer.” His fears were well grounded and reflect the web of inter-agency relations that utilize and exchange information regarding the movement of individuals.

A series of publications prepared by the New York State Department of Social Services (1995b; 1995c; 1995d) outline the rights and responsibilities of individuals applying for, or receiving, social services.³³ They explain what is expected of clients and the application process. In addition to these booklets there are a series of addenda pointing out changes in procedures for welfare recipients resulting from welfare reform, that include notification of time limits for receipt of cash benefits, the requirement that one work or be involved in work-related activities such as training or job hunting. Not meeting the requirements is considered to be an infraction that can result in being sanctioned for a specified time period or a complete loss of benefits. In addition, the addendum includes the procedures for receiving a fair hearing if a person wants to challenge a denial of benefits. Also included are examples of cross-institutional relationships between DSS, law enforcement agencies, and the Immigrant and Naturalization Services (New York State Department of Social Services, 1997a; 1997b) that facilitate the state’s ability to monitor people to determine their eligibility for government aid.

³³ This series of booklets are available to the general public on a counter outside of the waiting area at Dutchess County Department of Social Services.

The processes of cross-institutional networks have the cumulative effect of verifying and evaluating human activity -- people's lives can be monitored and checked across institutions. The hierarchical power of the Department of Social Services is assured through its function "as a network of power relations that hold together a web of interdependent forces" (Desjarlais 1997:97). In this young man's case, if an appointment for either social services or probation is missed, he runs the risk of being sanctioned, losing his benefits altogether or, being re-arrested. Either way, DCDSS has the right to share information about him.

The anxiety of waiting to be seen makes people do different things. They talk to strangers and talk to themselves to pass the time as they watch the clock to calculate how many minutes they have been sitting. Gloria did the same thing while she, Jean, a shelter advocate, and I waited for her to see the Front End Detection System worker one Thursday morning in March, 1998.

Gloria, a short, heavy-set, African-American woman with one daughter in her 20s, from whom she is estranged, and one son in foster care, had come to the shelter on a Wednesday in March of 1998. Gloria has had a drinking problem in the past, which is one of the reasons that her son has been in foster care. The man Gloria had been living with had beaten her and, then kicked her out of his house. Because Gloria was now homeless and with no place to go, the goal was to get her housed. She had arrived at the shelter the day before and that same day had already dropped off her application for assistance at the Dutchess County Department of Social Services. She had seen a worker

the same day, Wednesday, who updated her case³⁴ and informed her that she had to come back the next day. This visit the next day was to go to the investigation department if she wanted to be re-certified for housing.

The day we went to DCDSS, Gloria was petrified about being late for her appointment. The shelter volunteer that was supposed to drive her did not show up and Gloria really wanted to get going. One of the shelter staff offered to take Gloria and asked if I wanted to go along. The drive to DCDSS was about five minutes from the shelter and Gloria talked incessantly the whole time. During her conversation, she revealed some of her life story interspersed with her fear about going to DCDSS. She stopped talking after we parked the car and began walking toward the building. Gloria looked visibly scared and stayed about 10 paces behind us.

When we reached the building, we went directly to Window #3 -- Special Investigation. Gloria held on to me and said, "I feel faint." She registered and was told to wait. Since Gloria had received assistance in the past, she had to go through the Front End Detection System -- FEDS. FEDS is the unit of the Department of Social Services that investigates whether clients or potential clients have broken any DSS regulation. The Co-Director of Public Assistance told me, "I don't know why we call it that. I know it freaks people out, but they have to check for misuse of the system. It's a necessity." There are three conditions that flag a person going to FEDS -- being single, an immigrant

³⁴ Because Gloria is a single adult, she is eligible to receive Safety Net Assistance formerly known as Home Relief. She had a prior case with Social Services, which was indicated in her case record file at DCDSS. All case record files include, but are not limited to: the recipients application, birth certificate, pay stubs, notes taken by the caseworker during each interview (New York State Department of Social Services 1995b).

or applying for benefits if you are from out of New York State. As a single adult, Gloria met one of the conditions that warranted investigation.

The presumption of misuse of social services permeates the structure of the welfare system. Welfare reform underscores the belief that people will abuse its benefits and has implemented more stringent terms by which a person may be sanctioned and therefore become ineligible for assistance. But there is a contradictory philosophy about misuse of the welfare system. One official at DCDSS indicated that welfare reform has ushered in a new way of doing business, at least in Dutchess County. The official argued that the intense screening that accompanies utilization of social services offers recipients faster resolution of issues that prevent them from working. This is accomplished by focusing on the immediate needs, quickly and efficiently directing people to the appropriate service. Supposedly, this quick response will reduce the length of time a person will be on assistance.

The Commissioner indicated that the screening process sorts out those individuals who may be trying to beat the system, making it tougher for them to do so. He also stated that welfare reform has changed the culture of how things are run. Individuals are more closely watched which can pre-empt their tendency to use the system irresponsibly. People will not come to get assistance with the idea that they're "going to Disney World" with this money. At the same time he said that most clients are not fraudulent. He noted, "They come here with problems and are in stressful situations." The Commissioner's comments clearly reflect the contradictory thoughts about worthiness of welfare recipients. But most discussions of welfare are weighted down by perceptions, which belie the reality of poor and low-income women (Seccombe 1999). The possibility that

recipients draw a “double income” is one that has haunted legislators and policy makers for years. They are concerned about misuse and exact penalties when recipients have unreported and reported income that puts them above eligibility limits, making them fraudulent (Susser and Kreniske 1987). However, as Edin and Lein (1997) point out, people getting over, often really translates into people making ends meet, because they do not get enough from public assistance to survive in the first place.

So the procedures that many go through in the form of interviews, investigations and interrogations actually serve as deterrents. These are measures that prevent applicants from following through on their initial inquiries for assistance. The experience was described as demeaning by both advocates and recipients. The shelter's Director of Finance and the Shelter Director indicated that a growing number of women refused to even go to DCDSS. In some cases, it was because women had heard how recipients' were treated and others, because they had gone to the offices, were treated badly and refused to go back. It was not always that way but changes in requirements and what seemed to be a step-up in investigations caused a number of women to refuse to apply for assistance.

Gloria was not diverted from her attempt to get social services. But she was very distressed and even confused about having to see the FEDS investigator. Her fears came through in her conversations. “I wonder what they’re going to ask me? I haven’t done nothing wrong. I’m so nervous.” From 9:15 to 10:15, while we waited to see the investigator, these are the words she repeated again and again. I also noticed that she went to the bathroom six times.

At 10:15 a.m., a voice came over the intercom system. “Gloria Mason, please pick up the brown phone.” Gloria looked at Jean and me with wide eyes and dread. She

went to the phone, was instructed by the FEDS investigator to go through the doors leading to the elevator, and come to the third floor. As we walked through the doors and entered the elevator, Gloria turned to Jean and said, "Can you answer for me? I get so nervous." Jean told her that she would support her if it was necessary, but to try not to worry. We exited the elevator and walked down the corridor. When we got to the door that said Front End Detection System Office, we attempted to open the door, but could not. There are only two ways to enter any office in DCDSS, one is to use the swipe card and the other is to get buzzed in. We waited about 15 minutes for the investigator to buzz us in. Gloria wondered aloud what was taking so long. "I don't know why they made me come back. I ain't got nothing to hide. I ain't did nothing wrong. What do they want me for? I hope I don't get in trouble with the FEDS."

Mr. Hanson opened the door and escorted us to his office. Gloria had a panic attack. She moved so slowly that it took her about two minutes to walk 12 paces. Finally, we all entered his office and sat down. Mr. Hanson reviewed Gloria's file and then asked her address. He only wanted to know her last place of residence. "It was...I can't quite remember the numbers. Just the street." "Do you remember where you lived before your last place of residence and who lived there with you?" he inquired. "I lived with my cousin. We had an arrangement, she and me." Gloria had difficulty answering the questions. She started fidgeting and tapping her fingers on Mr. Hanson's desk. Then she started telling him whatever came to her mind. She talked about her need for food stamps, how long she had lived with her batterer and how he treated her. Mr. Hanson listened for a few minutes and then said he was only interested in her housing situation.

Gloria continued to tell him the random details of her life in which he had no apparent interest.

I noted two recurring phenomena with the women I accompanied to the Dutchess County Department of Social Services. The first was to tell their caseworker almost every aspect of their life. In some cases, it was due to anxiety as illustrated by Gloria's experience. For other women, talking was a defense mechanism, tell everybody everything first so they will ask you fewer questions. Just talk. If you tell them your life story, your situation, they will believe that you are not one of the people trying to "get over" on the system. In some ways, it was an attempt to exert control in a situation where there really was none. The second phenomenon involved women not speaking at all or very little because public revelation is demeaning and it is painful to have to justify oneself over and over again.

After Mr. Hanson had established that Gloria, in fact, had nowhere to live, he said that was all. The whole investigation lasted about eight minutes. All that waiting for eight minutes.

Leaving

"How long we gotta be here?" Leslie asked Paula, an advocate, one June morning. Leslie is 18 years old and pregnant. She had recently come to the shelter because her boyfriend, Dre, pushed her during an argument in the park. Leslie's head hit the jungle gym and she made the decision that she did not want to continue living with Dre. A month before coming to the shelter, Leslie had applied for social services on her

own but had not heard back from them. She needed to secure Medicaid for her prenatal care. Since she had never heard back from DCDSS, she took it upon herself to go to the clinic at Vassar Brothers Hospital. They told her she had a high-risk pregnancy and had to be careful about lifting, bending and standing for extended periods of time. By the time Leslie arrived at the shelter she was six months pregnant.

Leslie, Paula and I arrived at DCDSS at 9:45 a.m. By 12:00 p.m., Leslie's name had not been announced over the loudspeaker, which meant she would have to come back after 1:00 p.m. Paula would not be able to return with Leslie, so she asked if I would accompany her. I agreed. During the hour that Leslie and I waited, she told me some things about her life. It actually took two months for Leslie to share her entire life story: She was careful not to tell me too much at first, I suspect, because she was embarrassed by some aspects of her past. But over time, as Leslie shared more with me, I sensed that she began to see me as a godmother, in part, due to the tense relationship she had with her own mother. Further, her mother did not live in New York and she felt the need to have someone with whom to talk. Leslie was aware of the fact that I had a daughter her age and she would often ask me "what if questions" to seek out my responses. "What if your daughter got pregnant, do you think she should still go to college?" "What if she wanted to live at home with you, would you let her?" My opinions seemed to be important to Leslie, to the degree that she wanted me to go with her to find an appropriate apartment in which to raise the baby. She also requested that I come with her to other agencies in Poughkeepsie with which she became engaged, as she battled with the DCDSS worker whom, she felt, had been disrespectful to her. On several occasions she wanted me to accompany her to the clinic for prenatal checkups and she wanted me to meet Dre. After

meeting him, Leslie asked what I thought of him and if he would be a good father to the baby. While I thought Dre was immature, I surprisingly also thought he might be a good father. Dre had told me he was looking forward to the baby's arrival and wanted to take care of his newborn child.

The following description of Leslie's life contextualizes the two meetings that she had with the caseworker, Ms. Haliburton, and the DCDSS employment worker. It also illustrates the problems of pregnant teenagers who, according to the new regulations, are not entitled to social services.

Leslie's mother Shana was 18 years old when she had Leslie. When her father found out her mother was pregnant, they broke up. When Shana asked him for child support, he checked himself into a mental institution. After that, Leslie's mother attempted to form a household with another man whom she married. Within two years, that relationship dissolved due to abuse. Shana met another man, Paul, with whom she had the second of her three children – JoJo. For a while they lived in Poughkeepsie and then moved to Ohio to be near her stepfather's family. Shana did not get along with her husband's family and left, while still pregnant, to come back to Poughkeepsie. She left Leslie with Paul and his family. Leslie missed her mother terribly and recalls not being treated very well by Paul's family. They never gave her gifts at holidays and they would pinch her to wake her in the morning. When speaking with her mother on the phone, family members would snatch the phone from Leslie as soon as she asked her mother when she was coming back to get her.

After the birth of her sister, the whole family moved back to Poughkeepsie. When it later came out that Paul had been "visiting" another woman, Shana left him. Shana, Leslie and the baby moved to a homeless shelter.

Over the course of the next several years, Leslie and her mother lived with two other men, one of whom was the father of Shana's third child, Michael. While pregnant with Michael, she met James who was in jail. Upon James' release from jail, he moved in with the family. On the first night he was in their house, James locked Leslie and her sister JoJo in the bedroom and beat Shana. Shortly after Michael was born, Shana gave her two youngest children to their respective fathers. Leslie continued to live with her mother and James who was mean and nasty to both Leslie and Shana. "I stopped caring about my mother after that [giving the kids away]. And I hated James. My grades went down and down. By the time I was in the second grade, I became violent toward myself and others at school." Throughout her young life, Leslie has experienced abandonment and sexual and physical abuse, particularly from James. With tremendous sadness, Leslie remembered the time James killed a little puppy given to her as a gift.

Just before completing high school, Shana told Leslie that she did not want her to live with her anymore. So Leslie went to a Job Corps program in Upstate New York where she obtained her GED and vocational training. After graduating, she moved back in with her mother. Her return was met with a tremendous amount of hostility and physical violence.

One day I left a spoon in the sink and me and my mother started arguing and fighting and she tried to throw me out with no clothes on. My uncle took me to live with him. I went back to my mother's after a week and then she took me to Brooklyn to live with my father, who was staying with his sister. When we got there, he wasn't there and his sister said she didn't

know anything about me living there. I went back to my mom's house and we got into more fights. I packed my things and told her I was moving to River Haven.³⁵ When the staff at River Haven asked her if she wanted me back, she said no. I was in the independent living program, working and sharing an apartment with a roommate. But after awhile, I didn't like the rules anymore. So I left and moved in with a friend. Me and the friend stopped going to work and started doing illegal activities like selling drugs. I did it for a couple of months, but I finally realized that wasn't the life for me. I moved into my uncle's house, where I was like the nanny to his kids. I got tired of raising his children and moved to my aunt's house. I stayed with her until I was accepted into the Army.³⁶

Shortly before Leslie joined the Army, she met Dre. He visited her at the base and during that time, she got pregnant. She was surprised at the army's response.

I was sent home from the army (because of my pregnancy) and I went to live with Dre. We used to fight a lot but it wasn't physical except that time in the park. So, I moved into the shelter. Me and Dre are in counseling working on our relationship but I still live at the shelter. I am now six months pregnant. I don't really know where my life is headed next, but I hope it takes a turn for the better.

As Leslie's story illustrates, her life has been riddled with a series of events over which she often had little control. She has no money, no health care and one of the thinnest social support networks of all of the women I met and, as a teenager, she had little right to public assistance.

The 1996 Welfare Reform Law contains provisions that affect the lives of teenage mothers. The new legislation requires that minor mothers live with a parent or legal guardian in order to receive benefits.³⁷ The policy shift has emerged in response to public

³⁵ River Haven is a shelter for homeless youth.

³⁶ Unlike any of the other people that were interviewed, Leslie decided she wanted to write her life history for me, not have it tape recorded. She wrote her life history and gave it to me on June 11, 1999.

³⁷ "If you are pregnant and under 18 or are a parent who is under 18 and not married, you must live with a parent, legal guardian, or other relative. If your worker determines that this is not possible or not in your

fears about teenage mothers and their “drain” on society. In the United States, teenage childbearing is much higher than in other industrialized nations. For example, in the early 1990s the rate of teenage births was two times higher in the United States than in Great Britain, four times higher than in Sweden or Spain and 15 times higher than in Japan. It is not that teens in the U.S. are more sexually active, but rather that they use birth control less frequently and less effectively (Dunifon 1999, citing Coley and Chase-Lansdale 1999). In reality, the actual cases of teenage pregnancy have decreased in the two decades from 1970 to 1990 (Alan Guttmacher Institute 1999). The increase has been in the number of out-of-wedlock births (Dunifon 1999 citing Coley and Chase-Lansdale). Wilson argues that the increase in out-of-wedlock births among Black women can be attributed to the fact that they are more likely to delay marriage and less likely to remarry (1987: 91). He maintains there is a low pool of marriageable Black men, which influences out-of-wedlock births. The contributing factors to the low pool of marriageable men include Black men’s tenuous relationship to the labor market and consequent inability to support a family, as well as historical patterns of discrimination which have resulted in higher incarceration rates of Black men hence reducing their availability.

In spite of the distinctions made between teenage pregnancy and out of wedlock births, it is teenage pregnancy that has been depicted as a major problem. However most teenage births occur when girls are between the ages of 18 and 19, Leslie’s age, as opposed to younger teen girls. It is really the politics of their conduct -- that they are

child’s best interest, the local DSS will decide if your current living arrangement is appropriate. If it is not, the local DSS will assist you in finding other appropriate living arrangements (New York State Department of Social Services 1997a: 5).

having sex, which has resulted in the denigration of teen mothers, and served as the driving force behind punitive policy (Polakow 1999b). Conservatives take the position that teenage pregnancy violates the normative family and welfare reform policies reflect that position; virtually all government assistance to pregnant teenagers has been eliminated.

The public picture of teenage pregnancy has been highly distorted (Luker 1991). Teen mothers are depicted as milking the welfare system -- as if they were to blame for "out of control spending," and are loose, sexual young women. Luker (1991) argues that politicians' and the media's constructions of teenage pregnancy as an epidemic rarely mention that fewer pregnancies occur among young women (age 15 to 17) than among those who are 18 to 19. The birthrate among teenagers from 15 to 17 in New York State is 26 per 1,000 and among teenagers 18 to 19, the rate is 66 per 1,000 (Alan Guttmacher Institute 1999). Among younger girls research has shown that the younger the girl is when she has sex, the more likely it is that her first sexual experience was not voluntary (Child Trends 1997).

Young women face a number of obstacles similar to Leslie's, as has been documented in research, and have found that teenage pregnancy can not be so simply reduced to a matter of young girls' sexual frivolity (Polakow 1993; Seccombe 1999). Rather, teenage pregnancy is a complicated issue that cannot be resolved by demonizing young women.

Leslie and I came back to DCDSS at 1:00 p.m. Shortly after our arrival, Leslie was called to pick up a phone. We were buzzed in and waited a few moments for Ms. Haliburton to escort us to her office. She was very pleasant while examining Leslie's

case file. "Let's see now, Leslie," she said quickly looking at the personal information portion of the application, "You are how old?" "I'm 18," replied Leslie. "I see you're staying at the Grace Smith House." Leslie did not answer. "*Oh*, I see, you are pregnant and you were in the army. What are your plans for the future? Maybe after you've had the baby you can pick up where you left off." She reviewed the case file quietly and in short order said, "I'm sorry but I can't open a case for you. You're underage. You're not eligible for any services. Do you have any family?" Leslie replied in a soft voice, "Yes, my mother lives in Ohio, but we fight all the time." "Well, dear, children fight with their parents all the time. My son and I fought when he was your age. It's all a part of growing up." The phone rang. "Excuse me just a moment," she said as she reached to pick up the phone. Leslie looked at me and rolled her eyes. She whispered, "What am I gonna do?" I said, "I think you might explain to her what fighting means."

Ms. Haliburton ended her phone conversation and launched right into a discussion about what Leslie's options were. She made it clear that the only assistance that Leslie could get was a one-way ticket to her mother's house in Ohio and \$5 to buy food along the way. "Is that what you want to do?" I asked. Leslie looked petrified and said she didn't know. "Can I have a few days to think it over? When would I have to leave?" Ms. Haliburton informed Leslie that she could not think about it for a day or two; that she would have to leave immediately, meaning within 24 hours. Ms. Haliburton told us that she would be right back; she was going to get the \$5 for Leslie's trip. I had wanted to interject, but she moved too quickly. When she returned, she gave Leslie the \$5 and asked her to sign a form indicating that she had received the money and would use it for the stated purpose of buying food on her trip to Ohio. Ms. Haliburton then picked up the

phone and called the local bus company to find out the cost of the ticket. She asked in what town her mother lived in Ohio while waiting for the bus company operator. I urged Leslie to tell Ms. Haliburton about her relationship with her mother. "I just want to leave," Leslie said. "She's telling me I have no choice, so I guess its better than nothing." I suggested that Leslie say she wanted to see the domestic violence liaison. After having found out the bus schedule, Ms. Haliburton got off the phone and Leslie said, "I want to see the violence lady."

Yvonne Genesee is Dutchess County's Domestic Violence Liaison. Her position emerged in the context of criticisms that the Welfare Reform Act of 1996 would place women at risk for further abuse. The Family Violence Option works to ensure that women on welfare receive some exemptions from the punitive aspects of the law. New York State is one of 41 states that have implemented the option. In Dutchess County, the amendment was implemented by hiring a Domestic Violence Liaison whose role is to assess the credibility of the applicant, assess the need for waivers from employment or seeking child support, provide emergency safety planning and then reassess her case after the waiver period has been reached. Yvonne can recommend that a woman be granted a waiver from some or all of the requirements and still receive aid. In Leslie's case, she could have determined whether or not Leslie had to go live with her mother.

Yvonne is a warm, friendly woman who takes her job very seriously. When we met in February of 1999, she expressed satisfaction that the program was successful. Her only trepidation was that some of the caseworkers had not been appropriately trained to screen applicants for domestic violence. This concern was not unwarranted. An analysis of Wisconsin's welfare program (known as W-2) found that domestic violence victims

were overlooked and W-2 caseworkers frequently failed to advise women of available support services, program options, or exemptions from certain regulations (Center for Law and Social Policy 2000).

The implementation of the Family Violence Option in New York included a teleconferenced training session. The training was distributed in video form and was to have been seen by all caseworker staff so they would be able to accurately identify who may be in need of assistance. There were a series of vignettes in the video to enhance caseworker ability in identifying recipients who were in domestic violence situations. The presentation was a panel format with experts representing Children's Services, Protective Services and the Office of Temporary Disability. It covered the development of the option and why it is a necessary feature of welfare reform. Generally, its implementation in New York has been regarded as extremely positive. One panelist states, "No State has put the same kind of effort into the Family Violence Option as New York."³⁸ The video notes that local districts in New York have to offer universal notification of the violence option to all public assistance applicants. There is also universal screening. Completing the screening form is voluntary and one can also request the screening form at any time in the public assistance process. According to Yvonne, a total of 388 women in Dutchess County had indicated on their applications that they were victims of domestic violence and she had granted 205 waivers. Most of the waivers were for child support, relieving women of having to force the fathers of their children to pay.

³⁸ The New York State Office of Children and Family Services and The Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence produced the video "Domestic Violence and the Family Violence Option."

Other waivers exempted women from having to work. The average length of time for the waivers was four months.³⁹

There were conflicting opinions about the implementation of the FVO. Some policy makers felt that Wellstone and Murray had designed a loophole for large numbers of women on welfare. Domestic violence advocates felt that women who disclosed the violence in their lives would be dealt with punitively by caseworkers, or that abusive partners would be retaliatory. Others felt that the option would lead to the view that battered women were unable to work, and still others felt that, as with any special dispensation, there would be uneven access to and uneven distribution of the waivers, based on race and class. In an early assessment of FVO, Raphael (1999) suggests that the option has not proved effective in helping current victims obtain enough time off from the requirements nor have enough women been able to obtain the supportive services they need. Tracking systems of self-disclosure rates are needed, as are internal monitoring of policies and procedures.

During conversations and formal interviews, when I asked women if they knew about the Family Violence Option, most said no. Leslie was one of the women who had no idea about the domestic violence liaison prior to our discussion. At my prompting, Leslie asked to see the liaison during her face-to-face interview. Her request was denied.

“The Violence Lady?” Ms. Haliburton said, with a frown on her face. It was as if she could not believe that Leslie was making this request. At this point, Leslie was exasperated and quite angry. Ms. Haliburton then accused Leslie of wanting to get out of

³⁹ States may waive recipients from requirements for almost any length of time that they choose. Some have no time limits on temporary exemptions, while others permit exemptions for 90 days, 12 months or 24 months. In addition some states allow for renewal of waivers.

moving to Ohio. It sounded "suspicious," she said. After all, Mrs. Haliburton argued, Leslie had not mentioned parental abuse during the earlier part of the conversation. The discussion only "came up" after arrangements were being made for Leslie to get on the bus the next day. Now she was bringing up domestic violence as an issue. Leslie said to me, "You tell her, I'm too mad." I told Leslie on that day and on many other days when we sat in the DCDSS waiting room that she should consider speaking up and telling people the truth about why she was there. Of course, having applied for social services myself in the past, I should have known better than to make that suggestion. The constant hurdle of having to prove oneself is onerous. That is why people need advocates; because sometimes they do the work that you just can't face anymore.

I turned to Ms. Haliburton and said, "She tried to tell you earlier that she and her mother fought. She did not mean they had arguments, they fought. She doesn't want to live with her father because he has mental health issues. She wants to see the Domestic Violence Liaison because she is not sure Ohio is where she should be." Ms. Haliburton was visibly annoyed and told Leslie that she'd better think about what she had said because the charge of parental abuse is very serious. Did she have any records of charges? Had she told any authority? If so, then she could see the domestic violence liaison. Leslie turned toward me and said, "I'm leaving."

Assuming an adversarial position as we left, Ms. Haliburton said, "If you don't pick up your bus ticket, you have to return the \$5." We left DCDSS and Leslie cursed Ms. Haliburton the whole walk back to the shelter. I felt so powerless to help this young woman who was my daughter's age. When we arrived at the shelter, I was livid and told Maria, the shelter director, what had happened. She was just as appalled as I and asked

me to fill out the human rights monitoring report. I asked Leslie if she felt her rights had been violated, to which she responded, “Yes, it seemed like the lady wasn’t hearing anything I said, she was rushing me. I might be eligible for Medicaid or food stamps, but I won’t know from her.” I filled out the report and gave a copy to Leslie.

Leslie was using social services out of necessity because she had no job due to her pregnancy and no family support system. Although she had not planned to have a child, abortion was not something she even considered. Leslie went to Church almost every Sunday while living at the shelter, praying she had made the right decision and asking God’s help. She was also smart and desperately wanted to go to college. During one of our walks to the Waterfront, Leslie asked me if I thought she could go to school and raise a child. Leslie knew that I, too, had been a single parent and wanted some assurance that it could be done. On this walk, she created a plan that involved getting a sitter during the day and taking a couple of classes during the day. She would work part time and then come home to the baby. In the evenings, after the baby was asleep, she would study.

Leslie was excited about the birth of the child. She told me the stories she would read to the baby and the songs she would sing. She thought it would be a positive influence if the baby saw its mother going to school and moving up in life. These were her plans; she just needed to get started by creating a safe home for the two of them. Dre, of course, would be part of the baby’s life. She wanted her child to know the father since she had not known hers. This young lady had plans. And DCDSS was not working with her. She felt betrayed and thought the people at DCDSS were mean and sabotaged her intentions.

Leslie's irritation with being on institutional time and having to wait, having been denied benefits and her right to assistance, caused her take to action. Leslie took the copy of the Human Rights Report to the Director of another agency who called Ms. Haliburton's supervisor. The Shelter Director also called the supervisor. Subsequently, a case was opened for Leslie. We returned to DCDSS two weeks later. Leslie was given a budget for housing, a food stamp allotment and Medicaid. But because she was getting her needs met through the State, Leslie was also subjected to the work requirements. She had to find a job and this meant having to see the employment counselor.

The diversionary approaches of welfare reform are contributing factors to the national decrease in welfare caseloads. Prying into women's lives is not a new tactic to keep women from accessing services, but it takes on an ironic twist when one considers that the goal of welfare reform policy is to move recipients toward self-sufficiency. How is it possible to become independent when the economic support that is so often necessary to achieve self-sufficiency is denied? The practices that have become the norm as a result of welfare reform, exert a tremendous amount of power over women's lives. Although the family violence option is an effort to accommodate the needs of domestic violence victims, the pressure to decrease caseloads, in some instances, subverts the intention of the option.

Although I have drawn on two examples to paint a picture of the interactions that women have when they go to DCDSS, these examples mirror the pattern of the experiences of other women in the study when they applied or reapplied for social services, particularly women of color. It is clear that obstacles are present in women's attempts to get assistance, even considering the grievous circumstance of violence. These

women have the history of a movement that has served to sensitize the public about the ramifications of violence in women's lives. Against that backdrop, along with the family violence option, we might expect battered women to have a slightly easier time securing welfare. But this was not the case. It makes one wonder, what, then, are the encounters of women who are *not* battered and need welfare? What are they up against?

Some might argue that battered women are special cases and may have difficulty in meeting the goals of welfare reform policies. I submit that welfare reform policies are mean-spirited and obstruct any woman's attempt to become independent because the tactics deter some women. In reviewing my field notes, I counted five instances of women who refused to go back to DCDSS for assistance, even though they needed it. Two of those women may have been under investigation for fraud. But the other three indicated the procedures were simply too humiliating. It takes considerable tenacity to apply for social services, but women often do so in the interest of being autonomous and safe.

CHAPTER 5

WORK AND CHILD-CARE

Introduction

Changes in welfare and, consequently, the interactions with the Department of Social Services demand an examination of the impact on women's everyday lives. What are the issues that battered Black women face as a result of reform policies? This chapter deals with the constraints placed on Black battered women. Through it we see the ways in which the lives of the poor and low-income people are managed and contained when they have to rely on institutions to access basic needs as a result of having left a battering situation. Women face challenges as they attempt to find employment. There is conflict between child-care and work, and obstacles in locating a place to live. In describing the processes that women go through in order to meet their basic needs, I refer to the stories of two Black women and one Latina for the purposes of comparison and exploring how Black women struggle.

Nationally, the welfare rolls have decreased. In New York State, the number of TANF and Safety Net recipients has decreased from 1.7 million in 1995 to 874,000 in November, 1999 (New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance 1999). This has been achieved in part by employment and sanctioning. The mandate to work, the basis of welfare reform's goal of moving people off welfare, engenders a negative dynamic between the staff of the DCDSS and the women who were part of this study. These women were sometimes diverted from going on, or staying on, public assistance. I argue the mandate does a disservice to clients because, in the case of these women, the

requirement to work deflects from other important aspects of life necessary to work. The focus on employment turns our attention away from the quality of life issues of those forced to take *any* job. Attempts to push people toward work have caused frustration for women because they do not necessarily find the employment they want, or they have educational goals that are not realized because, under the new policy, entering a two-year college program is not an option. In sum, their process of becoming self-sufficient on their own terms is undermined.

This chapter examines two realms in which welfare reform undermined women's ability to become self-reliant as they envisioned: employment and education, and child-care. These dimensions of life are not merely independent variables. A woman's job influences her housing; her child-care influences her job choice. The issues are so intertwined that it is difficult to examine them discretely. What follows are descriptions of women's experiences in attempting to meet the mandates of welfare reform and the impact of those mandates on the two dimensions discussed above.

Frequently, they were diverted from their goals because the regulatory policies of welfare reform undermined their attempts to mold a life they felt was of their own making. The emphasis on sanctioning recipients and a single-focus policy of work, was often counter-productive because by following punitive or deterrent actions, women placed a great deal of energy responding to the shortfall. In other words, their process of achievement was interrupted. In many cases, this interruption and the not-so-invisible control exerted by social service workers exists because it is presumed that poor women cannot make good choices and therefore need to be told what to and when to do it.

What Kinda Work?

Leslie had her second meeting with Ms. Haliburton, her caseworker at DCDSS, two weeks after the first meeting in early June. Ms. Haliburton was cold and curt, speaking through clenched teeth, undoubtedly because her supervisor had reprimanded her for not permitting Leslie to see Yvonne Genesee, the domestic violence liaison. Ms. Haliburton informed Leslie that she was eligible for Medicaid after having told her she was not. She also told Leslie she had to work and that she had set up an appointment for Leslie to speak with Ms. Pauli, a Dutchess County Department of Social Services employment counselor, for the same day.

Ms. Pauli was all about the business of getting Leslie a job. She told her that she would have to come back to the office every other week until she found employment. Until then Leslie was expected to go on five job interviews per week and log the outcome of her interviews in a little booklet. If she failed to bring the booklet in, missed an appointment or refused a position offered to her, she could lose her benefits. Leslie placed her hand on her stomach and said to Ms. Pauli: "I was told by the doctors at the clinic not to lift anything heavy or do too much standing or walking. I have a high-risk pregnancy. Can I get a medical waiver?" It seemed this information was meaningless to Ms. Pauli because she pulled out a copy of an employment newspaper and began to read job listings. "There is a job at Home Depot. Here's another one for a cashier at one of the shops at the Mall. Can you get to the Mall?" Both positions Ms. Pauli recommended required travel as well as a considerable amount of standing--two things Leslie did not

think she could physically tolerate. Further, Leslie did not believe anyone would offer her a job since she was six months pregnant.

Later in the conversation, Leslie asked about the possibility of going to school. Ms. Pauli said, "We can't do that until you have the child." This woman was of no assistance to Leslie. The jobs she was reading were all low paying and offered no opportunity for advancement. It seemed that all Mrs. Haliburton wanted to do was make sure Leslie showed up with her job search card. Since Leslie did not think these jobs were suitable, she made an appointment with a gentleman she had seen sitting at a desk in the waiting area of DCDSS. Michael Wells worked for the Private Industry Council's welfare-to-work program⁴⁰ and coordinated job searches for social service clients. Within a week, Mr. Wells had found a job for Leslie and set up an interview. The job was a temporary position at the YWCA day camp with children. She worked five hours per day, five days per week.

I saw Leslie one afternoon about two weeks after she started her new job. We walked around the city as she told me about how sick she was. The morning sickness

⁴⁰ The Private Industry Council is an administrative outgrowth of the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), which was a bi-partisan bill presented by Senators Ted Kennedy (Democrat) and Dan Quayle (Republican) signed in 1986. At the time the legislation was signed, the intent of JTPA was to serve the needs of people who were eligible under Title I and Title II funding of the Act. Title I eligible people include dislocated workers - people laid off from their jobs and unemployed for 15 weeks, displaced homemakers and people over the age of 55. Under Welfare-to-Work. PIC also has a training program where services are provided after a person is attached to work. The training is for people who have not been employed or are not considered displaced. The funding for their training comes under Title II. The qualifications to participate in the program are: 1) A person must be receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, 2) The person must have been on social services for 30 months and currently receiving services, and 3) they must have a fairly low skill level in math and reading. To be eligible to participate in the PIC program, a participant must have a score of 8.9 or below. Once a person has been assessed and certified as eligible to participate, they receive training. If they require skills building, then PIC provides that service. If a person needs what is called "up-the-ladder" training, (such as a certificate so they can get a promotion) then PIC will provide that as well. The target population for PIC's welfare to work program is so stringent that only 12 people had enrolled as of April 2000.

never seemed to stop, not even in her seventh month of pregnancy. I asked how the job was going and she said it was "all right." But she wasn't making a lot of money. In fact, the amount of money she made was such an embarrassment, Leslie refused to tell me how much she earned. All she would say is:

I've never made so little money in my life. Please don't ask me what I bring home. I'll tell you it's not enough to get a place to live or do anything. I can't even afford to buy lunch each day. I certainly won't be able to save to get things for the baby.

I asked if she brought home less than \$200 every two weeks to which she replied "Yes." I could get no further information. I suspect Leslie made about \$5.25 per hour which would amount to \$262.50 every two weeks. After taxes, she probably had a take-home pay of \$175. Her money was so tight that when we went to the bank, Leslie made a withdrawal of \$4.50. That was all she had after buying some things for the baby. As we walked back to the shelter we stopped at a take-out restaurant. The chicken and biscuit lunch she wanted cost \$5.25. Leslie was embarrassed that she did not have enough money to pay for the meal, so I bought it for her.

By the time Leslie's job ended in August, she was eight months pregnant. At that time DCDS approved a budget of \$347 for an apartment, \$121.28 for food stamps and \$388 in cash, but some of the cash was withheld, for reasons which were unclear to her. So, instead of \$388, Leslie received \$125. This amount was to last her until October. I went to visit Leslie one Friday night and she looked worried and complained:

You know those people at Social Services want me to get another job and work until the baby is born? They've sent me lots of letters about coming in. What kinda job am I going to get for a couple of weeks being eight months pregnant? All the ones they want to send me on, it takes two busses to get there.

When I asked her what she was going to do for money she said:

Well I am babysitting for a lady who paid me \$5 yesterday and \$4 today. I can't believe it, they keep sending me letters about working and telling me I am missing appointments. I'm not going to see them, I am working. How can I go in for an appointment when I'm making some money?

Nine dollars for two days of work was not a lot of money and the women who were employed typically made more than that, but still not enough to have a good quality of life. When they found jobs, the positions most women had were in the service sector and included work as home health aids or working at fast food chains like Dunkin Donuts, McDonalds, or department stores such as Filene's Basement. They took these jobs because if employment was not secured, they could expect to be sanctioned. They applied anywhere and everywhere, knowing what was available would not get them on their feet.

One woman took her children along to a job fair because she was unable to find a babysitter. Naturally, she was concerned that their presence would reduce her chances of being interviewed, but she had no choice. She had to find a job. Another thing that reduced women's chances of being interviewed or being able to work an acceptable shift were visible bruises. Imagine trying to make an impression with a "busted" lip, or trying to keep a job with stitches in your eye. Sherita, as one example, went back to work at K-Mart three weeks after Joey beat her. The first day on the job, the manager "just looked at her." She generally worked the cash register but, upon her return, was immediately put on the night shift working in the stock room. "I know he put me in the stock room so customers wouldn't have to look at me. But I'm really good with the customers."

Being confined to the stock room meant vulnerable working hours. Workers were needed in the stock room on a seasonal basis not on a regular basis. The hours fluctuated and, in Sherita's case, she was given the night shift. Many of the women did not want night jobs. They were afraid of the night, during which time many felt a heightened sense of danger. But, also, the jobs they had were not paying enough to help them make their rents.

Gina, a woman who was not interviewed but with whom I spent time, made nowhere near the amount of money needed to cover her expenses. "I work at Stop-N-Shop as a cashier. Eighteen hours a week, three days from 7 a.m. to 1 a.m., and not enough money is made. \$92.70. I get \$45 in food stamps a month and my rent budget is for \$375. I'll have to get a second job to take care of things." Although she never told me directly, Gina had told Leslie she would consider working in a strip club in order to make more money.

Self-sufficiency cannot be secured with low wages. The women knew that. They also knew that education was a much more reasonable approach to securing good jobs and having degrees would increase their opportunities. But the Dutchess County Department of Social Services does not permit recipients to attend two-year educational programs. Leslie actually wanted to go back to school and train to be a chef. Sherita wanted to go to school to become a social worker. In some cases, the training programs women are made to attend are not even appropriate.

The career goals of the women were a mismatch in terms of what DCDSS allowed as qualified educational/training activities. When I questioned the Commissioner about the contrast between recipients' desire to do certain kinds of work and receiving training

to meet their personal goals, he had this to say: “Look, if a person wants to be a hairdresser but the employment demand is for data entry clerks, then that’s the training we will give them. We are not going to train people to do jobs that are not available”.

Welfare reform policy requires that each county in New York develop an employment plan. The Dutchess County employment plan outlines the client “targets” and work activities that recipients are required to meet and strives to move as many clients as possible into the workforce. The Plan “...is designed to address the needs of temporary assistance recipients by providing work activities and supportive services to prepare these individuals to compete in the labor market, *while being responsive to the needs of these individuals and allowing them to make decisions to the extent permitted by available resources and time constraints...*[emphasis, mine]” (Dutchess County Department of Social Services 1999:1). In other words, people are to be trained and employed in jobs that the county has deemed important.

Dutchess County has organized an integrated system to achieve the highest maximum participation of people on welfare in the workforce. The welfare-to-work policy has been translated into a program called Dutchess Works, which provides employment counseling and training for anyone who is unemployed. The program is a collaborative effort. It includes: The Dutchess County Department of Social Services, the Department of Labor, the Private Industry Council (PIC), the Chamber of Commerce, Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID), American Association of Retired

Persons (AARP) and, Dutchess County Economic Development Corporation.⁴¹ When a person applies for social services, they are immediately given an appointment to go to the Department of Labor (DOL) for an orientation with the hope a job will be found through DOL before the DCDSS application is processed. Lori, a supervisor at the Department of Labor, described the process:

Everyday there is an orientation for people who have applied [for social services] from 9:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. By doing this, we can move the mindset [of applicants] immediately toward getting a job. If you become a recipient, you are assessed to whether or not you are employable. A highly skilled person can be sent to the Job Club, which is a program operated by the Department of Labor. At the Department of Labor, a TANF or Safety Net recipient can utilize the Resource Room, [where one can learn how to compose a resume or make calls for job listings] which is open from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. or receive computer literacy courses. Employer representatives come to DOL to recruit potential employees from the pool of unemployed persons. The DOL oversees a three-pronged Welfare-To-Work Program for TANF and Safety Net recipients: The Job Club, On the Job Training (OJT) and the Mentor Program.

The Job Club, an outgrowth of a 1982 AFDC Food Stamp Demonstration Project,⁴² offers a two-week program that helps recipients establish personal goals. The room in which Job Club participants meet has a full-length mirror in it with a sign posted above it that reads: "Would you hire you?" This self-assessment is the first step in getting recipients to change their behavior and socialize them into good work habits. As Lori explained:

Employers care about work habits, coming to work on time and attendance, flexibility, the ability to follow instructions and the ability to work with

⁴¹ The information on the structure of the Dutchess County Welfare-To-Work program came from interviews with personnel at the Department of Labor, the Private Industry Council, an administrator at the Dutchess County Department of Social Services, and personnel at the Dutchess County Economic Development Corporation.

⁴² The Job Club was strictly for AFDC recipients because the food stamp program was federally funded. Federal funds could not be used for Home Relief (single people) recipients. However the program was found to be so successful County dollars were used to fund the program.

others. We promise employers that graduates have soft skills. Based on the media, a good number of people believe that people do not want to work. That perception is exacerbated by inappropriate behavior and that people *don't* want to work.

When I asked what happens if a person misses one of the Job Club training sessions, Lori said:

We promise employers that graduates have soft skills. So they cannot miss more than one session. If they do, they can be sanctioned. We report back to DCDSS. We have to have rules and regulations to make the sessions like a job or work experience to make a person ready to enter the market. We have marketed people as having completed the requirements. If you don't, we report non-compliance. It is a by-product because it is common for people in this population to manipulate the situation they are in.

The program attempts to address perceived personal deficits of poor people, transforming people in this population into work-ready persons. From the program's inception through the fourth quarter of 1999, a total of 160 people completed the Job Club training and 138 people found employment. However, there were no statistics indicating if they remained employed.

If after the Job Club training, where soft skills are emphasized, the individual has not become attached to employment, they must participate in an eight-week supervised work search that consists of one-on-one counseling. The counseling is supposed to help sustain recipients' motivation to continue their work search. Once an individual is employed, they can participate in the mentor program called "Work Now," a program administered by the Chamber of Commerce. The initiative was designed to provide employed individuals with a mentor to increase job retention. The mentor helps the individual develop coping skills and strategies to maintain their attachment to work, for example, urging an employee to call in when their child-care arrangements fall through.

The training and job readiness offered by the Department of Labor, Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) and, the Private Industry Council, seem to be linked to the corporate sector in several ways. By hiring welfare recipients, corporations qualify for tax credits. The Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) allows a one-time federal credit of \$2,400. The Welfare to Work Tax Credit (W2W) provides a federal tax credit of up to \$8,500 over a two-year period for companies that hire "long-term" public assistance recipients (New York State Department of Labor 1998). While these credits serve as an incentive for employers to hire poor people and those with low or non-existent skills, one critic of the wage subsidy and tax credits has raised several concerns (Holzer 1999). First, will employers respond to the incentives, which are in the form of subsidies? Second, will a subsidy stigmatize people so as to deflect their participation? Third, will employers taking the subsidy create new jobs or does the subsidy allow employers to get a break on people they would have hired anyway? I also suggest a fourth issue: ensuring a workforce for the corporate sector based on a population of poor people means those workers will come cheap. As a cheap source of labor, they will be placed in jobs that are low level without chance for advancement.

The DCDSS seems to have become an intermediary for corporate interests at a time when the economy is very good. They have identified corporate needs and subsequently organized the training and skills building of DCDSS clients to meet those needs. The relationship that DCDSS has with corporations has transformed over the last few years, according to the Commissioner.

They [corporations] didn't trust us and they saw us and the Department of Labor as having quotas to fill. We wanted to develop that trust with

business...I told them I have over a million dollars in training monies. What training are you going to need in the next five years for people that are in your business? Do you want keyboarding skills? Give us something we can put our teeth into. At this meeting [set up with businesses by the Chambers of Commerce, on behalf of DOL and DCDSS], we said we were going to put our money into the skills...how a person should come to work everyday, how you should dress, what you should do when your boss may be crabby.

The Commissioner indicated that DCDSS tailors training to satisfy business interests:

Well the GAP came forth and said we need "X" amount of fork-lift operators. So BOCES set up a training program with money, so that if a client comes in and says, I don't know what I want to do and they have driving abilities, we know that if you take this course we're going to have fifty openings at the GAP.

Welfare-to-work programs and the county's relationship with corporations pushes people into low paying, low skill, dead-end jobs. The Department of Social Services is acting in the manner of a recruiter on behalf of corporation interests. Applicants are prescreened and corporations do not have to pay for the training of individuals. The potential employee is trained to present and maintain an employable demeanor.⁴³ The Dutchess County Economic Development Corporation is part of a collaborative group shaping the new workforce development system for the county by drawing in businesses with the promise of a labor force molded to specifications. The workforce development system works in tandem with the Dutchess County Economic Development Corporation to guarantee that Dutchess County has an adequate supply of workers trained for local

⁴³ An employable demeanor is achieved by assessing and certifying recipients over a three-day period. One's educational level is determined as well as one's vocational capacity. Trainees are then offered workshops on how to prepare for a job. It was pointed out to me by one advocate, Adolphus, that it is probably best that assessments are done by external agencies such as PIC and BOCES because:

"To have Social Service employees conduct assessments may be disastrous for some people who have had long-term relationships with DCDSS staff. If those interactions had in any way been negative, then DCDSS staff might make assessments based on retaliation, which would hinder clients' ability to secure appropriate training."

employers. Through the diligent efforts of DCEDC the GAP's distribution center will be located in the county. They plan to open a 1.3 million square foot Old Navy distribution center and recruit 700 employees. The Gap will be the first big test of the recently revamped labor supply system in Dutchess County.

Business interests prevail. On the surface, those interests appear to be sensible but, out of that interest, emerges a regulated labor force. The Work First approach is one that can create a glut in the labor market, cheapening the cost of labor. Ranney (1999) points out that the regulation of labor markets is one way of increasing profits by lowering wages because when there are more people in the job market, labor costs less. He states, "economic and government institutions facilitate and intensify competition among workers toward cheapening labor power" (51). This has the potential effect of sustaining poverty, by creating competitive conditions where workers vie for jobs. As a result wages are depressed.

The travesty is that the local population is being trained for low-wage, service-sector work while it is likely that higher-end jobs go to more skilled, non-locals and/or the unabsorbed labor force from IBM's downsizing. For the local population of Poughkeepsie, job choices are very narrow and low paying, such as clerical work, health-related and computer-related professions. The available positions are typically home health aide, which garners a salary of about \$280 per week and data entry with a similar entry-level salary. Neither position provides enough money to support a family of two, especially when child-care is a necessity.

It is within this job environment that the women I studied worked. In addition to the low-end employment, there are other issues pertinent to the women in my study. First, where are jobs located? Are they located in suburban environments? The second issue is whether or not the jobs are accessible by public transportation. Third is whether or not Blacks, who are typically concentrated in urban areas, are excluded from jobs by virtue of their location (Holzer 1999:470). There is little opportunity for women to become gainfully employed in a city where the new businesses rely on highly skilled labor. As such, they are herded into certain positions that lead to job ghettos.

There is also the issue of mismatch between the training activities in which recipients must be engaged and the actual jobs available. Training is not always applicable to the job market, which can be frustrating to those who have completed training programs. Take, for example, Sherita, mentioned earlier. She had this to say about the training program she took part in as a requirement for assistance:

I went and got training as a certified nursing assistant (CNA). What I really want to do is go Dutchess County Community College and work toward getting a degree in social work or human services. But they [DCDSS] won't let me do that. So I go and finish the training. I get a job at Vassar-Warner Home [for the aged]. But they tell me my CNA training is not applicable. I have to get re-trained as a Personal Care Assistant. When am I going to be able to do that?

Although Sherita became employed as a result of the training, her continued employment was contingent upon her receiving yet another certificate. Because she did not have the time to go to training and work full time, over the course of eight months, Sherita had a total of three jobs, in an attempt to apply the certificate she had received to a relevant job. She made no more than \$8 per hour. Assuming she worked every week, 35 hours per week, Sherita's gross salary would have been \$14,560 per year, approximately \$9,706

after taxes. Her rent was \$500 per month or \$6,000 per year. \$3,706 is what was left, amounting to \$71.26 per week for all her other needs.

The education/job opportunity mismatches are acute in cities where there have been declines in traditional blue-collar industries and growth in information processing industries since 1979 (Kasarda 1990:308). First there are tensions in the employment and training process. There are concerns whether or not people want the training offered. Second is whether or not the training leads to positions that offer a living wage. Third is whether or not the training received is applicable. All of these issues are factors in self-sufficiency. A person who *wants* their job is more likely to stay with it, particularly if there is room for advancement. In Sherita's case, her training was inappropriate and in a field in which she actually had little interest. This suggests that the opportunity to invoke choice as a person on welfare is negated.

Finding employment that provides a living wage is not very easy in Dutchess County unless you are highly skilled. The classified ads list low- or no-skill positions in the retail and service sectors.⁴⁴ Those positions are frequently part time. Also, the women, many of whom were pushed toward getting certified as nursing assistants, will compete with each other in a segment of the labor market, saturated with other certified nursing assistants.

Many of the jobs were not actually located in the City but, rather, in the Town of Poughkeepsie or in the nearby towns of Highland, Fishkill, Hopewell Junction or Newburgh, to which there is inadequate transportation. Juliet, the community resident

⁴⁴ According to the State Metropolitan Area Data Book (www.census.gov/staab/ww/smadb.htm) there were 1,728 retail establishments employing 18,507 people and 1,824 service establishments employing 35,516 people in Dutchess County.

with whom I sometimes lived, succinctly described the difficulties of finding and keeping a job when one is poor and living in Poughkeepsie. She said: “We are held hostage in our community because there is no transportation. How do you get to and from a job with an abbreviated bus system?” Newman (1999) in her study of the working poor in Harlem, New York notes that employment opportunities are geographically limited because it is difficult to get to, and costly to accept employment outside of the city.

Nonetheless, women make a Herculean effort to find work as mandated by the changes in welfare. To facilitate this process, DCDSS has employment counselors who work closely with clients and provides grants to several groups and councils that coordinate training and job placement for people on public assistance. But again, the task of accomplishing independence is challenged by inadequate funds to survive. Employment and training is complicated for women with young children who need child-care. We will now turn to Iliana’s attempt to become independent and the hardship caused by welfare policy vis-à-vis her need for child-care. This is the third dimension, following institutional interactions and employment and training, that contributes to self-sufficiency.

“They don’t see it’s so hard for me”: Child Care

It took two months for me to finally meet with Iliana because, at the time, one of the advocates suggested that I talk with her about her experiences with social services, she was in the last trimester of a difficult pregnancy. I wanted to speak with her because I had been told that her interactions with social service staff were remarkable in the unyielding manner in which they pressed her to meet the requirements for TANF.

Iliana was born in the Dominican Republic where she graduated from high school and attended one year of college. At age 18, shortly after she started college, her mother died and she came to the United States to live with her aunt. While in the United States, Iliana met Raphael, the father of her two oldest children, Margie who is eight and Ricky who is two. She received social service benefits in the past, mostly when Raphael lost his seasonal jobs doing construction work, making her use of social services intermittent. Iliana was primarily a stay-at-home mom when she lived with Raphael, who was emotionally abusive. She left him two years ago.

Iliana went on social services on a more long-term basis when she came to the shelter after fleeing from Raphael. After her stay at the shelter, she was approved for federally subsidized housing. Since leaving Raphael, she met and has been in a relationship with Tony, the father of her youngest child, Rayza – who was just one month old when Iliana and I met. In 1998, Iliana received cash assistance, food stamps and Medicaid. Due to changes in welfare, she said she was required to participate in a job-training program in 1998.

I trained as a certified nursing assistant at BOCES. I didn't mind the training because I hoped it would lead me to being employed. I like to work.

What she really wanted to do was work in the tourist industry but the training options at BOCES did not include anything related to tourism although that is a growing industry in Poughkeepsie and the rest of the Hudson Valley. While in training from October through December of 1998, Iliana continued to receive benefits. Because she was in a training program, Iliana was eligible for child-care assistance, which she received. Although she had a grueling schedule, initially her child-care arrangements worked out quite well.

Iliana had everything timed to perfection. She arose at 5:30 a.m. and got the children ready to leave by 6:30 a.m. Since she did not have a car, Iliana walked Raphael to the babysitter's house and then walked with Margie to wait for the school bus near her training program. Her classes for the certificate program began at 8:00 a.m. and lasted until 12:30 p.m.

The mandates of welfare reform were a challenge for her. One requirement of the welfare-to-work policy is that you have to be engaged in work-related activities for 35 hours per week. The training Iliana attended was four and a-half-hours per day so she also had to participate in a workfare program, to work off her cash grant. Then there was an unexpected problem, according to Iliana:

In the first month of the training program, I discovered I was pregnant. I did not plan to get pregnant a third time. I was on the pill. But I had gotten the flu and was given antibiotics. The antibiotics made the pill not work. But the people at Social Services asked me why I keep having children, but things happen...⁴⁵

Shortly after she started the training program, Iliana received a letter from DCDSS stating that she had to report to work at the Lunch Box, the food pantry for community residents. She made sandwiches each day from 12:30 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. Then she had to pick up the youngest child from the baby sitter and get back to the bus stop to pick up Margie. They would all walk home, rain or shine, snow or hail. She could not miss school or work or she risked being sanctioned by DCDSS. Iliana was determined to finish the program and did so in December, 1998. Although she was pregnant, she quickly got a job working at a nursing home on the 7:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. shift. The job

⁴⁵ Some of the taped conversation with Iliana was inaudible because her children were crying. Iliana was cooing in between sentences to the baby Rayza. Raphael, the two year-old, was jumping around trying to get my attention and playing with the tape recorder.

was only part time, about 28 hours per week. As soon as she started working, Iliana's cash grant was reduced.

They didn't want to give me cash because I was making \$8.25 an hour. I worked 28-30 hours a week...I still had to go to the Lunch Box. They were trying to make me go because I still needed help (assistance). They sent me a letter saying I had to be at the Lunch Box from 8:30 to 2:00. But I worked from 7:00 to 2:00. I called them and said, this conflicts with my work schedule. I have to be at work by 7:00 a.m. They told me I had to work on my day off. I told them, I have a hard job, I lift people and I'm pregnant. On my day off I should relax. I didn't want to have a sick baby.

Because her hours for work changed each week, Iliana said she kept getting letters changing her food stamp allotment. There were times, she said, when the food stamps were not enough to feed the family. During the eighth month of her pregnancy, while she was still working, she had to go on bed rest due to a serious health problem. Being home meant that she did not need to take her youngest child to day care, and it also meant she lost the child-care slot.

When I asked Iliana about the changes in welfare, and if she knew what they were, she said:

Not really, I don't know all of it, but before you could stay home with your children for one year. But now it's only for three months. I just found that out when I had the baby. I know I have to work and I don't mind that but they don't give me enough time. You can find a job here to do that, it's easy, but I don't know where I will find another babysitter who will watch the children so early so that I can get to work by 7:00 a.m. in the morning?

I asked Iliana about having relatives help her out and she said the baby's grandmother is not the grandmother of the other kids. She cannot depend on her to watch all of them.

The emphasis on employment resulting from the passage of PROWRA immediately raised the issue of child-care. Research has shown that child-care

obligations are a major obstacle to mothers' labor force participation (Kimmel 1994; Websdale 1998). DSS regulations state that one has the right to receive information about how to locate a child-care provider. The regulations also indicate that one can be excused from work activity if there is a child under 13 years of age and no child-care is available. Nonetheless, Iliana was still under the impression that she had to go to work. She felt the pressure to conform to the mandates of Social Services, in part due to the barrage of letters she received. These letters scared her and her perception was that she would lose all of her benefits.

Iliana noted there were other shifts she could work but then she would not see her children or she would be exhausted. Working the third shift (9:00 p.m. to 4:00 a.m.) was very difficult for single mothers with or without child-care. She found the whole situation stressful. She said she could not sleep because she "lies awake at night trying to figure out what she's going to do." The letters DCDSS sent her for months were troubling. "They must have been thinking of me everyday at DCDSS. I would get a letter every week. I do what they want [get training and get a job] and the letters still keep coming. They still take stuff away from me." The letters itemized what Iliana was expected to do to keep her benefits. She also received letters that indicated changes in her food stamp allotment. But one thing she never received was information about child-care.

Child-care in Dutchess County is limited and has been for the last six years. The need has been responded to by increasing the number of day-care centers, but demand continues to exceed supply (*Poughkeepsie Journal* 4/8/99). It is even difficult to find although DCDSS subsidizes day-care for people on public assistance and low-income

families. In 1999, the county allotted \$3.7 million dollars for child-care assistance and subsidies. Approximately 1,000 children of public assistance recipients receive day-care subsidies from DCDSS. Expenses for another 640 from low-income families also receive help from DCDSS but there is a long waiting list. The Commissioner of DCDSS informed me that the Department's own research found that the waiting list was long because women who do not need child-care immediately (because they are pregnant) are prematurely signing up to ensure a spot when their child is born. One might surmise, however, if women are signing up prematurely, then clearly there is an anticipated shortage.

In her effort to meet mandates, Iliana went to BOCES for training and worked daily at the Lunch Box to work off her grant. The demands of the social service system left her feeling tired and fragmented. She could not understand how she could have worked so hard and still be reprimanded by DCDSS. The amount of time Iliana spent meeting DCDSS requirements interfered with her ability to spend quality time with her children. Iliana indicated that she went to DCDSS frequently, almost every time she received a letter. Decisions about what to do with her day were frequently organized by the requirements of social services policy. "They should look at everybody individually. They don't see it's so hard for me." Iliana was unsure of what kind of child-care she would be able to secure. There was a woman in the neighborhood that might be willing to help her out, she said. But informal child-care arrangements are "often made with individuals who may not view the arrangement as primary. These providers -- often low-income mothers themselves -- may have responsibilities and obligations to people other

than the child in need of care" (Henly 1998). Their lack of commitment threatens the stability of the arrangement and places mothers at risk in terms of on-going employment.

Iliana's ability to be self-sufficient was met with systemic indifference. Child-care is a crucial component of women's ability to be self-sufficient. Under federal and state law, a state may not sanction a person for failure to meet work requirements if the individual is a single parent caring for a child under six years old and can demonstrate an inability to find appropriate child-care. Under New York State law, parents receiving public assistance, who have children under age 13 and are required to be engaged in work-related activities, are guaranteed child-care assistance if they need child-care in order to work. "Further, parents are entitled to transitional child-care benefits when their cases are closed once they have obtained private employment" (Powell and Cahill 2000:8). Parents are given the opportunity to choose from a range of child-care options including center based, group home, family, and in-home child-care.

Single-parent families are more likely to pay for child-care than two-parent families and they pay a national average of \$258 per month. As a percentage of earnings, single parents pay approximately 16 percent of their salaries. "When earnings are low, the level of child-care expense could affect whether a family is able to "make it" on their earnings (Giannarelli and Barsimantov 2000). Among poor families on welfare, they pay about 18 percent of their earnings on child-care. For families who earn less than the official poverty level, child-care expenses can range from 23-34 percent of their earnings (Giannarelli and Barismantov 2000).

Clearly, the percentage of earnings for child-care can be a deterrent to work. However, the more relevant issue is Iliana's concern about the quality of life of her

children. Iliana was torn because while she really wanted to work. She was more eager to stay home with the new baby, as she had done with her other two children. Iliana did not feel that the baby would be ready to be with a babysitter by three months.

Although people cannot be sanctioned for not complying with work requirements if they cannot find appropriate childcare, many parents worry that they will be sanctioned but, by law, caseworkers are required to inform parents that they cannot be penalized. Yet, some are not told of their child-care rights, as was the case with Iliana. As Kalil, Schweingruber, Daniel-Echols and Breen (2000) note in their study on mothers who work and receive welfare, child-care is a conflict for women. Mothers experience conflict because by working (or being in training programs), they are required to spend too many hours away from their children. They were reluctant to let unknown child-care providers be responsible for their children. The expectation that women work or be engaged in work-related activities because they were receiving TANF precluded their option to find the quality of child-care they might have preferred. Caseworkers are often insensitive to women's concerns about child-care options. Their considerations are intricately related to the meaning of self-sufficiency and self-esteem. Child-care decisions intersect with a woman's ability to work *and* her sense of what makes her a good mother. The State defined meaning of independence should not be achieved at any cost. Women should not be forced to parent in ways that are contrary to their own value systems. By that I mean, if their value systems include working, they should be able to do so. If their value systems include being stay-at-home moms, then they should be able to do that as well. Finally, women's children should not have to suffer the consequences of bad child-care arrangements.

CHAPTER 6

“HOW CAN I RAISE MY BABY IN THIS?": HOUSING

Introduction

The final dimension considered in terms of self-sufficiency relates to housing options and the political-economic conditions that circumscribe women's choices. The housing needs of poor, battered women are urgent. Survivors of domestic violence are often in desperate need of housing. For some women barriers to self-sufficiency are the result of batterers who sabotage women's efforts to work. For others, independence is sabotaged by women's economic dependency on abusers. In either case, access to housing is crucial to live a life free from violence. Due to some women's poverty or low income, the ability to move is challenged.

In Poughkeepsie, women's attempts to secure housing intersect with the economy of the county and reduced availability of housing for low-income individuals. Access to quality rentals was important aspect of women's sense of accomplishment. In this chapter, I describe women's desires for housing and the complications in securing it, as well as the role DCSS plays in their options.

Some of the dearth of housing can be connected to the City's vision of rehabilitation. The City of Poughkeepsie Comprehensive Plan (1998) called for a range of strategies that include renovation and reuse of vacant buildings and removal and replacement of dilapidated structures (2-3). It also suggests "Homesteading of better quality vacancies was identified as a strategy to attract new families into the city and help

rehabilitate older neighborhoods...while older structures should be razed and replaced with new construction" (3-4). Many of the vacancies referred to are on the Northside of the City.

A Place to Live

"Where's the paper?" said a resident early one morning while shelter staff sat at the dining room table. "I've got to find a place." She examined the Classified section of the *Poughkeepsie Journal*, but the pickings were slim. I noticed the paper was marked up with blue pen. She had circled two apartments, all on the Northside of Poughkeepsie. "Why don't you check out some of these?" I asked, pointing to other listings. "I can't live there, that's the Southside." Two relevant issues about women's access to housing emerged from this very short interaction. The first was the lack of affordable housing and the second was the issue of race and class in housing options.

The need for affordable housing and apartments has been a challenge since IBM downsized and since the City began its revitalization, according to advocates. At the time of the downsizing, people foreclosed on their mortgages or left their properties and many houses became rentals according to Adolphus, an advocate who focuses on welfare entitlement issues. The average fair market value of a one-bedroom apartment in Dutchess County is \$710 per month. To afford that type of housing, one has to have an income of \$28,400 per year (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 1999). The 1999 New York State TANF grant provided a single-parent family of three, \$577 per month.

In this case, a person with no earnings, the maximum affordable housing cost would be \$173 per month.

An analysis⁴⁶ of the Real Estate Classifieds in October 1998 during the first year of my research, listed 31 apartments in the City of Poughkeepsie. The average rent was \$525 and there were three listings for Section 8 approved apartments. The apartments were available on both on the Southside and Northside of the City. A little over a year later, in January 1999, there were 33 listings for apartments and the average rent was \$614, reflecting a 17 percent increase. The listings in January 1999 included only two apartments approved for Section 8. On February 15, 2000 there were 21 listings for apartments but only one was available at \$350 and it was the only apartment that accepted Section 8 subsidies.

Housing is a much-needed commodity in Poughkeepsie. Jayson, who is mentioned in Chapter Two in relation to the impact IBM's downsizing had on his life, at one point capitalized on women's restricted housing options. He befriended the landlord of a building in his neighborhood. The landlord did not want to rent out to single women with rowdy children or, "particular kinds of women," as Jayson put it. So he offered to act as a rental agent for the landlord. He would recommend women as potential renters. He made sure they did not have abusive boyfriends or boyfriends who were drug dealers. If the women were known to Jayson and were flawed in some way, he would not recommend them for an apartment. If he liked the woman and thought she would make a

⁴⁶ This analysis was completed by counting the number of apartments identified as being available in the City of Poughkeepsie, that had a rental price. If an ad listed two apartments with prices, then it was counted twice. If an ad had an apartment with a price range, I took the lowest figure and added it into the calculation. The October 21, 1998 and January 27, 1999 issues of the *Poughkeepsie Journal* were randomly selected for this analysis.

good tenant, he would help her get the apartment. She would pay him money and so would the landlord, although Jayson never said how much.

Women's housing choices are influenced by race and class distinctions first evident by the sides of the City on which residents live. Main Street cuts through the City of Poughkeepsie redlining⁴⁷ the community. Blacks and Latinos primarily live on the Northside, and mostly Whites live on the Southside. I came to know the City of Poughkeepsie through the lens of race by talking with community residents and going on morning, afternoon and early evening walks with Juliet. Juliet and I walked to and from her house where I often spent the night on her living room couch. Each time we walked we took a slightly different route and Juliet's griot-like style provided countless hours of information about the homes of the City of Poughkeepsie, the politics of home ownership and the multiple uses of dwellings.

Juliet lives on the Northside of the City in a home that was built in 1910 and has been in her family for over fifty years. She lives there with her mother, her daughter -- one of four children, and her granddaughter. On Juliet's side of the street are eight houses; three are owner-occupied; four have the same absentee landlord who checks on her properties every single day -- unlike most. One house is a drug den. Several of the homes were built around the early 1900s and are architecturally stunning but some are in need of repair. Just around the corner from Juliet is another block with a similar dwelling

⁴⁷ Redlining is the designation of certain areas where real estate loans will not be made, typically by banks and mortgage brokers. In the past it has been used to keep Blacks from purchasing real estate in predominately White neighborhoods. The use of the term as used here connotes restrictive conditions that prevent people from moving into areas they choose.

composition except the drug den is in an old building that has been turned into a rooming house. This composition of housing – private ownership, absentee landlord rentals, rooming houses and drug dens – are some of what can be found on Poughkeepsie’s Northside. The drug dens, rooming houses and badly kept buildings reduce women’s desire to move into them. Some of the homes are in need of various degrees of rehabilitation and larger buildings, which have historic significance, are in need of complete renovation.

The Northside has several businesses interspersed with residential dwellings, such as Catskill Art and Office Supply and Love/Effron, an oil company (City of Poughkeepsie 1998), as well as the Dutchess County Jail. Many of the homes on the Northside are historic, but not one has been designated an historic landmark. In contrast, the Southside has a number of historic homes. On Academy and Garfield Streets, almost every home for five blocks is designated as an historic landmark. Many of the non-historic designated homes have ample front and back acreage and the area is considered to be an upper-middle-class area.

The housing in this neighborhood seemed to be out of reach for the women leaving the shelter and this may be particularly true for Black women. Leslie and I passed a beautiful old brick building that had been rehabilitated near the border of the Southside. There was a "For Rent" sign in the window of the street-level business office of the building. We went in to inquire about the vacancy and were told it was rented. Just on a hunch, I later called the phone number on the rental notice and asked if the apartment was available. I was told yes, it was a duplex for \$850 per month.

If a woman earns a fairly good salary, she goes into the private housing market. If she is on DCDSS, she has to find an apartment that meets the budget she is given. Table 3 below indicates the guidelines for rent depending on family size at the time of this research.

Table 3. Public Assistance Monthly Allowance for Shelter with Heat, Based on Number of People in Household.

Number of people	1	2	3	4	5	6
Monthly Allowance	\$353	\$469	\$579	\$689	\$803	\$886

Source: PA/FS/MA/Monthly Allowances and Income Levels 8/15/96 (revised)

The value women place on a home is rooted in a desire to be safe and comfortable. Fitchen (1981), in her work on rural poverty, discusses the dissonance in values between those who are poor and those who are middle class. She indicated that the housing goals differ between the two groups, suggesting that poor people accept inexpensive, substandard housing and are willing to compromise between ideal preferences and real prospects (97). She also suggests there is tremendous vulnerability in being publicly scrutinized and labeled as lazy, a spendthrift and without ambition as a consequence of living in poor housing. Among poor women living in the more urban area of Poughkeepsie is an awareness of what people think about them living in substandard housing and they do not compromise willingly. In fact, it is not a compromise at all, which implies an agreement by mutual concession. Sadly, there are rarely options or positions from which the women could negotiate because the cost of the housing they desired was incompatible with the budget for housing determined by the New York State Department of Social Services guidelines.

Leslie, for example, was given a budget of \$347 for an apartment. She found one listed in the *Poughkeepsie Journal* and made arrangements to see it. On the way there, Leslie said she hoped it had huge windows and lots of light. She wanted a separate room for the baby and prayed, as we walked, that it was not in the building next to the rooming house where everybody knew drug deals were transacted. The apartment, indeed, was the one adjacent to the rooming house, which was a grave disappointment. When we arrived, the buzzer did not work. Leslie yelled out hoping that someone would answer. We finally entered and Leslie was even more disappointed. The living room was less than seven feet wide and the “bedroom” was about five feet wide. There were small, low windows in both rooms, which Leslie pointed out anyone could climb through from the porch. The kitchen, the largest room in the apartment, was infested with roaches. Leslie was angry that she was expected to live in such a place. She just looked at me and said, “How can I raise my baby in this?”

In response to the need for affordable housing in Poughkeepsie, an old building on the upper northern end of Garden Street was targeted for development (Hudson River Housing 1999). The group responsible for the development was the Hudson River Housing Corporation. This effort was supposed to provide housing to meet the needs of all the community members and was slated to include retail space. Juliet was angered by this project. She discovered that the street-level space was slated to be a convenience store. The revitalization effort, in her opinion, should include retail stores that will service the needs of the community and those stores should have lasting value. A convenience store is not an example of meeting community needs because several already exist. She said “What we need is a supermarket, where the prices are not as high. We’re

already poor and when you have to shop at a convenience store, you spend more money so they can cover their costs.” As we walked to work in the rain one morning, Juliet stopped in front of the Garden Street complex and pointed her finger. Speaking loudly she said, “How is this going to benefit us, the poorest of us?!” As it turned out, her question was very relevant.

Sara is a White woman with a long history of advocacy in the community on behalf of battered women and worked in the civil rights movement. She provided some insight into how poor women would not be able to access the newly developed units:

I had every battered woman fill out an application for housing at Garden Street while it was in the building phase. Every woman who completed the application was rejected because her income was too low. I did a calculation to see if these women could be self-sufficient. I figured out that if a woman worked a full 40-hour-a-week job, (a measurable outcome of welfare reform) at \$5.35 an hour, she would make \$11,128 per year. That is not enough income to qualify for an apartment at Garden Street. That building won't do anything for poor women and there is less and less housing available in Poughkeepsie.

DSS and Subsidized Housing

The housing market is tight and, increasingly, properties are selling for more than the listing price. Rents are also increasing. In addition, 41 percent of the housing units are owner-occupied, which limits the pool of available rentals. Further the quality of housing available for women on welfare is very low. “Some of the places are real shit,” commented Sara. She continued:

You can't afford to live in anything decent. If a woman comes to me and tells me the address of the place she's going to and I know it's a bad block, I'll tell her.” But sometimes they don't have a choice. There is housing,

cheap housing. The landlords know what the maximum budget is for each family size on social services. The people who manage the slum buildings are loan sharks. The apartment owners rip people off. Mr. Johnson owns a building where none of the apartments have refrigerators. So a woman has to get DSS to buy a fridge for her. Then, when she leaves the apartment, the landlord, Mr. Johnson, takes the fridge out of the apartment and brings it to a store that he owns and have DSS buy it again. DSS pays for the same fridge over and over.

The absence of a basic necessity, such as a refrigerator, entails a series of tasks to accomplish putting together an apartment that is acceptable by DCDSS. The process can be demeaning and tiring, as Joanne soon discovered, because she was recognizable as being a recipient of public assistance.

Joanne is a small, demure Black woman who came to the shelter in the fall of 1998. She came after her boyfriend, Carl, beat her. Carl had come home one September evening after work and saw Joanne standing in from their apartment building with friends. He was in a foul mood. When he got out of the cab, he began arguing with her -- about what, she did not remember. Carl began to beat her in the street because she was outside. The next day, Joanne and her son, JD, came to the shelter. It was then that she applied to DCDSS, for the first time. Shortly after arriving at the shelter, she began to try to find an apartment.

Joanne put in applications for five apartments with two real estate agencies that manage apartments often rented by people receiving TANF or Safety Net funding. She kept getting rejected for apartments; she believed it was because she was Black. Trying to find an apartment contributed to Joanne's feeling that she was going to break down because all Joanne wanted was to have a home; a quiet place, free of violence to raise JD.

She already had a part-time job working at a small company, but without Carl's income she needed assistance.

The best part of her new life, she hoped, would be the ability to come home where no one would beat her. That, to Joanne, felt like she was taking care of business; to be able to come and go, sit out on a stoop and not get knocked in the head.

Joanne found an apartment after three months. She was filled with anxiety. The anxiety was about living alone with her child and the expectant baby in an apartment that she did not feel was suitable. "It's not a good place for kids. It's not really safe...but it's all there is." The new place had no refrigerator, making it inhabitable, which delayed her move-in date. The DCDSS caseworker told Joanne to get an estimate for the refrigerator and have it faxed. After approval it could be brought to the apartment and she could move in.

To remedy the situation, Joanne and I, along with an advocate named Angie, early one morning went to get an estimate on a refrigerator for approval by Joanne's caseworker at DCDSS. We tried three locations, two of which had refrigerators on the street just outside the store's entrance. The hope was that the salesperson would fax an estimate of the cost to the caseworker. At the first place, Angie told the salesman that she wanted an estimate for a refrigerator. There is a familiarity of class status based on that for which a person is asking. The salesman was familiar enough with the language of social services to know that "an estimate" is connected to being on welfare. He held up his hand just as she finished her sentence and said, "We don't give estimates for welfare, because they don't buy new ones. We only have new ones." Joanne looked down to the floor. She was embarrassed and headed for the front door. Angie put her arm on

Joanne's shoulder and said, "Let's try another place. I saw a place that looks like they may have used appliances." The second shop we went to had no more refrigerators.

The next store appeared to have once been a florist shop because of the glass-front coolers lining the walls. On the shop floor, however, were all kinds of used appliances. We spotted a refrigerator as we walked in. Angie walked over to the Black man who appeared to be in charge and asked if they gave estimates. "We don't give estimates no more. Welfare has to call us first and then we'll deliver." Angie tried to cajole the man to simply fax an estimate to DCDSS. He was exasperated by her request and walked over to an old desk. He pulled open the top drawer and pulled out a dog-eared piece of paper. He waved an old estimate in Angie's face while saying, "We did estimates, but then no one showed up to get the appliance. No one comes. It takes too much time." Joanne whispered, "I can't get the apartment approved without the refrigerator." The gentleman did not even bother telling us the cost of the refrigerator because he felt it was a waste of time. Angie felt it was useless to stay and argue with the man so all of us started to leave. As we were leaving, I spotted a nearly new refrigerator on the other side of the entrance. "That's a nice one," I said. He said "Oh yeah, that is a nice one...too nice. I'm sending it home to Jamaica." I asked him why he wouldn't sell it and he stated that it was worth a lot more in Jamaican dollars.

Joanne was placed in the predicament of having to scrounge to put together an acceptable apartment – in this instance it required obtaining a refrigerator. Her apartments could not be certified by DCDSS unless it had a refrigerator. She drew on the consumer retail industry in the area. But in doing so, Joanne's welfare status was easily identifiable. She was working within the parameters of a social serviced life. To a

certain degree the appliance shop represented a line in the web of constraints that mark poor women's lives. Joanne was being "pimped by poverty lords"⁴⁸ and it was both embarrassing and exhausting. Social Service requirements and the process of moving into buildings entrap some women into demeaning arrangements with not only DCDSS, but also with institutions such as retailers.

The Sunday following our attempts to locate a refrigerator, Joanne moved and spoke slowly while making chili for the residents at the shelter. She said she was tired and scared. The apartment had not yet been inspected and she only had three days before she had to leave the shelter. The euphoria of having found a place was dampened by the need for an appliance and the fact that where she was going to live was not so great.

Eventually, she found a refrigerator and an estimate was sent. The DCDSS conducted a check to ensure the apartment was acceptable and Joanne moved in at the end of November. She did not like her place that much. As one advocate told me, the DCDSS housing unit deals with slum landlords whom they know accept social service payments.

What Joanne really wanted was a tenant-based Section 8 subsidized apartment, as did most of the women. However, that was nearly impossible because there was a two- to three-year waiting list. The other type of housing within the permissible budget limit of DCDSS in Poughkeepsie is public housing. The Poughkeepsie Public Housing Authority is the landlord and owner of public housing where tenants pay thirty percent of their gross annual income for rent. None of the women wanted to live in public housing or in

⁴⁸ I use the term "pimped by poverty lords" to connote people or organizations that benefit from poor people's dire circumstances. Another example might be the high interest rates charged for people with bad credit histories.

residences in run-down neighborhoods. I went to one apartment in a public housing building that was a low rise. The rooms were small with cinderblock walls. They looked like pre-fabricated apartments. The women perceived they would be thought of badly if they lived in public housing and they associated it with Social Services. The quality of the apartments was inferior and there was a considerable amount of drug activity the women wanted to avoid. There were also too many people. "I'm not trying to live with *all* those people," said one shelter resident.

Obviously not all of the housing in Poughkeepsie is bad. The units may be very nice, but the neighborhood is less than desirable. Meg Palumbo, Section 8 Supervisor⁴⁹ commented, "The women give up something when they move to some units. Like those on Main Street. If they have children, where are they going to play, on Main Street? No, but it's housing you can afford."

Since the quality of public housing and units in the private housing market were sometimes less than desirable, women tried very hard to get into Section 8 tenant-based subsidy. The difference in standard between DCDSS housing and those that accept Section 8 subsidies are dramatic, according to Meg:

DSS they have a whole other standard that boggles my mind. I just had a very interesting conversation with a building inspector. He got a complaint and went to the unit and said he could not believe what people were living in. DSS' point of view is that you're getting a budget for two people, which is like \$465.⁵⁰ You've got to find a place to cover your rent, your utilities and you're not going to find that. I think he said 10 people were living in that one-bedroom apartment. That is against every standard I know. So I have a problem with that. I have personal feelings that I'm not going to put a mother and her child in a place that is roach infested. She'll

⁴⁹ The interview with Meg Palumbo took place in September, 1999

⁵⁰ The actual budget for rent for a family of two is \$469 (see Table 3).

be back in a shelter, know what I mean? People are paying too much rent for what they have to offer. Our standards are "Housing Quality Standards." We are even more stringent than the government's housing standards, which are 'Minimum Housing Standards'.

The two standards play a large role in why people want Section 8 subsidized housing. Minimum Housing Standards, for example, do not require tiles to match. You can have black and white tile floors, if one of the tiles peels up and the landlord puts down an orange replacement tile, that is acceptable and will pass minimum inspection, according to DCDSS. Alternatively, the Section 8 office would insist the tiles match. Edin and Lein (1997) point out that Section 8 subsidies are attractive and limited. There is an overwhelming demand for Section 8 subsidized housing, which can take years to get. Two housing administrators whom I interviewed confirmed that a three-year waiting period was the norm for a subsidized apartment. In March 2000 the City of Poughkeepsie Section 8 Program opened up subsidized apartments for people who applied in 1997. The county has about 900 Section 8 subsidies, the City of Poughkeepsie has 515 subsidies and, Poughkeepsie Housing Authority has 35 subsidies. Most of these subsidies are occupied. The number of subsidized housing does not meet the need because low-income rentals are scarce and the price of housing has inched up after being deflated in the early 1990s.

Participants who have tenant-based Section 8 subsidies are permitted to find their own housing units in the private housing market. Essentially, one asks a landlord if he/she is willing to be Section 8 approved. If the landlord agrees, then an application process begins to grant Section 8 status. If one finds an apartment that accepts Section 8 tenant-based subsidies, they pay 30 percent of their gross annual salary for rent. Federal

funds make up the difference between the renter's contribution and the actual rent.

Typically, units in Poughkeepsie that accept tenant-based Section 8 subsidies are well kept and are frequently located in mixed income areas. Also, the certificate or voucher⁵¹ for the Section 8 is portable, which means that if you leave your current tenant-based Section 8 subsidy and find a place that will accept your Section 8 subsidy, you can "port" or take your subsidy to that other location, even to a Section 8 approved unit in another state. This is an important benefit for women who are battered and may want to leave the state in which they live.

There are housing pressures in Poughkeepsie. Some are due to fewer rental units and others are due to changes in welfare. These issues have increased the need for housing. Meg noted that there are far more women coming to the Section 8 office since welfare reform:

I would say the number of women we see has increased. A lot of women...what happens now is that you're a woman on public assistance. They sanction you. You're off the grant. So now you're living off less money...so realistically, you can't pay your rent, and you owe. You can't afford it. Now you're going to be evicted. So now you're going to come to me because you need me. I can't take you because we don't take people that owe back rent. You have to be current, plus we don't do emergency housing. So, it all falls back on DSS again, because they are going to end up putting you in a shelter and the cost of a shelter, do you know what it costs? \$68 per day for each person. Something like that. It's outrageous.

⁵¹ The difference between a voucher and a certificate is that with a Section 8 Certificate the maximum allowable rent is based on room size and adjusted gross income for a particular area. On an annual basis Housing and Urban Development (HUD) publishes the fair market rents for each area. The rent cannot exceed the established amount. In Dutchess County, the Fair Market Rent (FMR) for a one bedroom is \$732. The Section 8 Voucher allows people to make above the income limits and move in non-target areas where rents might be a little more expensive. Rental payments are standardized at 90 to 110 percent of the FMR set by HUD. These percentages apply because rents in the City of Poughkeepsie are cheaper than in other parts of the county. With a voucher a person can move into an apartment that is above the limit, if they pay 30 percent of the difference between the payment standard and the actual cost of the rent. With a certificate you must stay within the fair market rate. As of October 2000, the Section 8 program was based on the voucher system.

Does that make sense to you \$1,800 a month to be in a homeless shelter, and they're not going to pay your back rent for you, which could be \$600 bucks?

The Dutchess County Rental Housing Survey (1999) showed a vacancy rate of 2 percent. Housing experts suggest that a 5 percent vacancy rate indicates a healthy rental market but the rate is not healthy in Dutchess County and housing is difficult to obtain. The subsidized housing survey for Poughkeepsie included complexes that have waiting lists, and a waiting list indicates a negative vacancy rate. Of the seventeen subsidized buildings in the City of Poughkeepsie, only three do not have waiting lists and one of the three is for senior citizens. A negative vacancy rate suggests that women will have difficulty moving into low-income housing units. From 1995 to 1999 the apartment complex vacancy rate has gone from 4.1 percent to 2 percent (Dutchess County Rental Housing Survey 1999).

Excavating Housing

The City's economic development is resulting in gentrification. The revitalization which is taking place in Poughkeepsie is evident. One day I walked through the City and noticed an abandoned General Electric plant had been transformed into a cement mixing company called "Get Real Surfaces." I stopped to ask what they did and was told by a worker that they made cement surfaces for residential use, such as counter tops. He said, "Yeah, we got a good business going here with all these houses being bought up and rehabbed."

The patterns of capital investment in the City of Poughkeepsie are bound up in the explosion of information technology that is occurring in the county as a whole. Over time, the downtown area of Poughkeepsie will most likely be transformed into a consumer's paradise, where property prices will escalate and development plans will move poor people to more marginalized areas of the City, specifically the Northside.

Housing is more difficult to find as new housing developments cater to those in higher income brackets. The effort to excavate some of the City's resources (both residential and commercial structures) resulted in designating funds for rehabilitation in 1993 and 1994. This rehabilitation program would have been beneficial for some of the working class residents who were already homeowners. However, the City decided to focus on helping residents buy homes. This resulted in shifting money from the needy Northside of Poughkeepsie to the "healthy" Southside of the City (Pfeiffer, 1995). For example, a first-time homeowners program is being organized by Hudson River Housing in connection with Ulster County Savings Bank and HSBC. It helps a family establish a savings program with one of the two participating banks. The bank matches all contributions \$3 to \$1 up to \$5,000. These funds can be used toward closing costs. Low-cost financing is available to purchase the housing stock for sale in the City of Poughkeepsie.

A second program is the Community Development Rehabilitation Assistance Program. Juliet, whose house is in need of repair, applied for this assistance. It is only for owner-occupied dwellings. The owner/occupant must be income eligible and the total household income must fall within low to moderate income guidelines as determined by Housing and Urban Development. A family of two must make at least \$23,400 but no

more than \$37,450. Other qualifications include that the homeowner must be current with payments of property and school taxes and water bills. Also, the title to the house must be clear. The maximum amount of the loan is \$30,000 for a multiple family house and \$15,000 for a single-family dwelling. As we went over the paperwork, Juliet said:

I don't know how some homeowners are going to be able to access this money. Many of the people I know on the Northside owe something because they are, or were, out of work at some point. They make it so hard for you. The thing is that if you apply, they come to your house to do an inspection. Once they come, if anything is in arrears they put a lien on your house. Then you can't pay the lien so people lose their homes. Just from applying. How's that for getting Black folk to move out?⁵²

The housing being developed as part of the City's revitalization is not affordable for low-income and poor people. Most of the housing in nicer neighborhoods is for the upper-middle-class and wealthy, said one advocate. The home ownership programs are not even relevant for the poor women with whom I spoke.

New developments, which could be claimed for low and very low-income people will most likely be geared toward higher income earning households or specialized populations. For example the City is using a Housing and Urban Development grant of \$500,000 to convert the historic Luckey-Platt department store into 41 "affordable" (the amounts have not been determined) housing units with artisan's loft, gallery and commercial space. If the deal goes through and the application process is anything like the Garden Street development mentioned previously, housing options still will not expand. While housing developments like Garden Street are ostensibly for everyone, they will really be most beneficial for middle-income people.

⁵² In the summer of 2000, after the submission of her application, a lien was put on Juliet's home. She was in the process of raising money to pay it off.

In Joanne and Leslie's case, the ability to obtain housing was marked by race and class. The disadvantage of being poor, a woman of color, and battered is not always so obvious. But one has to wonder especially when seen in relation to other women's experiences. This will be demonstrated in the next section as White women and some of their interactions with DCDSS, education and housing are discussed.

White Battered Women and Welfare

White women had different kinds of experiences with the Dutchess County Department of Social Services that depended on their class status. In Chapter Three, I discussed Jocelyn, a middle-class, White woman who came to the shelter after an "accident" with her husband in which she received head trauma and had her jaw wired and a broken arm. She had no source of income besides working as a housekeeper, although her husband was a police officer who made over \$50,000 per year. In terms of her husband's income and assets (he owned the home they lived in), Jocelyn would be considered middle class. She told me that when she applied to DCDSS, she was treated with disdain. "They treated me like a leper because I am not considered poor. I am. I don't have anything right now. I hate them for treating me so badly." The idea that a middle-class, White woman would have to rely on the state seemed to contradict the illusion and meaning of Whiteness. Jocelyn felt that she challenged the perception of who was supposed to be getting social services. She felt the workers were offended that she was there at all.

If a White woman was low-income or poor, then she was treated like a "low-life" because she was like the rest "of them." The "them" were Blacks or Latinos. White women's poverty became the condition that shifted the boundaries of race. The flexibility of perception in some ways points to the flexibility of race in relation to class status. Both matter because class status serves as a signifier of racial categorizing. Charla, a Black woman who was an advocate, noted that if you are White and on welfare you're not the standard. She said, "You [Blacks] become the underclass -- a Black slave with an institutional master."

On the other hand, the other White women who went to DCDSS were the beneficiaries of sympathetic management of their cases on the part of workers. If a woman was young, with children, and presented well, she was given a lot of support, as illustrated by Josie's story.

Josie is a perky, White woman who is 25. She has a daughter, Shaneva, by Luke. Josie met Luke, a 27-year-old, charming Black man who was a file clerk. His charm "got to her" and she fell in love. Within one month of their dating, Josie discovered she was pregnant. The two set about saving for their wedding but during that year Luke became abusive.

Josie is originally from the South and moved to Dutchess County at age 17. She remembers that her father used to beat her mother who nonetheless had five children by him. After the family moved to Dutchess and he abandoned them, Josie's mother was forced to go on welfare. She constantly plans for her future life in much the same way that Leslie does.

Josie wants her daughter to see her as a success and wants to raise her child with the love and affection she felt she never got. Josie never tires of Shaneva and holds her constantly, even when Shaneva is sleeping. Circumstances, of course, meant that Josie had to use social services to deal with the changes in her life. She needed a place to stay and a source of income. Josie was no stranger to social services and had been on public assistance when she was 19 because she wanted to live on her own and get away from her family. Her conundrum about social services had to do with a decision to use the Child Support Collection Unit to receive \$100 per week from Luke, or not. The PRWORA requires states to enforce child support systems in order for that state to meet federal standards. Families that apply for TANF must cooperate with the child support program. Under the old rules, the first \$50 per month of child support collected was passed through to families who were receiving AFFDC. Under the new rules, states collect child support but the mothers do not receive any money. The state keeps 100 percent of the child support payments as reimbursement for TANF benefits paid. Gordon (2001) astutely points out that child support payments used to reimburse the state for TANF benefits has no effect on the recipients' welfare time limits. She questions why, if the state has been reimbursed for part of its benefit, should that time be charged against a recipient's time limit?

The Family Violence Option gives women latitude in filing for child support payment, fearing increased abuse. Because of Luke's behavior, Josie filed a Restraining Order against Luke. There was a possibility she would be exempted from having to collect from him, one of the benefits of the Family Violence Option. When Josie and I spoke prior to her going to DCDSS, she had no idea about the FVO exemption of

collecting child support if one was in an abusive relationship. However, she was able to make a decision to not collect child support from Luke because the caseworker with whom she met at DCDSS willingly provided her with all of the choices she had, including using the Domestic Violence Liaison to get a child support waiver.

An advocate had gone with Josie to DCDSS and on a different occasion went with a young Black woman. Both Josie and the other woman had seen the same caseworker. She found startling differences in the way each woman was treated and said:

Ms. Harris gave Josie every piece of information she needed to get through the social service maze. She explained to her how the requirements could be used to help her achieve her goals. She told her that if she wanted to go to school, DCDSS would pay for her transportation to class and provide her with day-care. Ms. Harris told her that they could even figure out a way to let her go to school for two years if she wanted and that she would not have to work since Shaneva was less than 1 year old.

Ms. Harris was so helpful. They needed Luke's license number, which Josie did not have. Ms. Harris said, 'I'll call for you.' In determining the benefits, Ms. Harris called Yvonne Genesee to see if Josie could secure a waiver for child support. When Josie filled out some boxes on her application incorrectly, Ms. Harris went over it with her and explained what it was she had done incorrectly. It seemed like she reached out to Josie. But that's not right. She didn't do that with Marianna, [who is Black] another resident at the shelter. She was rude and did not even bother to answer questions that we had about Marianna's case. If you're going to be a caseworker, you've got to give everybody the same amount of information and care.

Josie's treatment at Social Services was obviously quite different than it was for some Black women. Take, for example, the fact that the worker discussed educational options with Josie. This was never the case with Leslie who asked about going to school. In fact, under PRWORA, states may count education as a work activity for only 20 percent of their caseload. This means, *20 percent of the people can, in fact, go to school.*

Apparently, the discretion about who are allowed to be part of that 20 percent is left up to, in large measure, the caseworkers. What this translates into, is that 80 percent of a state's recipients are *not* allowed to count education as meeting the work goal.

The system is operating in a manner that expresses differential treatment based on race. My observations are supported by the work of Gooden (1998, 1999). She argues that there is a race-based disparity in the dispensation of information with regard to welfare reform and the incentives to assist women. In her research, she found that caseworkers are more likely to encourage White than Black women to pursue an education. (Gooden 1998.) In a second paper Gooden (1999) reported that in Virginia, Black women were less frequently informed about transportation assistance. In her research on caseworker support with 39 respondents (22 were Black and 17 were White), Gooden found racial disparity in support given to welfare recipients. White women reported that workers expressed a willingness to provide additional transportation assistance. No Black women in her research reported any offers of transportation assistance beyond gas vouchers. She generally found that Black welfare recipients were less likely to receive caseworkers' support in two areas, transportation assistance and increasing formal education.

White women in this research were able to move into apartments in other parts of the county, typically because they had cars and, I suspect, because the privilege of whiteness increased their housing options. Some places simply would not rent apartments to Black women as evidenced by the previous description of what happened when Leslie and I went to see one.

In these last three chapters, we see that women's lives are restrained in ways that interact with the local economy and social services. Welfare reform policy, which constantly threatens women with sanctions, makes it difficult to imagine feeling secure, because so much is contingent upon meeting the requirement of work. Leslie's job was not going to make her independent, the pay was too low. Sherita was not going to be able to advance because she kept changing positions, trying to find a way to use her CNA certificate. Joanne's attempts to secure an apartment although achieved, was one that might make a person take on a defeatist attitude. Iliana's problems with child-care, along with her desire to care for her children herself, was made a mockery of by welfare reform policy. Through it all the combination of trying to come up with money and take care of oneself was harrowing.

Women moved from their first home, to a shelter, to an apartment within three months, a feat not to be dismissed. But they could lose all they accomplished in one moment through a sanction or a job loss. Or, they could feel the weight of hyper management by the Department of Social Services. The women wanted to *improve* their lives...lives *they* fashioned, not one imposed upon them by policy. But the ceremonies of degradation interfered with how they were able to do so.

The ability to be self-reliant was, in many ways, enmeshed with and overwhelmed by the details of each woman's experience, making her life complex. Various aspects of a woman's life were amplified to a greater degree than others, depending on what was going on. But all of the dimensions of her life were connected. A woman's lack of work might be most important one week and her frustration with not being able to find housing would scream out the next. Both were related. The point is, women's independence

cannot be expected to conform to a uni-dimensional approach. Women's needs blend together and the intricacies of their experiences are not made any simpler by mandating work.

What is just as disturbing in exploring these women's experiences is that battered women living in shelters have a support network -- a group of advocates who negotiate on their behalf with institutions such as social services. If they have a support system, then it is almost impossible to imagine what women who are not connected to an advocacy organization are confronted with.

According to Mink (1998), and as I believe is evident from the research, we learn that many different life events can cause and sustain the need for welfare. We learn that single mothers and poor or low-income women who are Black and battered have a range of needs which, upon being fulfilled, will contribute to their being independent. It is no small charge to be relegated to self-sufficiency only using employment as a standard. Independence, at least as it appears in welfare reform legislation can be interpreted to mean that individuals do not need supports. To be independent in the sense of welfare reform policy also assumes an easy trajectory in the process taking no account of either hardship or discrimination.

But, in spite of the trials the women in this study had in relation to institutional engagement, employment/education, child-care and housing, they persevered. In the next chapter, I discuss the strategies women employed in order to realize some form of self-sufficiency.

CHAPTER 7

STRATEGIC MISSIONS: SURVIVING WELFARE REFORM

Introduction

The women in this study experienced violence that was physical and structural in form. The structural forms of violence, as defined by Anglin (1998) jeopardized women's lives through the withdrawal or reduction of social support in the form of welfare. Women were marginalized by the power exerted by institutions that could have dispensed necessary resources but did not, would not or merely limited such resources. In spite of institutional control, however, women do express agency. They make choices and act in ways that allow them to frame their personal and familial viability. Foucault might have referred to these as "illegalities," a term I interpret to mean strategies against oppression. In this chapter, I examine the ways in which Black women deal with trying to survive in a city where navigating poverty was made more difficult by welfare reform policy. I show that these women managed to survive.

During and after the shelter experience, when situated in their own homes, the women continued to experience financial, housing and child-care vulnerability. How do Black women who are battered and poor survive the poverty and displacement brought about by abuse and policy sanctions? How do they react to the inadequacies of a system that seemingly pushes them to the bottom of a hill, forcing them to engage in Sisyphean efforts? The reality is that poor women have rarely been able to survive based on institutional income-transfers. Four strategies emerged as patterns across the experiences

of the women in this study. These were: the development of fictive kin relations, the use of language, illegal acts, and dependence upon the kindness of strangers. Each served to help women recreate stable households and families -- based on their idea of self-sufficiency. While the strategies are discussed independently, this in no way suggests that women employ only one strategy at a time. They use as many as are necessary to attain a goal. To illustrate these strategies, data on four women are presented; Clemmie, Sherita, Solange and Elizabeth. In delineating the experiences of Black women who were battered and poor, I show they are neither pathetic, depraved, powerless victims, nor celebrated success stories of the anti-poverty, battered women or anti-welfare reform movements. They are women who made decisions that were sometimes degrading because they had to. Therefore, these strategies should not be taken solely as a celebratory moment contextualized in a romantic assumption that welfare reform is working. Surviving against the odds should not necessarily be the task of humanity. Negotiating constructed scarcity is not noble. It is a response to structural violence that exists when institutions expose people to hazards that can impede one's well being (Anglin 1998) such as sanctions and reduced benefits. Their strategies should be taken as a starting point to understand the sense that women make of their worlds resulting from constraints. They make plans to the best of their ability and in the best interest of themselves and their children.

“She’s my daughter and that’s my granddaughter:”Creating Fictive Kin

Welfare reform has had outcomes beyond moving people to work. One result has been an increase in people having to draw from their social networks in order to survive. Cross-culturally, women draw on a range of resources due to privation (see for example, Wikan 1996; Fuchs 1992; Scheper-Hughes 1992). However, generally, Black women tend to draw upon kinship or domestic networks for survival. Harrison (1997) in her work on the impact of structural adjustments in the lives of women in Jamaica showed that kinship networks are key in the everyday lives of the urban poor. The social networks are structured relations often extending beyond individual residential units (182). In another example, among women in Tshunyane, South Africa, negotiating the pressures of apartheid, which was a barrier to health-care delivery was facilitated by kinship relations (Donaldson 1997). Family networks and patterns of exchange have been widely discussed in the literature as a source of accessing material resources, services and information (Stack 1974; Mencher 1993). These exchanges influence family members’ standards of living (Dehavenon and Okongwu 1993). Stack examined the way in which poor women survived through an immersion in a domestic circle of kinfolk who helped them via reciprocal obligations. “The domestic circle may include friends and members of the households to which individuals hold loyalties and share mutually conceived domestic responsibilities” (Stack 1974:30). For battered women who are or were living in the shelter, similar arrangements are evident.

Since many of the women spent up to three months at the shelter, they came to know each other very well. Although tensions often ran high about mandatory group

meetings and communal meals, the staff's efforts to create a community were successful evidenced in the relationships the women developed which survived beyond shelter life. Take Clemmie, for example, whose life story is described in Chapter Three. The escalation of violence in her life caused her family ties to slowly disintegrate.⁵³ What she wanted to do was create a safe home for her children and recreate the sense of family she had lost. The challenge of accomplishing those two goals was exacerbated by the fact that Clemmie had to create a new identity for herself since her batterer could locate her through her old social security number. She could not secure a job without a new number, could not find an apartment, nor was she able to get utilities turned on in her name. She was dependent upon DCDSS and the Social Security Administration to make a decision as to whether or not she could receive a new identity. Although the process for changing Clemmie's social security number was initiated the same month she arrived at the shelter in November of 1998, Clemmie still had heard nothing by February of 1999. So, Clemmie got an apartment using her daughter's name and social security number.

To reconstitute the sense of family she so missed, Clemmie did what many women did while at the shelter; she constructed a network of individuals who became her family. She is not the only woman at the shelter to have done this, but hers was the most substantively developed network. Her familial network was composed of staff and shelter residents. The roles each person had served a necessary function. In constructing the fictive kinship units, there were kinscripts, as Stack and Burton (1994) suggest, which involve expectations of people based on role assignment. Since the

⁵³ For a discussion on the importance of familial networks in the lives of battered women, see Pagelow (1981), Bowker (1984), and Hoff (1990).

fictive kinship structure extended beyond the boundaries of shelter life, it served to help women as they reconstructed their individual households. Favored staff members were often incorporated into the network. Clemmie's particular "family" is described below in her own words:

Margaret, (a shelter advocate) is like a grandmother to my children. Josie (a resident) is like my daughter – cause she's so close in age to Shawnice. Her daughter Shaneva is my grand-daughter and I'm gonna teach her everything she needs to know about being Black -- since her father is Black and she don't see him. Sheila is my sister. She's the person who makes me feel like a family. I know when she's sad and she trusts me. I miss my baby sister, so she's her for now. Alfonso, [a male advocate] is James and Henry's dad, and Sheila's son Marcel is like a younger brother to Henry because he needs someone to look up to him. Especially since he is so far away from his younger cousins.

By April of 1999, Clemmie was still unable to work due to the unresolved Social Security number issue. She had spent a considerable amount of time at the DCDSS office getting one waiver after another so as not to jeopardize her safety. She constantly had to remind the staff there that working under her old Social Security number was too dangerous for her. At this point Clemmie was receiving \$450 toward her \$500 rent; \$104 in cash and \$171 in food stamps each month. She clearly needed more money because the \$171 did not cover food for the five people living in her household. Clemmie drew down from the \$104 in cash she received. She used \$50 to cover the rent differential and \$54 for food, bringing her total food expenditure up to \$225 a month. This translated into \$45 per person, per month or \$1.50 per day for *everybody*. After those two expenditures (the rent and food), Clemmie was left with no money. No money to bring her daughter home from college, no money to get clothes for the kids and no money to pay the phone bill. Clemmie had to find a way to access funds. The following entry is from my journal

and illustrates how Clemmie survived using the fictive kin network she created while at the shelter:

April, 1999

Clemmie's small apartment was full of people, her daughter was lying across one of two old couches in the cramped living room watching the "Maury Povich" show. Her niece was sitting on the other couch doing her hair. Henry, her son, was playing and tugging at Clemmie's shirt, informing her that he was about to go downstairs and ride his bike. In the middle of the room stood Josie (who used to be at the shelter) holding Shaneva. "Remember her, that's my daughter and that's my granddaughter," Clemmie said. Josie slipped Clemmie some money. Looks like \$20. Josie hugged Clemmie goodbye and left.

Clemmie asked if I wanted something to drink as we sat in the kitchen, the only room large enough for more than three people to feel comfortable and have some elbow room. We sat in the kitchen for hours. She talked about her newly found connection to Jehovah and her recent visit with her caseworker at DCDSS, who threatened to cut her benefits. The reason for the sanction had less to do with Clemmie and more to do with Shawnice. Shawnice at 19 is considered an adult and could therefore be working. But Shawnice was enrolled at the local Community College. She wanted to get an Associates Degree. Clemmie kept asking that Shawnice be exempted from working full time because it would interfere with her going to school.

I finally asked her about the money Josie gave her and Clemmie told me the details of how she made money baby sitting for women in her network:

All I want now is help with my rent. I'm not trying to get them [DCDSS] to help me live. I always had it in my mind to get my own money. I'm not trying to buy furniture, chandeliers and keep sneakers on my kid's feet 'cause I can work to do that. I'm just up on my own two feet, so I need a little help." "So, how do you do it," I asked. "Sheila [her "sister"] gives me \$60 a week for watching Marcel from 4-6:15 five days a week. But she's struggling, I know I could get more than that but I got to help my sister out. She can't give me no more. She gives me what she can give me. For Josie, [her "daughter"] I may watch the baby one day on the weekend, she'll bring me \$20. I be like no, but she insists. I also watch Linda's [another former resident] son. She has to work at McDonald's 'cause DSS wouldn't give her nothing. She works the midnight to eight shift, so he just sleeps over here. She pays me \$50. I never thought about making a living doing the childcare thing. I used to make \$11 something an hour working construction. But now, how I'm gonna live off of \$52 every two weeks? What's that gonna do? Anything that keeps money coming in, that's regular, I'll do it.

Clemmie was bringing in \$130 a week from her babysitting jobs. The use of the fictive kin network established months before, contributed to her subsistence without which she would not be able to take care of her children.

Each month, week, and day, Clemmie and many of the other women had to make choices about what got paid and what did not. For example, decisions regarding whether or not the laundry was done was dependent upon: 1) Was there a washing machine in the building? If there was not, can you afford the \$5 cab ride, either to or from the laundry-mat? 2) Who can give you a ride? Other choices had to be made for example about the phone bill. Do you do laundry or pay the phone bill? If a job call-back was coming that month, then yes. If it was not, then the phone service was expendable. Lack of funds made the answers to these questions all the more tenuous.

Children at the shelter also created fictive kin with women, sometimes independent of their mothers' involvement. This occurred between the children of

Angela, a non-English speaking resident, and Sherita. Elmo and Eugenia translated the English-speaking world for their mother. They also used her inability to speak English to manipulate her into thinking that shelter staff had given them permission to do things they actually had not received permission for, such as going out. Fortunately, staff quickly recognized the children were playing them against their mother and subsequently deferred to her at all times with regard to where the children could and could not go, and with whom. Through trial and error, the children knew which residents their mother approved of and created an alliance with Sherita, who became their “aunt.” With their “aunt” as a chaperone, the children increased their freedom of mobility around Poughkeepsie.

The relationship between Sherita’s and Angela’s children continued long after both women moved out of the shelter. The arrangement suited them just fine. The kids’ mother wanted them to have an adult they could look up to and trust. “Aunt” Sherita was more than pleased to have an instant family for whom she had some responsibility and over whom she had some influence. Sherita’s “aunt” status came with a condition: she was responsible for making sure the children called home or she had to call on their behalf. Sherita had to operate within the parameters of rules Angela laid out. She took the kids shopping and had them over for dinner. In return when Sherita was low on funds, Angela sent meals over to her.

The fictive kinship system worked to smooth the uncertainty of not having a job, or having a job but no child-care. Need made these alliances all the more important. The networks developed were similar to what Povinelli (1991) describes among Belyuen women in Australia who organize complex models of food-getting and child-care strategies. The resources for both are spread along kin-based distributions, particularly in

times of large fluctuations of available cash. Survival after being in the shelter is, in many cases, dependent upon the networks developed in the shelter. Uncertainty primarily resulted from not knowing when cash payments by social services were going to be reduced. Therefore, women created plans to counteract the effects of shifting benefit levels. The plan frequently involved developing an instrumental relationship (Wolf 1966) with a woman or women in their circle.

Some of this resulted in funds being exchanged for a narrow range of services that included child-care and hair styling. Fictive kin networks augment women's survival and the women were aware of the responsibility that came with being integrated into one. The networks were not limited to the distribution of cash resources but also included the distribution of non-financial kinds of help that were crucial to women's survival. Mencher (1993), describes that extended kin relationships facilitated non-financial kinds of help among Indian women such as connections with or consideration for jobs. Among the women in this study, fictive kin relations were similarly constituted. They included, providing transportation in a community where getting from one place to another is not easily resolved; keeping extra copies of job applications and bus schedules on hand for when network members dropped by; and serving as a message service for those who did not have phones or whose phones were cut off.

However, augmenting one's income seemed to be the most frequently drawn upon aspect of the network to help women survive. This finding supports Edin and Lein (1997) who showed that only a handful of women were able to survive on the welfare transfer payments they received and most had to engage in a range of activities in order to make ends meet.

Familial networks can expand and contract often although they are connected to a sense of group obligation. In times of economic shifts, less housing and precarious work conditions, the threads of kin-based networks can be stretched quite thin. These kin-based, or domestic, networks operate among urban poor in terms of exchanging services and resources. In the case of the women who had been battered, in this research, utilization of kinship-based relations to survive poverty was not an option because many were estranged from their families during most of the time that I knew them, primarily for safety reasons. However, the women created fictive kin networks that served the same function as kin-based networks.

The Economy of Language

Negotiating for getting basic needs met in an environment where poverty is viewed as the fault of the individual almost requires publicly revealing oneself. Public revelation is a strategy to get needs met due to the paucity of political access. The use of words serves as a forceful mediator (Desjarlais 1997:42) for people living on the margins of society. Sherita's case and those of several other women I met exemplify the potential outcomes from the accumulation of stories. The stories women told were attempts to give meaning to and offer a subjective perspective to a situation. They were intended to persuade people to help where talking has a use-value in a calculated exchange process. The use of language was particularly poignant in Sherita's case due to a reduction in her benefits.

Sherita never intended to be on social services for long. In fact, all she really wanted was medical coverage. Over a two-month period, Sherita's self-sufficiency plan was marred by the policies of welfare reform to reduce caseloads.

They [DCDSS] don't see that a person who gets on temporary, means temporary. Temporary means short-term assistance...until I got myself back on my feet and got a full-time job. They sent me 100 letters a week. In fact the more I progressed, the more they stayed on my back. I really needed the Medicaid. But they cut that off.

Sherita's benefit reduction occurred in two stages. The first was just before she completed a training program to become a Certified Nursing Assistant. The second occurred two months after she finished the program. Her motivation was commendable, for while in the training she had surgery on her eye and then returned to work at K-Mart one week after her surgery. It was the holiday season and evening hours were available. In agreeing to take on more hours her paychecks were inflated – she would make \$250 one week and \$200 another. But this was a special situation, Sherita did not always make that amount. In fact, her usual take home pay was about \$150 per week.

They cut my grant from \$350 to \$23 because they said I was making too much money. Working nights and then overtime because of the holiday season.

DCDSS reduced Sherita's benefits in the middle of December in 1998, shortly after she had moved into her apartment and just before she finished the training program she was in. She was very worried about paying her rent for the month of January and had no idea how she was going to pay her utilities.

I was doing everything. They wanted me to work full time but I was in training 3-1/2 hours a day. Then I would go to work. Then they put me in a CWEP [Community Work Employment Program], which meant I would have to work off my grant. I go to school, I go to CWEP, and to work.

Every other weekend I would work 12 hours. The money would add up and they figured I was making too much, so they cut me off. They cut me off and I wasn't sturdy, you know. That's not helping somebody.

Sherita made several arrangements using speech acts. The first thing she did was walk down to the real estate office that managed her building and told the office assistant, in great detail, everything that had happened to her. This is one of Sherita's greatest survival techniques. She would tell almost anyone anything about her life in order to have her basic needs met. After telling her story Sherita asked the assistant if she could make her rent payment in two installments once on the 10th and again on the 30th of each month. The assistant who had "always been nice" told her she could pay the rent "half and half... That's what I've been doing." But the arrangement was informal and there was no promise that the management agency would never ask Sherita for the rent to be paid all at once on the first of the month. What Sherita did not know was she charged her late fees. There was no reconciliation between the receipt of her rent payments and the verbal agreement that she thought excused her from late payments. Sherita was billed \$20 late fees for several months and had not realized it because she walked to the real estate office to pay the rent, cutting down on the cost of postage and did not use the bill that came in the mail.

The next thing Sherita did was call her "vendors" as she called them. The cable, phone and electricity companies were contacted. She informed each vendor of everything that happened to her -- the beatings, how she was in a training program, the loss of her job, and the loss of her Safety Net Assistance.

Meanwhile, Central Hudson, cable and the phone bill had to be paid. I had a place to stay, but the lights...they don't care if I can't see. Cable is

considered a luxury to them. But that's my only entertainment 'cause I'm too scared to go out.

I asked the Commissioner about the problems associated with recipients having their grants cut in the middle of their process toward "self-sufficiency" and pointed out that they fall behind and cannot catch up. He acknowledged this was a problem of the system.

That's certainly a place where our system is lacking. If you are going to make enough money in one month to make you ineligible, your case is going to be closed. Now there is the 46 percent disregard, so one can make more money that first month than you would normally get. But if you are going to go 200 percent above the poverty line, you're not eligible for any money. There is nothing in our system that says, 'keep your first month's pay and use that first month to get ahead...If your landlord is used to getting the full rent on the first and now you're only getting half of your grant, you can't possibly pay your rent. So now, unless you have a very lenient landlord, you're at best going to have late charges. No, our system isn't set up to let a person get a boost to get going.

Shortly after graduating from the training program at the end of December 1998, Sherita obtained a position at a nursing home and left K-Mart. That job was part time and did not come with benefits. Sherita had kept her Medicaid going but then two months later, in February 1999, it was cut off. She never found out why. Sherita wanted and, in fact, needed to keep Medicaid because she was not working full time and she still needed to have dental work completed from when she had been beaten. Again, she employed speech acts to get her medical needs met.

Sherita went to see Mrs. Thompson, the woman at the nursing home who hired her. The goal here was to get Mrs. Thompson to agree to provide health coverage. She described how she had been beaten, which resulted in some of her teeth being dislodged. Sherita made it a point to emphasize how important it was to have a professional smile.

With any new job, I wouldn't have health benefits. My health issues are my teeth and my eyes, especially my eyes. Since I had the surgery, my eye is still not all that great. It doesn't focus great. I still get headaches. That was why I wanted to keep the Medicaid. I didn't get everything I needed done.

Even though she was a part time employee and had only worked about two months, Sherita's supervisor sped up her benefit process, so she would be able to have medical coverage. Sherita's strategy of telling people everything about herself was, in some ways, manipulative. She used the power of story-telling to achieve positive outcomes in the form of badly needed goods and services.

As their experiences became known through the use of language, the women could influence the course of their own lives. One housing administrator verified women's use of talking. She described the frequency with which women came to her office, sat down, cried and told her every detail of their lives. "Any of them tell their whole life story as a negotiating point to get a place to live." She admitted that one does view the women a little differently -- more as individuals and less as the stereotype of a "Welfare Queen."

The telling of stories often worked for the women and they were quite specific about who should know what. In some instances, as an expression of values, women used story-telling to convince social service caseworkers that aspects of welfare reform were in contradistinction to their own values. For example, Clemmie did this as she offered evidence to the job counselor at DCDSS that Shawnice should be exempt from working although she was 19. Shawnice was in school at Dutchess County Community College. The regulations required that Shawnice work or participate in a work-related activity but the educational program she was in did not qualify as one of the accepted

training programs. When the job counselor told Clemmie and Shawnice that the focus was on work and not on education, Clemmie explained to the woman how she had raised all of her children to achieve academically. She talked about how much time they had spent doing educational activities, that her other daughter was in college on a full scholarship, and her sons were in gifted programs at their new school. Then, in what Clemmie describes as her most embarrassing moment, she got down on her knees and begged the social service caseworker to not financially penalize the family because Shawnice was in school and not working full time. Clemmie did not lose her benefits on that day, but her case was closed in May of 1999, one month later.

These examples show that language is not only a strategy for women to survive but they also express the nature of power relationships. The relationship that is developed when women use speech acts is built on a foundation of unequal power and reinforces dependency that in fact, maintains that power. Welfare reform has, in fact, taken away the rights of people to make their own choices about work and education. It has also placed some in precarious situations. Because choice is obliterated, and life chances are compromised people are forced to strategize from a subordinate position. They reveal themselves because they have to, not because they want to. What comes with constant self-exposure in some cases is humiliation, as is evident in Clemmie's situation. Although the story she told "worked," the choice about how well the story worked was in the hands of the caseworker.

In their own interpretation of story-telling, the women used language to shift the scales of uncertainty in their favor. Sherita said it was "necessary manipulation. How else are they gonna know anything about me? They think all I am is a case file. I'm more

than a case file, I have a real story and they need to know who I am, not what they think I am.”

Based on conversations with community advocates, there has been an increase in the use of linguistic strategies since welfare reform. Helen, an advocate who has been doing community work for 15 years, told me that welfare reform has caused women to really think through the kinds of arrangements they may need because of crisis:

They talk their landlords into letting them pay the rent in small portions. They say 'Next Monday, I'll give so and so amount.' They can't do this at the big complexes, they can only do it with private homeowners. Of course this limits women's choices for housing because they have to live in smaller buildings, like private homes, where they can negotiate with landlords.

Occasionally speech acts were so startling that women received an initial positive response because the listener was petrified, but it was later rescinded. In Solange's case, she was trying desperately to not have to return to her husband. His control over her life included lining up toothpicks against the front door in a certain pattern to determine if she had left the house when he was not home. A former foster child who had survived child sexual abuse for many years, she discovered early on ways to get institutional personnel to respond to her crises – she would tell them about her bulimia.

My bulimia gives me a sense of control. I don't stick my finger down my throat like the others do. I just cough until my food comes up. But I've got it under control now. But I know when it's coming, it happens when I get anxious.

To ensure not having to go back to the county from which she came, she told people about her bulimia in order to get a tenant-based Section 8 subsidy. She would hold her chest and the coughing would start. With shortened breath, she would say, “my bulimia is coming on.” To appease her, people would let her think she was going to get

what she wanted – just long enough to stabilize her. It was a desperate attempt to capture control where there was none, to circumvent homelessness and reestablish a household for herself and her daughter.

Not having a safe place to live was one of the biggest fears the women faced and talking one's way into an apartment does make sense. But sometimes, Solange's speech was misdirected. For example, I know she thought I had some power to influence her entry into the apartment complex that Grace Smith House operated. On two occasions, she told me how her fragile state could be neutralized if she knew she could get into the supportive housing program, coughing for the duration of the conversation.

The routine of reminding those around her that her bulimia was triggered by anxiety was a different way of telling her story to generate a positive outcome. If told the right way to the right person, a deal might be struck putting the odds in her favor.

Gal (1991) points out that through revealing oneself, the listener will judge your worthiness, which was precisely the women's intent. Women's verbal practices are an effort to represent their own experiences. Through the economy of language the women provide a version of who they are, what their needs are, and are simultaneously contesting the inadequacies of institutions that have failed them, by speaking up.

The women often developed a solid set of responses from talking that helped them get their needs met. Who they chose to disclose to is as important as what they chose to disclose. Typically it was to formal institutional network personnel, such as a Social Service caseworker, housing authority staff, an advocate or an employer. It was someone who they thought could offer immediate help. This strategy was rarely used in situations when the women felt less certain of the outcome. Except for one woman, Elizabeth, all

of the women used language and story-telling to convince and persuade people. Elizabeth refused to engage in publicly revealing herself because, she said, "it is demeaning to have to prove yourself over and over again and I won't do it."

Illegalities

"I hate the publicness of my life," said Elizabeth. "I don't want this ever again." The same publicizing of their lives that most of the women so fully engaged in outraged Elizabeth. Some of it had to do with the way she was raised -- in a family that never revealed very much to each other. Elizabeth was born in the West Indies and raised in Great Britain. Her family, which consisted of her mother, father and five siblings, came to live in New York City when she was six years old. Elizabeth was gifted and received a full scholarship to attend a prestigious, all-girls, private high school, followed by attendance at a prestigious university on the east coast.

Elizabeth's refusal to reveal very much about herself and her needs almost made her a mystery at the shelter. She would leave the shelter and not tell staff where she was going, for which she would get warnings that led to her being asked to leave. All she would ever tell me was that she was going out because she had "business to take care of."

Elizabeth has two children, Kamari, 5 and Olu, age 3, by her husband John who is a disabled veteran. Kamari has severe eczema and a learning disability and Olu has severe asthma. The boys are her pride and joy and every breath she takes, she told me, is toward ensuring that their lives are stabilized. The process of securing stability is the totality of her safety plan.

After two weeks of missing each other at the shelter, we sat down in the television room at the shelter one afternoon. The backdrop to our conversation was The Ricki Lake show, where the drama of everyday life unfolded in 60 minutes. It took considerably more time for her to unfold her own life history.

Elizabeth's husband had been awarded court ordered visitation rights and had seen his sons somewhat regularly over the past three years since their separation. Elizabeth tried to include John in decisions about their children, one of whom was having difficulty in school. One evening she took Olu with her when she went to speak with John about some issues Kamari was having at school. John started yelling at her and blaming her for Kamari's problems. His rage turned physical and he picked Elizabeth up and held her by her neck up against the wall in front of Olu. She begged him to stop and finally wrangled free from his grip. She and Olu ran out of the house into a cab that happened to be cruising by. He called her later that night threatening to "get her" if she took the children anywhere where he could not see them. Of course she was concerned about what he might do to her so she left the city and came to the Grace Smith House.

Elizabeth arrived at Grace Smith House with an open DSS case from the City. She had been on social services since shortly after the birth of her youngest son due to his asthma. The frequency of his attacks caused her to have to leave her job. After using up her unemployment, she received social services and Medicaid.

While at the shelter, Elizabeth began her search to identify a place to live that would be safe for her and her children but with no success. She started to feel that she would not be able to create a life for herself and her kids if she stayed in New York. On

several occasions, Elizabeth told me that she would be willing to move out of state in spite of the fact that the children's father threatened to have her arrested.

I don't think I have a choice. I think making enough money to buy a plane ticket to Great Britain is what I might have to do. The children don't have dual citizenship, but I do. As soon as I hit British soil, there will be a support system, not like here.

Elizabeth had tremendous disdain for the U.S. welfare system. She had been treated with hostility when she had gone to apply for assistance in New York City prior to coming to the shelter.

I had lost my job. I didn't have any money and my unemployment had not kicked in. We had run out of food supplies and medical bills for my son were piling up. I went to the Department of Social Services in New York City. I walked there every day hoping to get an emergency check. I had no money, so I had to beg the bus drivers to let me on the bus so I could drop off and pick up my Kamari at school. He was going to school in Manhattan and we lived in the Bronx. Then every day for a week, I walked there. It rained that whole week. Every day they wouldn't have a check for me. The worker would laugh in my face and tell me, 'Tomorrow, it will be ready tomorrow'. Finally, I told them that if they didn't give me an emergency check, I would camp out there and they would have to call the police. I developed a deep hatred for public assistance. I'd rather leave the country than go on assistance.

After months of trying to reestablish a household in Poughkeepsie, Elizabeth decided to move to Michigan, an area where she felt she could be comfortable and could pursue work. In so doing, she made a decision to violate the visitation agreement that the court had handed down on behalf of her husband. In spite of the fact that the boys' father had threatened to have her arrested, she decided that she would "rather be a fugitive." Elizabeth's decision to "be a fugitive" not only resulted from wanting to get away from her husband, but also "to get away from the eyes of the system." In order to get the

services she needed to rebuild her life, she would have to tell her story. Elizabeth did not believe that the system was effective enough to warrant exposing oneself.

Systemic ineffectiveness caused some other women in the Poughkeepsie area to live like fugitives because there were no other options. Some young pregnant teens were being forced to live illegal lives. One young woman in particular, who was not able to access public assistance because of her age, refused to go home where the threat of violence was ever present. She needed a place to stay and lived illegally in the basement of a building in Poughkeepsie until the landlord found out. The dwelling was not habitable but she lived there out of desperation with no heat or electricity. Her marginal existence was precipitated by policy that wanted to force her to return to her parents' house, which was not a safe environment.

Other women who lived this way were immigrant women, unable to rent apartments and, in many instances, unable to find jobs. Several advocates shared how difficult it was for Latina women, especially, to secure a job or an apartment. Giselle told me:

The women will live wherever they can. One woman paid money to sleep on a mattress behind a couch in the living room where eight other people lived. That was her apartment. They do these things that aren't legal like rent out space from others because they can't afford to survive with the low payment from DCDSS. Or, because they can't get on social services because it is too hard to apply.

Out of desperation, women make these choices. Other strategies researchers have found that poor women engage in are serial relationships in order to increase access to material goods (Scheper-Hughes 1992; Brown 1975), or return to former batterers to resume an intimate relationship based on economic scarcity. None of the women in this

study engaged in serial relationships during the time that I knew them and I was aware of only one woman who returned to her batterer. However, women did sustain contact with former batterers and welfare reform policy seemed to precipitate this connection.

Advocates noticed that many women were likely to recruit a former batterer, who was generally the father of their children, to provide child-care services. This illegality could place the women in jeopardy of losing their children and being charged with endangering the life of a minor. But several women made these arrangements so they could go to mandatory training programs or to work. In exchange, the women would promise not to ask for child support. The women felt that they were getting child support through the child-care. Several advocates suggested that women also may be less likely to request orders of protection from their abusers, because they need the child-care arrangement.

A variation of illegalities is revealed in what happened at Clemmie's house four months after she moved into her apartment. Shortly before Clemmie lost her benefits, and I am sure she anticipated the cut off, she and her daughters all ended up with boyfriends. I was perplexed at the new household structure.

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I rang the bell and Clemmie looked out the window and said, "Who?" "It's Dana," I said. She came down to open the door and invited me up. "Everybody's still asleep" she told me. We walked in the front door and on the couches were each of her daughters, wrapped around their respective boyfriends. Clemmie and I went into her room. "Who are those people?" I asked. "That's their boyfriends. I don't really like

that they are here, but what can I say?" I said, "You could tell them they can't come here."

Rumor around the shelter had it that all of the men in Clemmie's house were dealing drugs, including Clemmie's new boyfriend. I asked her how he was treating her. "Oh, he's the best thing that ever happened to me." He treats me real nice and buys us stuff." I asked if he was dealin' [drugs], to which she responded, "I don't think so. He was, but we talked about it and he's been lookin' for a real job. But I know those boys are dealing. I don't want that up in my house."

I suggested that we walk to the store. "I don't have any money" she said, "Could you get me a pack of cigarettes?" Of course I obliged. It was a beautiful morning. Poughkeepsie was not buzzing with activity yet so we sat down on a bench in a park that Clemmie chose. "I come here when I need to get away from them all" she told me. "I just love this place. It's my secret place." She looked away from me and there were tears in her eyes. Clemmie said she felt so helpless about the girls. "They ain't never been with guys like that before. I don't know why they doing this now. I want to stop them, but I don't know how. It hurts me that they in this."

I had heard from Sherita that Clemmie had been cut off from TANF. They had run into each other at Social Services about a month before. Sherita said Clemmie was wondering how she was going to survive. It seems that the new boyfriends were helping out with that. They bought food sometimes and the girls got to go out. Clemmie's boyfriend also contributed to the household.

I asked Clemmie if she had found a job yet and she said no, but that she would make a deal with the devil if she had to in order to keep her family alive and eating.

“What do you mean?” I asked. “Would you deal [drugs] if you had to?” She looked away from me. “Yeah, I done it before and I’ll do it again. I mean I ain’t never done it public or nothing. And only at the holiday. I used to go to the club and get a table. Be there a couple of hours in the evening---only on weekends you know...Friday and Saturday.” I asked her how much she would make. “I could pull in a ‘G’.⁵⁴ “I never did it too much. But my kids should have stuff for the holidays. If I have to do that now, I guess I’ll do whatever I have to.”

While neither Clemmie nor her daughters had a lot of men in their lives, the circumstance of scarcity made being with someone who could increase the family’s resources or doing something illegal that would immediately reduce scarcity was an option within a very narrow range of choices.

Illegalities as described by Foucault represent acts that cause systemic change. The women’s individual acts clearly cannot create a movement because they are done in silence. They are underground strategies that represent the impact of particular relationships with poverty and its managing institution. The institution, while it may work for some, has been ineffectual for many of the women in this study. In order to survive, however, they work around systems that fail them.

The Kindness of Strangers

Those women whose experiences and strategies did not include creating fictive kin, talking or illegalities simply depended on the kindness of strangers. They

⁵⁴ A “G” is \$1,000 dollars.

intentionally developed functional relationships with people that led to a level of intimacy one might find in kinship or fictive kinship networks. As a result of the relationship the women hoped that the stranger would have enough sympathy to assist them. The expressions of assistance on the part of the stranger were more substantial than simply doing a favor. The aid given by the "donor" was crucial to women's survival because without it, women might go hungry or lose their apartments. Relationships of this type developed out of need and mostly because the women's support networks were thin or non-existent. Depending upon the kindness of the strangers often occurred when women had not developed fictive kin relations with other women in the shelter.

The strangers were not formal institutional network members, nor fictive kin members. They were individuals from women's casual networks -- absentee landlords, grocery storeowners, and bus drivers. These were people in the women's everyday frame of reference, people from whom they could get something if they needed it at a later date. The way this process worked was that the women did favors for the casual network members and banked the favor as a form of moral credit in the event they needed something in the future. One advocate told me:

They find ways to be a good tenant. They will make sure that everything is clean, or quiet or something to please their landlords, so he/she will like them and give them slack. One woman had a small clerical job. She made friends with the landlord up front and he liked her. She was conscientious about keeping her apartment and the rest of the building clean. She was very careful. And then whenever she had to have her car repaired, she knew she wouldn't also be able to pay her rent on time, she was able to negotiate with the landlord. I know that the landlord applied for and got that apartment registered to accept Section 8 subsidies. The rules for Section 8 include timely payment of rent. With that, she should have been paying her rent on time but the landlord let her keep the arrangement of paying when she could. I just don't know how long these things will last.

Many of the women, when they moved into their apartments, would assume the role of maintenance person or groundskeeper. If the hallway light bulb blew out, they would purchase a replacement drawing from their own limited resources. Or, without being asked, they would organize the garbage for pick up making sure that the recycled garbage was in the correct bag or placing other tenants' garbage in the appropriate place. Occasionally, women would plant flowers or tend to the landlord's garden. The women did these things with no expectation of payment and the landlords never, to my knowledge, offered to repay them.

The moral credit is a type of reciprocity where there is no accounting for what is "spent" as in generalized reciprocity. Women used the credit in an attempt to look good in the eyes of people they did not know, but whom they may need at some point. In return, the women expect that the good deeds done can be leveraged against a future need. For example, if a woman prepared a dish for a small grocery store-owner, she expected that if her foodstamps were reduced or eliminated she could buy food using the moral credit.

Most of the women in this study lived by the art of making arrangements (Pardo 1996). This was a form of a patronage system where women initiated the provision of the favor for a patron. These friendships are instrumental in defining a social relationship in which a deficit can be satisfied (Wolf 1966). It serves the purpose of counteracting a lack, or perceived lack, of resources. In its practicality it draws on the burden of emotion in which a set of performances of mutual assistance are exchanged. The relationship is tenuous for several reasons. First, if the woman does not provide a favor the relationship is challenged and she may not be able to access needed resources. Second, the

relationship does not exist between equals. The woman is in a subordinate position and risks being exploited. As Wolf states, "the relation contains an element which provides sanctions internal to the relation itself" (Wolf 1966:13). Further, the relationship does not change a woman's status from being poor.

In attempting to create viable households for themselves as single women or as mothers with children, the women in this study engaged in a variety of strategies to reduce the probability of scarcity. These strategies for survival emerge within the context of violence and poverty and, as I hope is evident, are quite intentional. Conceptual distinctions have been made between strategies employed by poor women and tactics. Scheper-Hughes (1992), for example, draws from de Certeau (1984) to make the argument that poor women in Brazil cannot be strategic because they do not have the mechanisms to institute the power needed to initiate a strategy. She suggests that strategies are planned, intentional, collective acts of resistance (Scott 1985). Tactics, on the other hand, "are the everyday oppositional survival practices of the poor...they are defined in the absence of real power" (472). They are defensive and individual. Fuchs (1982) also suggests that poor pregnant women in France in the 19th century did not employ strategies for their survival because a strategy implies access to information, which offers women the power to make rational decisions.

The Black women in this research were often caught in a trap of welfare engagement where the consequences for the slightest infraction could be forced disengagement from government aid. As a result, the women identified ways to endure that were linked to the possibilities of accessing material resources (Bozzoli 1991). The strategies obviously do not reflect any sort of collective mobilization to address inequity.

Yet, we cannot presume that the sphere of collective action for social change is always accessible to women. Rather, we can carefully examine the individual actions in which women engage to transform their lives and then determine the nodes of commonality around which they might organize, if they could. However, social justice is rarely satisfied with small incremental changes. But, if we structure individual acts in terms of understanding the hierarchy poor women's needs – that which makes a woman a little less poor, a little less regulated, a little more independent, then maybe success can be measured differently.

CHAPTER 8

RESISTING BEAURACRACY: ADVOCATES AND WELFARE REFORM

Introduction

There is one group of people whose experiences and interpretations of welfare reform have not been examined closely by policy analysts or social science researchers. Few have asked how advocates are responding to new welfare laws. What do they think of welfare reform and how are they coping with changes made by policy makers?

Welfare reform policies have posed many challenges for women as they attempt to exist on unlivable incomes provided by TANF and Safety Net funding and inadequate wages from low-wage employment. There are discrepancies between needed resources (such as child-care, housing, and food) and the amount available to secure those resources. Women find themselves in the position of having to engage in activities to make up for the lack and they do so in several ways as reported in Chapter Seven. They exchange services with each other, use linguistic acts to get what they need, engage in illegal activities and draw on the resources of people in their social worlds. In this chapter we find another form of resource attainment; through the work of advocates.⁵⁵

While women employ their own devices to survive, they are also assisted by advocates; individuals who work on women's behalf. Here I examine the perceptions of

⁵⁵ Everyone in this chapter is referred to as an advocate, whether they worked at the shelter or with another community based organization. I use this term in some instances as a replacement for specific titles of personnel at agencies to maintain the anonymity of identifying individuals with whom I spoke. I also use the term as a legitimate characterization of a particular type of work described within the body of this chapter.

welfare reform by advocates and the ways in which they are pulled in to respond to clients' dire needs resulting from policy changes.

In some ways it is precisely because of women's strategies that advocates are pulled into helping women and it must be remembered that the strategies women use are embedded in relationships of power. The women are in the "one-down" position because of their need. The circumstances of crisis and scarcity may require they employ their fictive kin networks, speech acts, illegal activities and/or depend on the kindness of strangers, over and over again. However, at some point, a state of imbalance will be reached (Wolf 1966) and the practices that result in resource sharing and allocation may diminish due to overuse. What I found was that advocates step in and pick up the slack. The needs of poor women compel those who work with them to assist in accessing material and non-material means.

The Role of Advocates

Some governmental social service workers treated the women in this study with laxity. Welfare reform has engendered women to find employment that in no way has helped them move out of poverty. In some instances, some women have had to leave their children in order to work and frequently, there was little choice about where they set up their new households. Women lived under the threat of having their benefits eliminated for a certain period of time or being severed from government services all together. These conditions made the women in this research desperate. Their needs and

desperation have reverberated in the hearts and souls of advocates making welfare reform the burden not only of women but also of those who help them.

Here I define advocates as those individuals who work for non-profit community based organizations that support disenfranchised populations. In this study they served the role of helping poor women access services to which they were entitled but of which they were sometimes unaware. The advocates were employed by a variety of categorical organizations including Grace Smith House Shelter for battered women, Legal Aid services, community health programs, programs for women, mental health organizations, and court assistance programs. The advocates were not employed by state or government entities such as the Departments of Labor, Social Services, and Mental Health. They are the staff of non-governmental organizations although, in some instances, they had an office at a governmental entity. Typically, advocates serve as mediators between their clients and the bureaucratic staff of governmental agencies and the staff of private entities -- such as landlords, real estate offices, and retail services. With regard to welfare reform policy, advocates try to absorb the conflict of policy implementation. They struggle to reshape and mold the attitudes of government agency social service caseworkers in an attempt to ensure the broadest possible level of equitable distribution of resources for clients.

My observations and conversations with 19 advocates revealed that client-based organizations are frequently understaffed and overworked. Welfare reform policies that have forced recipients and potential recipients to work and that have sanctioned them for not doing so, has intensified the day-to-day needs of the clients that advocates serve. Other aspects of the policy such as restrictions on the provision of services to teenagers

and certain immigrants has heightened advocates' agitation because these clients have no options to secure any services from the government.

Those advocates with whom I spent time see their primary role in the same way that Lipsky (1980) discusses advocates' responsibilities; "to secure the best possible treatment for clients within the constraints of systems and to identify loopholes and discretionary provisions to gain client benefits" (73). Advocates, he states, operate under an assumption of equity and attempt to be non-judgmental. The characteristics they, themselves, so highly praise, are what distinguish them from the staff of many governmental agencies. Many advocates feel that the caseworkers of the Dutchess County Department of Social Services exerted a considerable amount of control over clients and were very judgmental.

Being an advocate requires time, attention and an expenditure of resources. Their work may involve visiting clients, accompanying them to agency appointments and persuading other institutions to meet client needs. In the case of this research, advocates served to help women deal with accessing services such as TANF or Safety Net Funding (the programs for single heads of households with children and single adults with no children, respectively). They helped women obtain employment; identified substance abuse programs; advocated for women in court to secure Orders of Protection; worked with lawyers to ensure benefits to immigrants; secured women's placement in English language classes; contacted landlords; and coordinated mental health and counseling services for women and their children. Advocates were the support system that operated within and sometimes around the rules that were the foundation of welfare reform. One example of the type of situation advocates addressed is exemplified by the role Karen, a

young, social work intern, played with a Black client Linda, a teenage mother with one child. Linda was denied government assistance because she was an immigrant, although she was a legal immigrant.

Linda is 19 years old. I don't understand why she doesn't have a green card. Her parents do. Linda needs quite a bit of advocacy. We keep trying to get her social services so she doesn't have to move back home with her parents. She's in a bad situation. Her boyfriend beat her and her parents beat her. She has nowhere to turn. And, she's pregnant. But she has no Medicaid. She wants an abortion but she doesn't have money. I've been trying to find out where she can go for the abortion and, at the same time, get her some financial assistance.

Karen worked with Linda on several issues: She was attempting to identify a loophole in the welfare policy that would permit Linda to receive assistance although she did not have a legal permanent resident status. This involved working with an immigration lawyer. Karen also attempted to identify a hospital that would perform an abortion. None of the hospitals in the area would perform the procedure. Subsequently, Karen drove Linda to Westchester County to a Planned Parenthood Clinic. The third issue Karen advocated for on Linda's behalf was around working with DCDSS to determine if there were any emergency funds she could receive in order to set up a separate household from that of her parents and her boyfriend.

A second example of how advocates work with clients is described by Charla, a Black woman in her 50s who is an advocate with a health agency in Poughkeepsie:

...I go with a woman. And most of the time...I go to DCDSS. So I would be there as a support -- that means I would help them with the application because sometimes they're not sure how they should do the application. And I would sort of guide them through that. I would also go in with them when they're being interviewed. And just be there.

For instance, I have one woman who is on welfare. She worked part time and her caseworker mandated that she also go to training [as required by

the policy]. On her part-time job she hurt herself and took some time off. She was out for weeks with doctors' notes and got therapy and all of that. And--while she was out she was also attending CNA classes.

Lydia,⁵⁶ Charla's client, was struggling to meet the requirements of welfare reform. She was in a training program so she could increase her income and gain enough skills to get a full-time job and reduce her need for public assistance. According to Charla:

She [Lydia] was doing the CNA class before she got hurt on the job. During the process of her being out on sick live, she received a call from her employer saying they needed to see her in the office right away...She went not knowing what it was [all about]. They said to her they understood that she was going through training...the supervisor indicated they were gonna ask her to leave [her position]. They were saying, if she was in training then she couldn't also be coming to work.

But at the job she had to go up and downstairs to get laundry. She had to climb stairs and she couldn't do that because of her injury. Being in class was different...all she had to do was just sit there and write. Not knowing her rights, she quit.

Lydia was not aware that she could not be asked to leave her position. Instead, she quit. By quitting, Lydia was at risk for sanctioning. Charla felt that Lydia was set up because the employer found out she was in a training program. She continued:

Lydia had been working at this place part time for a while. As an advocate, I am trying to do two things: get Lydia's medical benefits reinstated, and second, to work with Legal Aid around the possible violation of employment law on the part of her employer.

As Lydia's advocate, Charla called Lydia's Social Service caseworker, the Human Rights Commission, and an attorney in an attempt to rectify the situation.

Advocates walk a tightrope trying to give clients the support they need to have

⁵⁶ Lydia was not part of this research project.

their basic needs met. They traverse the new terrain of welfare reform and, in story after story, described how DCDSS failed to give women what they needed to endure temporary setbacks. The advocates had to step in often to help women defend themselves and to rectify situations of neglect or mistreatment as was the case with Leslie, discussed in Chapter Four, who was not initially permitted to speak with the domestic violence liaison. In the process of upholding women's rights to entitlements and fair treatment, advocates must be careful not to alienate the staff of government or other agencies. The goal is to get government agency staff to work with advocates in the best interests of the advocates' clients. This is done because the system of services for poor women leaves very little room for women to negotiate on their own behalf. It is not that the women are powerless themselves but, rather, because the social service bureaucracy pathologizes them and forces women to prove their eligibility. In so doing, sometimes little attention is paid to the particularities of women's circumstances.

Creating and Meeting Human Needs

Human need is the raw material that drives the social service economy (Lipsky 1980). Pathologizing individuals by identifying their deficiencies justifies the delivery of services to recipients. The construction of need and therefore dependency, is achieved by pinpointing "correctable flaws." The Department of Social Services is one such governmental agency that organizes the production of its human services by categorizing people based on deficits.

Yet, human need is not only constructed by flaws, it is also constructed by inequity. People are not simply defective and in need of fixing. They are also faced with societal injustices and conditions that obstruct their life chances. To take Lydia as an example, there are at least two interpretations of her situation. The first interpretation of Lydia might be that she was flawed due to her lack of skill. Her defect was having too little human capital and this lack predisposed her to working only part time. The treatment for her "diagnosis" was to re-skill her through training. Her deficit enabled her to receive public assistance and she could be "fixed" by going to a mandated training program, which would ostensibly reduce her dependence on the government aid. In this scenario, Lydia has to be labeled "inadequate" in order to receive welfare in the first place.

A second interpretation may seek to redirect the focus away from Lydia as imperfect and, rather, center on the fact that her part-time employment was due to the lack of opportunity for full-time work. The script in this formulation places her needs within a construct of restricted opportunity; making the problem structurally, and not individually, based.

In the United States, people who are victimized by poverty, violence and racism are very likely to have their lives influenced by a bureaucratic system, which pathologizes the individual or the categorical group of which the individual is a member. Consider for a moment the ways in which, for example, poor people have been characterized to justify helping them. The inability of poor people to purchase services in the private sector requires that assistance be sought from the government (Lipsky 1980). "Street level bureaucrats" (Lipsky 1980) are charged with meeting these human needs. It is their job to

provide services and, to a large degree, as Lipsky argues, induce people to accept inadequate services and/or resources.

The power that street-level bureaucrats wield emanates, in part, from their discretion to determine the benefits their agencies will provide to recipients or the sanctions that will be rendered. In responding to need, however, they are supposed to be objective and without judgement. This is a Weberian notion of institutions in democratic society (Beetham 1996). There is supposed to be a distribution of service and justice without favoritism or judgement. However, government agency social service workers do not always accomplish this goal partly because it may be difficult to manage the legitimacy of the agency for which they work, while simultaneously having the strings of altruism tugging at their sensibilities. In other words, agency-based personnel, i.e., caseworkers, must follow the policies of welfare reform to move people from welfare to work. But they have broad discretion in doing so. With little uniformity, caseworkers pass judgement on recipients' or potential recipients' worthiness to determine eligibility, deny or sanction benefits. Alternatively, some caseworkers may feel sympathetic toward some recipients as evidenced in the discussion of Josie in Chapter Six. In her case, the caseworker was willing to help Josie secure all of the resources she wanted.

The challenge of human service work, and this is true for people who work at non-governmental organizations as well, is that recipients or clients have to be constructed as worthy of assistance. They must meet a certain set of criteria to benefit from the provisions of services, so they are transformed into a client. There are rules and regulations that help order which resources -- such as food stamps, Medicaid and TANF, will be allocated. The client is processed and assigned to a category for appropriate

services and is, thus, made within the milieu of bureaucracy. The category of “low skilled” is one example of how Lydia was classified to justify the dispensation of services.

Lipsky (1980:59) notes that sometimes people act like the categorical entity to which they are assigned, facilitating the workers' abilities to have them fit stated criteria. To wit, people elaborate on the characteristics associated with their stated classification. For example, knowing that battered women's shelters are technically supposed to provide services only to victims of domestic violence, some women call and deliver their experiences from the *angle* of domestic violence. A portion of my field notes illustrates the elaboration of one woman's battering experience:

June 22, 1998

Took a hotline call today. Woman called who stated her roommate was threatening her. She was concerned that he would hurt her. Checked the Rolodex to see if she's been at shelter before. She was. Stayed on the phone for 35 minutes while she talked about how her roommate was treating her. Near the end of the conversation, she explained with great urgency she had to find a place to stay because the house she lived in was being sold. She's being kicked out of her place. I finally asked her if she was more afraid of being homeless than being abused. She said, "Yes, I really need a place to live." Referred her to a homeless shelter.

The example above points to how the caller constructed herself into the category of being an abused woman to enhance her chances of receiving services from the shelter. It also points to how I constructed her as less than a battered woman to legitimately deny her admission to the shelter. While her battering and fear of violence were important, she was, in fact, more homeless than battered. In her desperation to find a place to stay, she elaborated on the points of violence that would facilitate her receipt of shelter services. But I also had the discretion to structure her as more battered, using my own judgement. (For an in-depth discussion of the social construction of the battered woman, see Loseke 1992.)

What is described above is the same process that can be used in determining eligibility for TANF recipients and whether or not they will receive benefits. One might argue that there is a greater tendency for Dutchess County Department of Social Services to malign recipients in determining their eligibility than among non-governmental, community-based agencies. I make this claim because all of the community-based organizations that were part of this study were created as altruistic responses to the needs of community members and work to alleviate the pressures of disenfranchisement, deprivation, and victimization. The Dutchess County Department of Social Services is a bureaucracy that is not grounded in altruism. This, however, was not always the case. As Connelly (2000) points out, the social service approach was based on the charity model and an ethic of care. But, its failure has resulted in cynicism and has "encouraged a politics in which the privileged give themselves too much credit for their achievements by bestowing too much blame on the down-and-out for their conditions" (190). Cynicism and coarse treatment of recipients existed before welfare reform. But there is a peculiar

harshness of the current policies associated with reformed welfare. According to the advocates interviewed, they find themselves more entrenched in "mean-spirited" moments interceding on behalf of poor women.

It's Like Slavery or the Holocaust": Advocates Perceptions of Welfare Reform and the Mandate to Work

The inefficiencies of the welfare system have been demonstrated here and in the literature (see for example, Mink 1999). However, the interpretations of welfare reform's consequences have not been fully examined from the perspective of advocates (Withorn and Jons 1999). In this study I found that advocates had a narrow range of feelings about welfare reform, mostly disapproving. Their concerns are linked to the everyday experiences of their clients. The particularities of women's experiences of poverty and violence are relevant to advocates in their "ethic of care" (Tronto 1993). As Connolly (2000) points out, the staff at non-governmental social assistance programs "prioritize social relationships over bureaucratic policies..." and rules and regulations that interfered with the caring priority of clients was interpreted as contradictory. This suggests that advocate's sense of commitment to those in need relates to how they evaluate governmental entities treatment of the people the advocates serve.

Advocates critiqued welfare reform on two levels. The first critique concerned those who were responsible for translating the policies -- the street-level bureaucrats, i.e., caseworkers at governmental agencies. The second concerned actual welfare policy. I found that advocates, who were non-managerial staff, primarily focused their criticisms

on individual caseworkers. Alternatively, advocates at the managerial level were more likely to find fault more broadly with welfare reform policies. The differences in the focusing of advocates' critiques make sense given that it was non-managerial staff advocates were more likely to accompany women to appointments at places such as the Department of Social Services and Child Protective Services. However, regardless of the occupational position of the advocate, generally they felt that welfare reform was cruel and unusual in its punishment. The tactics Social Service caseworkers to divert people from receiving benefits were considered mean and insensitive by advocates. This feeling was heightened by the humiliation they witnessed when their clients went to meet with institutional personnel.

Advocates in this research often drew on personal histories as a point of reference for the work they did. Many of them had similar life experiences to their clients resulting in an emotional proximity to client's situation. In other words, advocates identified with the client. Among those whose lives were in some way reflected in clients' experiences, more negative feelings about welfare reform and its mandates were articulated. These advocates tended to be from working class backgrounds and recognized their own hardships in the clients with whom they worked. They also seemed to take the decisions of governmental caseworkers very personally.

Ruth is an advocate in her 30s. She has worked in a program with women for the last 10 years. She is of Irish descent and described her background as working poor. Because she received her bachelor's degree, she now identifies as a member of the educated poor. Ruth's assessment of welfare reform seemed to reflect her personal knowledge of injustice, which she also compared to parallel forms of injustice against

other groups. She discussed the historical mistreatment of her ancestors, the Irish, by the British. She compared their experiences of oppression to the Holocaust. Her point was that the treatment of the Irish and Jews was facilitated and justified by oppressors' lies about the two groups leading to the belief they were unworthy. To accomplish that, she said, required being emotionally anesthetized. This was the context that Ruth evaluated welfare reform and caseworkers' roles in implementing the policies:

What I see really happening in this country is a war on the poor. Before welfare reform, you kept seeing articles on the poor and how they are the ones eating up our tax dollars. And there was this real subtle campaign and I started seeing how it was affecting caseworkers and also my co-workers. They started saying things like 'people need to get off their lazy butts.'

How can you be in this field and say that? What you see with workers at DSS, in order to maintain their sanity, they have to believe all of this. They have to believe that welfare reform is going to help people not be dependent on the system. They have to believe that 'Those people don't have the natural drive to become contributing members of society.' That's just insanity!

I compare it to the Holocaust. They had to rationalize in their minds that they were doing something that was positive. And any time you attack somebody, nothing good is going to come out of it...I made a reference to people working in the system [caseworkers] and compared them to Nazis. Anytime you have to work in a situation where you have to be inhumane, you have to rationalize it in your mind. So the propaganda that preceded welfare reform has a lot to do with people's ability to carry out their roles in that.

Ruth is troubled by the number of women who have no idea of that to which they were entitled. She notes that in order to keep caseloads deflated, DCDSS caseworkers do not or will not inform women as to how they can access Medicaid or food stamps.

particularly if the client is from out of the county and/or of color.⁵⁷ Over and over again, women go to apply for benefits and nothing is explained to them. They are told they are ineligible and they simply leave without having accessed the means to acquire necessary services such as food stamps, Medicaid, cash allotments, child-care vouchers, and/or housing budgets. Ruth said "I've had a lot of women say that they will have to go out to the streets and do what they have to do to survive and take care of their children." So Ruth spends an inordinate amount of time negotiating not just getting services, but getting state agencies to retract rejections of women who previously applied and making a case for them to receive benefits. She says, "I've really gotten good at it. Generally, I am almost always able to get something done for someone. It is not always what the person would like, but I will find some way. It's just really hard now."

A second advocate, Giselle, remembers her family being recipients of social services when she was an adolescent. She is in her late 30s and is the oldest of four children. Giselle is Latina, a mother of one who married at age 20 but later divorced her husband. When we talked about welfare reform and her perceptions of its impact, she began by telling me a story of her experience with social services as a child:

Back then the Social Service caseworkers used to make home visits. One time the worker came to our house and saw an appliance that she had not seen during her last visit. She drilled my mom about where she got the money for the appliance. She wanted to know, if we were poor, how could we afford it? Did my mom have a man? Where was he? She threatened that if my mother had a man buying her gifts, she would have her benefits cut off. You know where we got that appliance? From my grandparents'

⁵⁷ If a woman comes from a county other than Dutchess and is on social services, then technically her county of origin is responsible for her care. Frequently this means that while living in Dutchess women are unable to secure benefits, such as Medicaid or food stamps for 30 days, from DCDSS. However, she should be able to continue receiving benefits from her county of origin. Often the county of origin may close a woman's case after 30 days and never negotiate with Dutchess to pick up the recipient. This means the woman is not receiving any benefits and is simply told she is ineligible.

house. They lived around the corner from us and we borrowed it. After that we would always hide anything that looked new when the worker came for a home visit. My mother would say, 'She's coming, hide everything' and we would.

Giselle interprets welfare reform and caseworkers' attitudes within the context of immigrant women. Giselle works at a community-based organization on behalf of immigrants. She thinks welfare reform's policies against immigrants⁵⁸ are egregious. Workers do not understand cultural differences, particularly as it concerns child-rearing patterns and resolving familial differences. This means that immigrant women are at constant risk of losing their children through the efforts of Child Protective Services (CPS).

The system doesn't take into account cultural values. They tell immigrant women, 'you are here now and you have to do what we do.' The court personnel and CPS personnel and DCDSS personnel make no room for different value systems.

Ruth found the same to be true for the immigrant women she worked with; they get little or no services from DCDSS and are rebuked within the broader Poughkeepsie community. She has seen immigrant women who cannot secure benefits. Consequently, they have no funds to pay for an apartment. So they take illegal work and live in an apartment with eight other people paying, as Ruth put it, "\$75 a month to sleep in an area behind a couch." Because the system will not provide for immigrants, they have to come up with their own mechanisms. They do things that place them at tremendous risk such

⁵⁸ Welfare Reform has narrowed immigrant eligibility for federal and state benefits such as food Stamps, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Medicaid, public housing and Temporary Aid to Needy Families. It is difficult to understand what assistance is available and which immigrants qualify. There are now categories of qualified immigrants and unqualified immigrants and there are contradictions between welfare restrictions for services to immigrants and eligibility for battered immigrant women. All legal immigrants who entered the country after the enactment of the PRWORA, were not eligible for any federal means-tested public benefits for a period of five years beginning on the date of the immigrant's entry into the country (Fujiwara 1999).

as work off the books. Charla criticized welfare reform laws and immigrant laws in terms of mandatory reporting of undocumented immigrants. "People are required to report illegal aliens. Before they weren't required to do that. I mean people could do that, but it wasn't a requirement for agencies to do that before [welfare reform]." Charla continued:

I called a worker at DCDSS for an undocumented woman to see what medical services she could get and the caseworker told me: 'Don't even bring her in here because we are required to report her.' She told me that on the phone.

Giselle works hard to compensate for the failure of the system as described above by Charla. She always goes beyond the scope of her job to help mediate the "nastiness," as she says, of workers. She makes phone call after phone call to help workers re-evaluate their decisions to penalize immigrants and other women. "They need food, a place to stay, and they need work." But she noted that:

Nobody will hire the immigrant women. This is more than work...it's a relationship. I'm so stressed and I get so tired that I go home and "veg out". I don't even have any friends. Why? Because a woman comes to me in need and I suffer to.

Maria, the shelter director, also spoke about how inflexible the system is and that it does not meet the needs of immigrant women.

Some women have nothing. Especially immigrants. We get no reimbursement for immigrant women. Nothing, nothing, nothing. We as an agency take a complete loss for her because they're (DCDSS) not reimbursing us for even an iota of her stay here. And she has nothing for herself when she leaves. No apartment, no ability to pay rent. She's got nothing. And that's their policy. They won't do anything for an immigrant. And the woman I'm talking about is documented!

In addition to the lack of resources available to immigrant women, advocates were appalled at the work mandate. Advocates knew first-hand that employment paying a living wage was not available. A report on the Dutchess County workforce found that private sector jobs in the county increased by 10,000 between December 1994 through December 1999. The largest private-sector job generators were in the highest paying industries with an average annual wage of \$37,503 for business service employees and \$74,080 for industrial/computer equipment manufacturing employees. Welfare reform provides opportunities for Departments of Social Services to meet employer needs and collaborate with businesses to make workplaces centers of learning. But there were no efforts directed toward preparing poorer residents to participate in the potentially higher paying industries through higher education. Most women were limited to taking jobs that were within walking distance from where they lived. Their options were narrowed by the lack of transportation. And, although the Dutchess Country Department of Social Services has a pool of money available to help clients purchase cars so that they can get to a job, rarely did the women know about this available pool of funds.

Several advocates brought up the lack of any "real educational opportunity." Hillary is a program manager and among her criticisms of welfare reform was how The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act eliminated support for a four-year college education. She believes that so much focus on skill-building and training programs and too little attention to advanced education will have negative long-term effects because:

It keeps the underclass in place and is destructive to human beings who want to learn and grow. It is one of the worst things about welfare reform -- not being able to go to school. We used to have a program that allowed

a woman to get her Associates Degree. At PACE women could get tutoring, child-care and a range of supportive services. Now it has been transformed into a certificate program. It doesn't have the same quality or meaning as it did when it was an Associates Degree program. In terms of human rights; welfare reform, time limits, and not being able to get an education ensures people will live their lives without dignity.

For the most part, advocates were angered by welfare reform and saw it as posing an increasing risk to women. Beth is a kind woman in her 40s who was once battered but took her three children and left her husband. She is a nurse in a clinic and was appalled that women should have to work and were sanctioned if they did not. "How can they expect women to move into work? What is their quality of life like? It doesn't make sense that women should be in these kinds of dire straits...living the kind of lives they are living under welfare reform...in a country that's so wealthy and during peacetime."

Ruth also expressed concern about the *risks* that come along with forced labor as mandated by welfare policy. She had this to say:

Employers know which people are on public assistance. First, because they get the referral from DCDSS or the Department of Labor. Second, because the supervisor has to sign forms indicating the recipient had applied for a job. They have the women under their thumb. Most people do not take advantage of that, but this work requirement certainly sets clients up for something that is not ethical. You're just setting up the potential for a really bad employment situation. Some women we work with are harassed for sexual favors or risk being reported back to their caseworker, which will cause them to be sanctioned.

Several advocates understood the work requirement as a form of slavery and interpreted the lifetime limit of five years for the receipt of aid as a mechanism to facilitate slave-like conditions. The recipient's labor benefits employers because people have to work for less money than they might ordinarily receive in the private job market. The threat of

sanctioning served to force people into jobs -- any job. It was fear that reinforced this slave labor force with sanctioning as the symbolic "master." One advocate stated:

These women, they have to work. But the jobs they have are low paying and don't come with benefits. What happens is the employer gets to pay them less and they are working for slave wages. The only difference between slavery then and now is that they don't get whipped.

Ruth also felt that the employment mandate could be equated with a form of slavery.

I made a reference to indentured slaves, in terms of employment, where people have jobs and the employer knows they are on public assistance. They know that if the person leaves the job, that person can get sanctioned. So they can take advantage of them.

Those working on behalf of women felt that DSS exerted a great deal of control over the women who were the advocates' clients; telling the women when to move, where to move and where not to move. Charla became very animated and agitated as she spoke about the authoritative power of the Department of Social Services:

... You depend on them [social services] to give you your name [in other words, they make you]...so people are afraid and end up being controlled. Ok, like having to work...it's not their choice. It's not their choice of work! I think some people would rather go to school, but they can't do it. Because if they go to school, it would mean that they don't eat or they don't have a roof over their head. And they can't do it on their own terms, they have to do it on someone else's terms.

Mink (1998) has addressed the comparison of welfare reform to slave-like conditions. She critiques welfare reform on several levels including recipients' lack of choice around work. The Personal Responsibility Act, she argues, makes decisions for poor women including fundamental rights about marriage, family life, procreation and work. Mink's critique of coerced labor is built on restriction of *one's choice to work* and

where one wants to work that is guaranteed under the Thirteenth Amendment⁵⁹ (Mink 1998; Bailey 1995). Forcing women to work under the new welfare laws, then, is a form of slavery or indentured servitude.

The regulation of women's labor is part of a process previously identified by Piven and Cloward (1993) whereby poor people's labor supports marginal industries (Bluestone 1977) and serves as a reserve labor pool. These conditions exist in relation to the expansion and contraction of the welfare state. Relief peaks when there is an economic crisis and contracts during economic booms. Given the types of jobs in which women found themselves (salesperson, home health aide, and child-care provider), this labor pool was in syncretization with the economic predictions made in the late 1980s and early 1990s about the labor needs of New York State (Surdey 1992).

It must be noted that, although advocates had very specific critiques of welfare reform policy and caseworkers, there were those who felt some of the changes were positive. Maria, the shelter director, stated:

My feelings about the Department of Social Services and my observations are different based on different workers. There are some workers who are brutal and insensitive and mean spirited. And there are other workers who have done...I've seen them do some really great things. So it just depends on the worker.

Even Ruth noted that she had seen some good outcomes of welfare reform for a few women.

I've been surprised at the positive effects of welfare reform. Some women who have gotten themselves back into the workforce. It's been life changing for some of them and they feel really good about themselves.

⁵⁹ In the early 20th century peonage cases the Supreme Court established the principle that coerced employment in satisfaction of a debt, is involuntary servitude.

Charla, along with several other advocates, thought that welfare reform was "OK" to the degree that it built up women's self-esteem -- for the successful client. "Some clients can manage a little push," she said, but Charla also cautioned that most of the women she worked with are pushed and forced in directions that end up having extremely bad outcomes. Like most of the advocates I interviewed, she thought welfare reform was ushered in with too many penalties. She noted that the penalties caused some women to become depressed. Advocates argued that women were no longer encouraged to think in terms of sustainability plans, long-term goals. Because they have to take the first job they can find, one that typically does not have benefits and pays too little money, the women feel trapped because they want to earn money and do not want to have anything to do with social services, which they feel controls them. They get depressed and desperate. The ability to set long-term goals is compromised due to the expectation that things should happen in record time and quick fixes are looked upon favorably. Further, when sanctions and reductions come so quickly, women are forced to make choices that may be unhealthy. Beth, the nurse, said:

I am worried about the health of women who are not taking care of themselves now because they have to cut corners to pay for child-care. They cut back on themselves, their teeth don't get fixed or they forgo check ups. We are only seeing the tip of the iceberg. I don't know what we'll see 10 years from now. It's going to come. I don't know what women's health is going to be like if they continue like this.

Also, the effect on the children is that they have an insecure life early on. They are left alone because that is the only way it's gonna happen [that their mothers will be able to work]. Before, because women were allowed to be parents, we didn't see this as much. Kids need more time, the mothers need more time. Right now we are hurting a lot children.

In their everyday work with women, advocates perceived the women as soldiers coming back from the front lines of a war. They, the advocates, interpreted women going to DCDSS as a battle. Sanctioning women for not meeting work requirements comes with no warning so some women are afraid. They will work even if they should not such as in cases when they are in poor health. It was the issue of sanctioning that frequently propelled advocates to engage in a range of strategies outside of the scope of their job descriptions to assist women.

Advocate's Helping Strategies

Poverty has never been adequately addressed through public assistance. Women are certainly having a much harder time because of changes in welfare and are predisposed to greater suffering as a result of sanctions in particular. But clients somehow survive within the context of restricted resources. They do it by their own magic and strategies they have developed and they survive with the help of others. These others, as I found, were often advocates.

Advocates bring clients home, buy them food, pay their rent, find housing for them, provide child-care, give women money and work after hours to help women cope with their problems. They did so because they believed that welfare reform's punitive mandates made it almost impossible for people to survive. The sanctions were particularly brutal and they could not tolerate the thought that women and their children might go hungry or lose their apartments. Advocates used their own resources to help women.

I interviewed and/or observed 19 advocates. Thirty-two percent (n=6) were managers and 68 percent (n=13) were non-managerial. Most of the advocates, 74 percent, were White, and 26 percent were Black or Latina. A much larger percentage of the advocates were women 89 percent (n=17) versus 11 percent (n=2) who were male. Not all of the advocates used their own resources to assist clients but a fair number, 42 percent (n=8), did. Table 4 summarizes the some characteristics among those advocates who did and did not directly help women using their own resources.

Table 4. Characteristics of Advocates' and Their Use/Non-use of Personal Resources

	All Advocates	Advocates who did not use personal resources	Advocates who did use personal resources
Total	19 (100%)	11 (58%)	8 (42%)
Race			
White	14 (74%)	11 (100%)	3 (37%)
Non White	5 (26%)		5 (63%)
Black	3 (16%)		3 (37%)
Latina	2 (11%)		2 (25%)
Gender			
Male	2(11%)	1 (9%)	1 (13%)
Female	17 (10 (91%)	7 (88%)
Occupational Status			
Managerial	6 (32%)	5 (45%)	1 (13%)
Non-Managerial	13 (68%)	6 (56%)	7 (88%)

Although obvious, it must be noted that those who were most likely to use their own resources were advocates with lower occupational status and were more likely to be

non-White. The remainder of this section focuses on the actions of the 42 percent (n=8) of the advocates who did draw upon their own resources to help women.

There were three levels of resource expenditure that advocates used to assist women. At the first level they drew upon personal and familial networks to help women. Three advocates or 38 percent of those engaged in resource expenditures using personal and familial networks, worked with clients around the specific issue of housing. It has been made clear that accessing affordable housing in Poughkeepsie was difficult. The housing market was so inaccessible that if women did not have the assistance of advocates, they well may have had to live in homeless shelters. I had been in Poughkeepsie for a little over one year before I found that many women might not have been housed as quickly as they were had it not been for the advocates. The advocates had family members or close personal friends who owned buildings, worked in the real estate industry, or were employed by a housing department or housing development. One advocate bypassed the DCDSS and housing system and went directly to her family and friends to help women find housing. This advocate's sister manages a building and her friend owns two houses. I asked her if she used her personal networks to assist women and she said:

Yes, I use personal networks because I think it's a way out for women and I know they need it. I can see the pain and hurt and if that's not done, there's no other way that a woman is gonna be able to do certain things. And so I call on my sister who manages a complex. Sometimes I feel guilty for using her like that. But then, you know, I do it anyway.

Look, one client was being forced to live in a bad neighborhood because of the little money she got from DCDSS. She wanted to move to an area and asked me if I could help her because she was being turned down at different places. I tell her I'll call my sister. Most of the time my sister is annoyed with me. But I call her anyway. Another woman with four

children and low income needed a place...she was making something like \$150 a week. Where was she gonna find an apartment? I helped her find a place. Got the rent lowered.

Another young woman who had only been doing advocacy for a short period of time made constant calls to her uncle to find an apartment for a client. She told me that she had to be very careful not to let her uncle know that the woman she was trying to find an apartment for was battered. Her uncle did not want a battered woman on welfare living in his apartment. He had "negative ideas about women on welfare in the first place. So I told him she was a friend of mine looking for a place to live."

Unfortunately, this was a problem for several battered women. When some landlords found out women lived at a battered woman's shelter or if they were referred by the YWCA Battered Women's Services program, they would no longer want to rent to them. Remember, these women are already homeless and only have 90 days to find an apartment. I make note of this because scarcity is compounded by the intersection of poverty and violence.

The second level of advocates' resource expenditures in assisting women came in the form of direct-payment for goods and services. A number of advocates would help clients pay their rent, purchase food or clothing. Again, 38 percent (n=3) of the advocates helped women in this way. Adolphus was one of the two male advocates I interviewed. He considered himself to be upper-middle class although he declined to tell me his income. He was the only one of the two who used his resources to help his clients who were mostly women. Adolphus has worked with women on welfare for almost 25

years and had "an adjusted" view of welfare reform; meaning that he felt people would simply have to adjust to the changes.

In New York State, our state constitution says that we have to take care of our poor. But people are being pushed into the job market to make \$5.15 per hour. If you work 35 hours a week, you're only going to bring home \$721 a month. That's not enough to pay your bills. They own people on welfare. The amount of money they give you buys you poverty. And the training available does not allow people input into their own destiny. When people fall between the cracks, I've gone into my pocket. I've bought food, and paid utilities.

Other advocates did the same. The situation was typically considered to be an emergency. The rationale that advocates gave for giving clients money was, the client rarely had a network from which they could obtain any form of economic assistance. The emergency was generally caused by a sanction or a decision of ineligibility for receipt of benefits. Rhonda, a counselor at a program, gave some clients up to \$300 so they could cover expenses as a result of being sanctioned. Money given to clients ranged from \$37 to \$300. In some instances, advocates would take their client shopping for food or clothing, items that could not be purchased with limited incomes. One advocate, Margie, was aware that a particular client needed to make money. Margie had a child-care need so she paid the client about \$40 a week in exchange for watching her child.

Giving money to clients was not an everyday occurrence. In fact, based on conversations with advocates and observations, I calculated that the three advocates helped clients out monetarily on only five occasions. The point was, however, they all felt there had been an increase in their financial giving and they related it directly to welfare reform and the acute needs of clients. They also felt that over time, they would

do it even more. In concluding our interview, one advocate, Adolphus, summed up his thoughts about why he and other advocates gave clients money.

When someone is sanctioned and they get cut off, they are a non-person...I've been giving out more lately because more people are in need and I have to live with myself.

The third level of providing assistance came in the form of in-kind services such as child-care, giving clothes to women and children, and extending the workday and work role by meeting women for sessions after work hours. The latter is best illustrated by the following description from my field notes of Mabel, an advocate. She was willing to provide "private" or off-hour services to ensure maximum client interaction away from an atmosphere of rushed processes:

May 18, 1999

Mabel drove her car to Clemmie's house early one morning. "I just want to check on her, see how she's doing." Clemmie has been disconnected from social services and any community-based services that were put in place for her. There are rumors going around that she has a lot of people living in her apartment. Men, some of who are drug dealers. Mabel, an advocate from a mental health program, had worked with Clemmie when she was at the shelter.

We pull up in front of Clemmie's house and I knock on the door. Clemmie comes downstairs and her boyfriend follows her. She tells him to leave the three of us alone for a while. Clemmie sits in the car and doesn't say anything for a few moments. Lynn asks her how she is and Clemmie starts to cry and says she doesn't know what's going on. Things feel out of control. Mabel suggests to Clemmie that they set up a regular meeting

date. She doesn't have to come to any organization. Mabel will come to her house and they can go for coffee and have sessions. Clemmie seems to be glad at the offer. They make a date for next Thursday and Clemmie goes back upstairs.

When I ask Mabel why she's going to spend time after work to meet with Clemmie, she says, "There's just no other way. She needs some services, she won't go to any organization and try to get it, DCDSS doesn't seem to be helping her in a meaningful way. So I'll do it."

It was rare for advocates to engage in clandestine service provision with a client, and it only happened in one other instance, that I was aware of. What was a more common form of in-kind services was child-care. Just about one-third of the advocates provided child-care services to clients. The lack of child-care in Dutchess County was in disproportion to need. This was particularly the case when a woman was being monitored by Child Protective Services (CPS). The scenario most frequently described to me was that a woman had to meet certain mandates in order to keep her children from being removed from the home. Maybe she had to go to a parenting class or a substance abuse program. In order to go, child-care was required. If her child-care fell through, which was sometimes the case, and she missed a mandatory session, then she was subject to being sanctioned by the Department of Social Services. To ensure that sanctioning was kept to a minimum, advocates would offer to watch children. This was the circumstance under which advocates went out of their way to help women. At most agencies the provision of this kind of assistance was in direct contradiction to organizational policy.

Thus, to engage in this practice technically placed the advocate at risk for his/her own job.

Based on the above, we see a shift away from the typical utilization of kinship-based networks (either real or fictive) toward advocate-based networks for goods and services. This type of network is not based on generalized reciprocity or even balanced reciprocity. It could be characterized as negative reciprocity in which a person gets something for nothing. Although the locus of the gift is from the advocate, the one doing the giving, they will realize no material return, but maybe rather a psychological wage. One argument for the emergence of the advocate-based network could be that women using kin-based exchange systems have saturated those network sources. Another argument, however, could be made. The work of advocacy involves intense relationship building with clients who are in crisis. In the case of the women in this study, it was the crisis of poverty and violence. The clients experienced extreme lack of adequate income-assistance. Is it possible that welfare reform, in its effort to reduce caseloads and dependency, is creating a mechanism of income and resource maintenance from within the advocacy community?

It is already known that charitable organizations such as food pantries (in the case of Poughkeepsie one example would be Catholic Charities), have experienced increased requests for assistance because people are having a harder time making ends meet (Ain 1997). One study examined the perceptions of welfare reform among charitable workers and found the practical solutions of dealing with scarcity has resulted in people's seeking alternative resources from the private sector. The study found that charitable providers felt more Churches and community-based organizations were "providing funds for people

for rent, utilities and whatever emergency situations they are in” (Glassberg, Middleton and McCall 1999:6). This is an area that warrants further exploration, particularly because as time limits are reached, more and more people will be faced with fewer options to secure resources. Again, according to Glassberg, Middleton and McCall (1999) agency personnel are experiencing high levels of frustration because, as the state eliminates assistance to poor people, organizations have to pick up the slack. But organizations are composed of individuals who obviously feel some sense of responsibility to also pick up the loss of benefits.

Walters and DeWeever (1999) found that community activists and advocates were concerned about the lack of information, inaccurate information, and little knowledge of clients' rights as TANF or Safety Net recipients and as employees. They found themselves in the position of providing this information and noted that many of the informational disparities were directly affecting Black recipients. Changes in welfare have created a burden for advocates who were part of this study in a number of areas. In this research I found that:

- 1) Advocates spend an increasing amount of time correcting incompetence and challenging decisions and in some cases, depleting their own resources. They do their advocacy work helping women find jobs, housing, food and other necessities. And, they are supplementing the income and resource needs of clients so that they can survive. Since the implementation of states sanctioning, advocates are, more and more, placed in the position of being income and resource support systems.
- 2) The focus on crisis intervention has intensified according to the advocates I interviewed. One outcome has been a shift away from one of the roles advocates have

- to organize their constituents to engage in social change activities. The changes in welfare reform have limited the amount of time that advocates can actually spend organizing their constituents because they are burdened with information processing and trying to create eligibility in situations where clients are not eligible.
- 3) Some of the advocates commented on how much more time they spend with clients to help them digest information about welfare changes and in helping women understand what they are entitled to. Advocates expect to, and do, play a role in distributing information but they complained that they have a lot of information to keep up with in regard to welfare reform policies.

Another study on the impact of welfare reform on the staff of community-based agencies found that it has created a high level of anxiety (Withorn and Jons 1999). The staff of community-based organizations were concerned about the increasing demands on agencies with increased caseloads. People are unable to make ends meet due to low wages, sanctions and case closures, so there are a greater number of crises. The report revealed two startling points: 1) That agencies may experience staff loss due to the inability to handle intensified multiple crises; and 2) that agencies may begin to only serve clients that they think will be most motivated to successfully meet the demands of welfare reform -- leaving others by the wayside.

The racial and class make-up of the advocates discussed in this chapter in relation to the women they helped deserves a concluding comment. All of the women who benefited from the kinds of assistance for survival described in this chapter were women of color. This may say something about the capital of color as women try to build their lives. Were they more likely to be sanctioned? Less likely to find housing? More likely

to need child-care and be in programs that challenged their rights as mothers? This is yet another example of how race is a relational factor that needs to be acknowledged as women traverse dimensions of self-sufficiency.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

Within the past five years, the connection between violence, poverty and welfare use has become a focus of study among activists, academics and policy makers. The examination of the relationship between these issues called attention to the number of battered women who receive welfare. Analyses have raised compelling questions about the barrier that violence presents to women's economic independence. These concerns were particularly salient as proposals to transform the welfare system were debated. They guided women's rights activists in the development of proposals to incorporate alternatives within welfare reform policy to reduce battered women's vulnerability to increased violence and poverty. The result was an amendment, the Family Violence Option. The goal of the amendment is to offset welfare reform mandates by exempting victims of violence from the requirements.

Although important, few of the analyses incorporated discussions of the relationship of race and the potential impact of either welfare policy, or the family violence option, in the lives of Black women. The inclusion of Black women in critiques of welfare reform, violence and poverty is an absolute necessity as Black women have been the targets of much of welfare's egregious policy implementation. This has been the point of departure of this dissertation -- to underscore the impact of welfare reform policy in the lives of Black battered women. Among the battered women in this dissertation, the quality of their lives was exponentially diminished due to negative interactions with

Social Service personnel. Coordinated activities by the state to organize women into low wage labor, training programs, forced child-care arrangements and inferior housing were arbitrarily leveled against the women of color in this study.

Although women of color experienced differential treatment with institutions as they sought to get their needs met, what this dissertation points to more broadly, are extreme expressions of gender control. This control is articulated through the power implicated in policy in the most ordinary ways found in everyday life. The stigma associated with welfare use was ensconced in an ideology of "dependency." Under the misconception that they were not able to fit into society, Black women were more monitored, organized and scheduled. As Sherita put it, engagement with social services was like "being on the inside," a reference associated with being incarcerated. More than other women, Black, Latina and immigrant women were less frequently given information about that to which they were entitled. They were also more frequently diverted from accessing social services.

The original intent of the welfare state was to protect citizens against the fluctuations of life in an industrial society. Yet, the historical trajectory of the welfare state has not fully lived up to this intent. Policies and programs within welfare have regulated various aspects of social life, particularly in the area of labor -- productive, domestic and reproductive. And, as I have argued, the regulatory capability of welfare policy has had specific outcomes for women, differentiated by race.

Welfare policies have long regulated women's dependency⁶⁰ within the context of patriarchal and capitalist ideologies. In discussing its regulatory function, examples have been used to illustrate how welfare policy discourse has been contemptuously equated with Black women's utilization of government aid. In the first part of this dissertation, I focused on one reason (of many) that some Black women use welfare -- in relation to the violence in their lives. The point has been to build on the emerging literature that connects crucial areas of social life -- poverty and violence. The association between these issues has led to an analysis about the ways in which fear of violence and the lack of access to resources challenge women. Although challenged, women still attempt to be independent and self-sufficient.

Through welfare reform the behavioral and emotional state of "dependency" is seen to be transformable through the process of forcing welfare recipients into labor that is compensated in terms of wages. According to Kittay (1999) it is assumed that entry into the labor market will lead to independence and self-sufficiency. But, as I have described, there are a number of circumstances that interfere with self-sufficiency as it is defined by welfare policy -- attachment to work. Because this research involves battered women, upon a first analysis, one may argue that independence is obviously compromised by the physical, emotional and/or spiritual attack on women. However, I do not want to promote the idea that battered women are less able to achieve independence than non-battered women and turn their victimization against them to illustrate what they cannot accomplish. One important understanding of the dynamic of

⁶⁰ For a detailed discussion on the historical use of the terms independent and dependent in relation to work, see Fraser and Gordon (1994).

violence, welfare reform and poverty is that we find the constriction of aid affects women's options *after* they have left abusive relationships.

I maintain that poor, Black, battered women, indeed, all women who are poor or lack access to material resources and choose, or need, welfare to *gain independence*, become entangled in a "Kafkaesque-like web" (Mama 1989) of institutional relations.

The United States policy toward the poor is designed to discipline and punish welfare recipients in the Foucauldian sense, which is facilitated by institutional relations. The regulation of recipients' lives are re-inscribed in the social worlds in which women interact, for example when employers potentially threaten to "turn women in" to their caseworkers if they do not acquiesce to demands. The term I use to describe the phenomenon of poor women being ordered by policy is "institutional entanglement." It expresses the sum total of the institutional experiences of poor women seeking to have their basic needs met. Institutional entanglement consists of monitoring women's performance and assessing their deficits and deviations. Judgements are passed and the compulsion of control incorporates other institutions, such as retail and real estate sectors.

The control is deceiving because it is articulated under the guise of helping people achieve goals. Here Foucault's analysis of power and control is very useful because we can see its multi-dimensionality. Foucault (1973; 1975; 1979; 1980) states his project was to examine the relationship between institutions and social actors focusing on how institutions exert power. He argued that on the surface, institutions appear to be beneficent. However, working behind the beneficent or impartial façade of institutions lies power and domination (Best and Kellner 1991:57).

...the real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the working of institutions which appear both neutral and independent; to criticize them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked so that one can fight them (Foucault, 1974:171).

He located the exertion of power in a variety of institutional domains including clinics and prisons (Foucault 1973; 1979). Foucault argues that regulatory practices are utilized to create the "docile bodies that are needed in a rational and efficient society" (Merquior 1985:94). I suggest attempts were made to transform women on welfare into docile bodies.

Staples (1997) has identified the practices, such as face-to-face interviews, and reporting back to caseworkers, "meticulous rituals of power." They are the micro techniques of discipline and social control. They include knowledge-gathering activities - small procedures that are faithfully repeated and are intended to discipline people into acting in certain ways (Staples 1997:3). In describing these rituals of power, Staples notes they exist in the dominant/subordinate relationships of managers and workers; parents and children; teachers and students. They also take place on a larger scale between individuals and public institutions.

For poor, Black women who are battered, the meticulous rituals of power are seemingly diffuse. Take, for example, the case of Joanne. The regulatory control of DCDSS crossed over to her interactions with a number of consumer retail personnel as she attempted to use a Department of Social Services voucher to secure a refrigerator for an apartment. The judgement and gaze of some sales people who refused to give her the required estimate meant that she could not get her apartment certified. The refusal to give the estimate delayed Joanne's ability to move.

I have tried to locate the processes of control within the institutional relations that emerge out of welfare reform policy and claim the everyday experiences of poor, battered women who are Black. The institutional engagement has three characteristics:

1. It is a documentary process of social life found in case files and elicited in face-to-face interviews.
2. It involves a network of peripheral organizations that regulate social life and the behavior of poor women.
3. It can generate or exacerbate scarcity which reinforces hierarchical arrangements. Out of need, people may be forced to develop instrumental relationships, which are not, by definition, equitable.

Anthropological research has interrogated other interactions between institutions and individuals in relation to homelessness. For example, Susser (1993) examines how homeless people are bound to social service institutions to ensure a place to stay. She concludes that family formation with regard to the presence of male children is organized through institutional mandates, such that male children over a certain age are not allowed to be in some shelters with their mothers. Similarly, Liebow (1993) analyzed women living in homeless shelters and illustrates the ways in which the shelter system disciplines women by micro managing their everyday lives, such as when they can sleep. Liebow makes the argument that institutional control works to encourage dependency.

It is institutional entanglement that I argue can compromise self-sufficiency. The regulatory ritual practices inherent in welfare reform hinder basic liberties. Kittay (1999) identifies these basic liberties which include freedom of movement, choice of occupation, income and wealth and the social bases for self-respect. All of these liberties are

restrained under welfare reform. By authorizing the regulatory control of women, techniques are employed to organize their activities from child-care to apartment hunting. Freedom of choice is virtually non-existent; women are unable to work in occupations in which they are interested because the mandate to work does not include choice of occupation. Women can choose to stay home with their newborns or young children. Women are not always able to live in areas in which they feel safe or find desirable because the income maintenance provided by departments of social services restricts their options. Then, as a result of sanctions, women's choices are even more restricted -- because they are placed in the position of patching together strategies -- to eat, pay rent, or buy some necessity for their children.

In paying attention to Black women, we can see how power and control is exerted in relation to race. By paying attention to battered women, we are forced to consider how control can operate even under circumstances that might mitigate the necessity of power and control. That is to say that one might assume that sympathy might accompany a victim of violence. However, power and control of institutions are not organized by sympathy. What we see by exploring Black, battered women's experiences with welfare reform is the exertion of power on the fringes. Foucault (1980) suggested that power be examined at its extremities to determine how things work at the level of ongoing subjugation.

The details of how effective welfare reform has been in subjugating women can be connected to the economy of Dutchess County and the proliferation of high-tech and service industries. The over-dependence of the county on one corporation placed it in a precarious position, which nearly devastated the Hudson Valley Region. When the

corporation contracted, the consequences were typical of those across the United States where downsizing had taken place. What ensued were high rates of unemployment, abandonment of buildings, an overflow of cheap housing stock and a depleted economic base. These conditions changed the City of Poughkeepsie into more of an "urban ghetto" with the attendant social ills.

However, these were the same conditions that also made the City ripe for revitalization. The process involves the focus of reinvestment and disinvestment. It is the domain for restructuring social and economic space and it is in the inner city where development leads to underdevelopment, creating the opportunity for new development (Smith 1996a). Poughkeepsie's proximity to New York City and the relatively inexpensive housing costs (compared to nearby Westchester) make it almost ideal. County residents often commented that Dutchess has an immense amount of brainpower, evidenced by the number of high-technology companies located there. All of these factors put Poughkeepsie, indeed Dutchess County, in a position to save itself from demise in the early and mid 1990s. It is now a flourishing county with large service and informational technology sectors.

These conditions have also made welfare reform easy to institute. Poor women who are regulated and controlled become bonded to social services in a county where the Department of Social Services works in direct relation with economic development agencies to ensure that service sector labor needs are being met. Dutchess County Department of Social Services, within the context of welfare reform, is working in the service of corporate interests, which means that some people are compelled to take low wage, marginal work.

We must remember that the goals of welfare reform are to move people from welfare to work. Thus, people in need must somehow be excluded from accessing services. The logic of exclusion is realized in sanctioning and time limits. From this logic, women's life chances are diminished because of increased exposure to risks and vulnerabilities. These risks, which include physical and emotional violence, economic disenfranchisement and institutionalized forms of stratification, interfere with the human capacity to flourish. In other words, the quality of life is forsaken. The restrictive, exclusionary elements of welfare reform are counterintuitive to the stated priority of generating self-sufficiency among recipients who require government assistance.

The women were governed and ordered by intense levels of bureaucracy. They were also controlled by the economy of the county in which they lived. The interaction of these factors hindered achievements of self-sufficiency and engendered a set of practices by some women and those who worked with them to compensate for the structural violence inherent in welfare policy.

The very foundations upon which welfare reform and sanctions are built are flawed. Self-sufficiency does not emerge only from employment. The ideas inherent in the policies suggest that institutions know best what individuals need. The goal of welfare reform is to end dependence by people or aid and encourage (or force) them to participate in democratic capitalism by moving them from welfare to work. Welfare reform has been considered to be successful because, through the practices of its logic, caseloads have been reduced. Yet any policy that "expropriates vital economic and non-material resources, subverting chances for survival" (Anglin, 1998), cannot be considered successful.

As Connolly (2000) notes, the language of "self-sufficiency" and independence is a false vocabulary. Independence, as understood by the welfare state, is fictive. Kittay (1996) argues that the welfare state resists acknowledgment of its obligation to the social order by attending to the needs and well-being of dependents and caregivers. Welfare policy's rendition of independence is based on inadequate knowledge of the context and circumstances of people's lives. Welfare policies do not assume that race and class status or longer-term needs will leak their way into social actors' lives or into the evaluations of the social service caseworkers, landlords or employers. More important, welfare reform policy and its focus on work is not concerned about the quality of life that women in need desire or deserve. Without factoring these points into the equation, we find policy that places women at risk and with very little freedom to decide what is in their own best interests.

Through welfare reform policy, the sense of individual choice is disrupted by the articulation of institutional power (Harvey 1990). In structuring poor women's activities, social services exercises power to the degree that decision-making processes are rarely left up to the individual. Women were required to make weekly contacts in their job search efforts. They have to come in for face-to-face interviews and penalties are exacted if there are any transgressions, *including making more income* (meaning that budgets are reduced or eliminated if their paid income exceeds a certain amount).

Expressions of the controls in welfare reform are found in the lives of battered Black women. Their lives after leaving a shelter represent an accumulation of needs leading to self-sufficiency and independence. Neither can bend to the will of policy

because the dimensions of life embedded in achieving self-sufficiency should be self-formulated options -- options that are meaningful and personal.

To make sense of the controlling nature of welfare policy we have to read power bi-directionally. In exploring the impact of welfare reform, women's resilience, although tenuous, shines through. In spite of regulations, women do survive. The women in this study, although they do not necessarily have access to political power, they use strategies that are organized, focused and purposeful. They attempt to exert control within the context of insufficiency. They create fictive kin relationships that will fulfill needs, they use language to diminish the dominant perception about who they are to secure basic needs, they engage in illegal activities aware that they are doing so, and engage in reciprocal relations with strangers to bank favors for a rainy day. But merely surviving is not good enough. Women should be able to thrive and have realistic access to services and options that give meaning to their lives. They need bridges to create stability. Most importantly, poverty and violence against women need to be eliminated. If welfare reform considered those as the goals toward independence and self-sufficiency, *then* reform might be implemented differently. Anything less than that only deepens the dire needs of women in ways that compromise human dignity.

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT

My name is Dana M. Davis and I am Anthropology doctoral student working on my thesis at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. I am interested in conducting a research study about how battered and non-battered women and those who work with them feel about the services available to them. I am particularly interested in your opinions and interactions with the shelter and with institutions such as the Department of Social Services, Administration for Children's Services, Family Court, Police, Housing Authorities, among others. I would like to have permission to interview you about your opinions and experiences.

You do not have to participate in any part of this study. If you decide not to participate, it will not affect your services, employment, your stay at the shelter or entitlements, your school records, medical records or what may happen to you in the future either in Dutchess County or anywhere else. You should also understand that there is no immediate benefit for you if you decide to participate in this study.

This audio taped interview could take up to 3 hours, but may be broken up into two or three sessions. With your permission, I would like to record this interview so I can ensure that I have the details accurately. Information gathered will be kept strictly confidential and will be kept in a locked file cabinet to which only I have access. The only exception is if you disclose any signs of harming yourself or others. Such information would have to be reported to the appropriate authorities who can offer you help. Confidentiality will be ensured to the extent that the law allows. You will be assigned a study number to protect your anonymity. Your name, alias, case number will not appear anywhere in association with this study. The list of subjects will be destroyed after the interviews are analyzed.

At any time you can refuse to answer any questions or to end the interview. You will not be paid to participate in this study. In the future, my report may be published. No names of people interviewed will be used in the writing of that report. At the end of the interview you will be asked if you have any questions about domestic violence. Or, if you have any concerns, feelings or problems you want to discuss. If the interview brings up hard feelings for you during or as a result of the interview, you have two alternative options available to you. You may speak with your case manager if you have discomfort resulting from the interview or you may speak with a member of the staff who is a Social Worker and had counseling skills. Participation in this study involves no benefits and minimal or no risks. You can withdraw at any time or decide not to participate without penalty, or loss of services.

Dana M. Davis may be reached at 718-601-0021 with questions or problems, which may arise from my participation in the study. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, contact Hilry Fisher, Sponsored Research, Graduate School University City University of New York (212) 642-2059 or my advisor, Leith Mullings at (212) 642-2242. Thank you.

If you agreed to be interviewed, sign below

I agree to have this interview
audiotaped (CIRCLE ONE)

Yes

No

Participant's Signature

Investigator's Signature

Date

Date

APPENDIX B**INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE****PART I - DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

1. What is your birthdate?
2. What is your age?
3. What is your race or ethnicity?
4. Where were you born?
5. What is your religion?
6. Where did you live before you came to Grace Smith House?
What was the zip code
7. What is the highest grade of school you completed?
8. Do you currently receive public assistance?
9. Have you received public assistance in the past?
10. Are you currently employed?
11. What type of work do you do?
12. What is your income (monthly)?
How much do you get in cash assistance?
How much do you get in food stamps?
How much do you get for housing?
Do you receive money from any other source?
13. What is the highest grade of school you completed?
14. How long have you been at Grace Smith House?
15. Is this your first time at Grace Smith House?
16. Do you have children?
How many?
What are their ages?

PART II EXPERIENCE OF ABUSE

1. Were you abused as a child?
By Whom?
2. What happened?
3. Have your children been abused?
4. What happened?
5. Have you been abused as an adult?
6. What happened?
7. What did you do to stop the abuse?

PART III - SHELTER EXPERIENCE

1. Why did you come to Grace Smith House?
2. Did you tell anyone what was going on before you came?
3. What kind of help did you try to get before you came to the shelter?
4. How did you find out about the shelter?
5. Is this your first time in a battered women's shelter?
6. Do you consider yourself to be a battered woman?
7. How do you feel about the shelter?
What do you like?
What do you dislike?

PART IV - INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

1. Have you ever been involved with any of the following?

- | | <u>Yes</u> | <u>No</u> | <u>When</u> | <u>Why</u> |
|---------------------------|------------|-----------|-------------|------------|
| a. Child welfare | | | | |
| b. Housing | | | | |
| c. Board of Education | | | | |
| d. Social Services | | | | |
| e. Criminal Court | | | | |
| f. Family Court | | | | |
| g. Police | | | | |
| h. Mental Health Agency | | | | |
| i. Substance Abuse Agency | | | | |

2. Are you presently involved with any of the following?

- | | <u>Yes</u> | <u>No</u> | <u>When</u> | <u>Why</u> |
|---------------------------|------------|-----------|-------------|------------|
| a. Child welfare | | | | |
| b. Housing | | | | |
| c. Board of Education | | | | |
| d. Social Services | | | | |
| e. Criminal Court | | | | |
| f. Family Court | | | | |
| g. Police | | | | |
| h. Mental Health Agency | | | | |
| i. Substance Abuse Agency | | | | |

3. I want to ask you questions about each of the institutions you **HAVE BEEN** or **ARE** involved with. (Discuss each institution in turn)

- a. Why did you become/are you involved with that institution?
- b. How did/do you feel about the institution?

PART V - LIFE HISTORY

1. Tell me what is your best memory of growing up?
2. What was your life like growing up?
3. What kind of work did your parent(s) guardian(s) do?
4. Who lived in your household when you were growing up?
5. How were you treated growing up?
6. Were you on welfare growing up?
Why?
For how long?
7. Are you on welfare now?
Why?
How long do you think you'll need it?
8. What did you want to be when you grew up?
9. Is your life different than the way you imagined it would be?
In what ways?
10. Tell me the most important events that influenced your life?

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