

FOUCAULT, ROGERIAN ARGUMENT, AND FEMINIST STANDPOINT THEORY:
INTERSECTING DISCOURSES CONCERNING WELFARE REFORM
DURING THE 1990s

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DEDICATION

In memory of my beloved husband, Ron Johnson, and to my son, Sean Michael Hanna,
whose love, encouragement, and belief never cease to inspire me.

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affection to the memory of my beloved husband, Ron Johnson, who opened up this special path of discovery for me, and even in death, made it possible for me to continue the journey.

ABSTRACT
CAROL WILSON JOHNSON

FOUCAULT, ROGERIAN ARGUMENT, AND FEMINIST STANDPOINT THEORY:
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Despite the numerous and exhaustive studies concerning families, poverty, and the history of American social welfare laws; in depth social science studies of welfare organizations and methods; and the more recent feminist analysis of women and social welfare, there is limited rhetorical analysis of the language of welfare legislation, the surrounding policy debate, or associated media commentary. Further, there is a paucity of research placing the voices of women who receive welfare in the welfare debate. This study seeks to fill this gap in scholarship by examining the rhetoric of social welfare and poverty, focusing on women's lived experiences as revealed through their discourse and by analyzing the discourses of politicians and newspaper media from the 1990s.

Artifacts associated with welfare rhetoric cross numerous disciplines and originate in historical, cultural, social, economic, political, and philosophical discourses. These discourses find the overlapping rhetorics of care, responsibility, community, work, and morality vying for primacy. Artifacts examined in this study include presidential speeches, particularly those of former President William J. Clinton, newspaper stories from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* as well as interviews with women

receiving welfare conducted by the Alliance for Children and Families from March through June, 2000.

This study begins by historically situating the issue of social welfare in the 1990s, and then applies Rogerian argument to analyze Clinton's speeches to identify the political terms of the welfare debate. Next, it uses critical discourse analysis to examine newspaper stories about welfare receivers to discover their characterization in print. Finally, it combines Foucault's *parrhesia* with feminist standpoint theory and applies them to the interviews of women living in poverty. This approach not only rethinks and revises how these theories could work together to examine language, but it also explores how they could be used to grant dignity to everyday discourse reflecting the lived experiences of a special group in society. This study found a common ground from which the voices of welfare receivers collectively stand and resist the system that determines the material existence of their lives.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Luke 6:20

Let us live happily, possessing nothing; let us feed on joy, like the radiant gods. Dhammapada 15:4

*La compia del beni in alcuni sempre eguale alla mancanza di essi in altri.¹
G. Ortes, 18th C*

"Poverty is the worst form of violence." Ghandi

Despite the numerous and exhaustive studies concerning families, poverty, and the history of American social welfare laws; in depth social science studies of welfare organizations and methods; and the more recent feminist analysis of women and social welfare, there is little discussion or evaluation of the role of language in the American social welfare system and limited rhetorical analysis of the language of welfare legislation, the surrounding policy debate, or associated media commentary. Further, there is a paucity of research placing the voice of women who receive welfare in the welfare debate. This study seeks to fill this gap in scholarship by examining the rhetoric of social welfare and poverty, focusing on women's lived experiences as revealed through their discourse and analyzing the discourses of the politicians and newspaper institutions which rhetorically construct their world, with a particular focus on welfare reform discourse from the 1990s.

As Robert L. Ivie discusses in his essay, "The Social Relevance of Rhetorical Scholarship," there is often concern, even debate, between those who regard the true

work of rhetorical theory as one that “keeps criticism from addressing significant social issues” and those who believe that scholarship should “yield something of value toward the intelligent resolution of public issues and the constructive conduct of civic life” (138). It is the point of Ivie, as it is of other theorists, feminist scholars, and critical discourse theorists and analysts, that it is important, indeed imperative, for theory to inform critique of civic discourse in an effort to “infiltrate and interpret” it and subsequently to directly impact its consequences (138). This study uses Rogerian argument, feminist standpoint theory, and Michel Foucault’s theoretical approaches to rhetorically examine and interrogate the discourse of American welfare reform during the 1990s in an effort to uncover possible sites of obfuscation, manipulation, resistance, and to insert the voice of women receiving welfare into the discourse.

Although the scope of this study prohibits examination of all artifacts associated with social welfare in the 1990s, it does seek to examine the language that influenced what was presented to the general public about welfare recipients during a crucial period of welfare reform. To that end, I will examine specific speeches given by former President William Jefferson Clinton concerning welfare during the 1990s, with a special focus on his inaugural and state of the union messages. These speeches were chosen because they were the most widely received and most closely exemplified his overall agenda in language developed specifically for a broad public audience. Additionally, I have selected representative newspaper stories about welfare reform from the 1990s for analysis. Once again, a premium was placed on newspapers that were widely distributed and carried inherent authority. But as a student of social welfare soon learns, much of

what is written about social welfare comes from politicians, academics, journalists, and the like—although there are volumes of works written about social welfare—the real voices of welfare recipients are often silent or their words are filtered through the frames of politicians, journalists, or other professionals. Therefore, I felt it imperative to include rhetorical analysis of interview responses by women receiving welfare in hopes of giving an additional platform from which the words of the women most affected by the whole process of welfare reform might be more clearly understood.

This study assumes its primary audience to be scholars of rhetoric. For those students of rhetoric who may be unfamiliar with social welfare and its history, Chapter II provides needed background. This discussion situates the history and language of social welfare and provides a review of its roots and subsequent formations drawn from comprehensive historical analyses, which identify the language of social welfare from the Elizabethan Poor Laws of 1601 to American welfare reform in the 1990s. This chapter examines a number of historical works to expressly search for the epistemological sources of the language used in social welfare and to identify shifts in practice, experience, and perspective. Scholars of rhetoric can find that the relationship between the poor and the wealthy makes an important shift from ancient times to the Renaissance. Where early biblical precepts taught humility and generosity towards the poor, later humanist epistemology placed more responsibility on the individual for their economic attainments in life. Further, religious doctrines shifted from one of obligation of the rich to moral judgments placed on the poor by God. The discourse of community obligation finds itself replaced by a discourse of individualism and morality. This brief overview of

social welfare touches on the language of social welfare and the persistent rhetoric of work, worthiness, family, and morality up to the 1990s welfare reform debate.

This historical examination of social welfare discourse was conducted using insights from Michel Foucault. Chapter II begins with a review of prior scholarship that has utilized Foucault's methods to examine the issues and language of social welfare. These scholars cross disciplines of political science, social theory, sociology, humanities, feminist studies, and philosophy, and include Judith Butler; Adrienne S. Chambon, Allan Irving, and Laura Epstein; Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon; Donna Haraway; Nancy C. M. Hartsock; Martin Hewitt; Charles C. Lemert and Garth Gillan; Ken Moffatt; and Jana Sawicki. Next, I examine the stance of those who question Foucault's approaches, including Jürgen Habermas, Richard Rorty, Charles Taylor, and Thomas Flynn whose debate provides insightful and compelling discussion. Finally, I identify important historical scholarship about the history of social welfare, particularly the work of Catherine N. Axinn and Mark J. Stern, Herbert J. Gans, Michael B. Katz, Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, and Walter I. Trattner. I found the work of Axinn and Stern especially insightful and rich with numerous primary sources. So, drawing on the lens of Foucault and the historical perspectives and interpretations of these scholars, Chapter II examines the rhetoric of social welfare with a particular focus on how the discourse of social welfare has historically constructed poor women as subjects in an effort to examine and control their behaviors.

Next, Chapter III applies the theory of Rogerian argument to a number of Clinton's speeches, including his inaugural addresses and state of the union addresses.

This chapter begins with a review of Rogerian argument scholarship including the research of Paul Bator; James S. Baumlin and Tita French Baumlin; Richard M. Coe; Robert J. Connors, Lisa S. Ede, and Andrea A. Lunsford; Sonja K. Foss and Karen A. Foss; Maxine Hairston; Carl Rogers; Richard E. Young, Alton L. Becker, and Kenneth L. Pike; and Nathaniel Teich. It then examines the language of social welfare in a November 1993 speech to black ministers in Memphis, Tennessee where Clinton's engaging, conciliatory, and empathetic style provides a classic example of Rogerian argument.

Following the Memphis speech, a brief historical look at twentieth-century presidential inaugural and state of the union addresses is presented to identify the requirements of the genre and to historically situate Clinton's approach to social welfare discourse within his speeches. Then a detailed examination of Clinton's state of the union and inaugural addresses is provided to demonstrate how Clinton's inaugural addresses, state of the union messages, and many other speeches and statements carry the over-arching message of change. Moreover, the themes of reform, work, family, and investment in the future infiltrate his discourse and his speeches. Clinton speaks to his audience in human terms, avoiding pejorative language for characterizing the poor, and portrays sincerity, competency, and resolve.

Furthermore, Chapter III identifies the rhetorical strategies employed by Clinton to mitigate the unhappiness caused by his willingness to sign a welfare reform bill vehemently opposed by many of his supporters and members of his party. Undoubtedly his motives were political—but were they more than that? His speeches, particularly his

inaugural and state of the union addresses, were crafted over a series of months and subsequently used as the blueprint for his political objectives and social programs for the year following their delivery. Clinton worked tirelessly on the speeches himself, embedding the therapeutic language of empathy and reform in his discourse. Clinton also co-opted the language of his opponents and employed a rhetorical strategy that sought to change the terms of the welfare debate from the character of welfare mothers to work opportunities. His strategy worked. By the end of his presidency, the subject of social welfare discourse moved from unwed mothers to work and jobs. This chapter's examination identifies how Clinton rhetorically redefined the language of social welfare and the image of the welfare receiver over the course of his presidency and thereby changed the terms of the debate.

Next, Chapter IV uses critical discourse analysis to examine newspaper stories about women receiving welfare using the methods that most inform this work including those of Teun A. van Dijk, Robin Tolmach Lakoff, and Allan Bell. A number of other scholars have significantly contributed to critical discourse analysis of news media including John Heritage, Noam Chomsky, Ron Scollon, Deborah Tannen, and Kevin Williams and their influence on the approach used in this chapter are acknowledged. Many grant that the influence of the media is ubiquitous in framing how the public views issues, events, groups, and individuals. This chapter identifies how welfare receivers are characterized in newspaper stories during the 1990s, whether or not they are allowed to speak, and when they are quoted, how their voices are represented.

Included in this chapter is a brief overview of how media theory and mass communication discourse impact society. Media theory crosses a number of disciplines, including social theory, cultural anthropology, political theory, literary theory, and discourse analysis. Many scholars explore the relationship of media management and journalists in the social construction of individuals and groups using discourse devices, such as propaganda, bias, and stereotyping, including Moira P. F. Chimombo and Robert L. Roseberry, Noam Chomsky, Teun A. van Dijk, Robin Lakoff, Ron Scollon, Shanto Iyengar and Richard Reeves, Paul Starr, John Whale, and Kevin Williams. Their research contributes to the body of work concerned with how the media influences and even creates how we see the world in which we live.

The data or stories examined in this chapter were taken from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* and were selected because they reported on the lives of women receiving welfare. These newspapers were chosen because of their broad readership and also because their articles and leads are often picked up by smaller local and regional outlets which republish their stories to an even wider audience. Using two of the major newspapers in the country allows examination of representative samples of news reports that were likely re-reported in other forms or different venues across the country. Therefore, there is a presumption that these stories, or others like them, were read or repeated to a large part of the population concerned with the issue of welfare reform.

When examining the news stories, this chapter concerns itself with the discourse used by journalists to interpret the words of women receiving welfare, how these women are characterized through direct and indirect attribution, and the subject matter most often

associated with stories about welfare mothers. Analysis of newspaper stories about welfare mothers found that negative depictions were prevalent and that mothers were characterized more by the journalists or other authoritative sources than in their own words. The impact of speech patterns identified in the welfare receivers' discourses in Chapter V also provides insight into how they were represented in the news stories examined.

Chapter V examines the words of poor women, not from a social science or political science perspective, but from a rhetorical one. Two rhetorical approaches are used to examine their words: Feminist Standpoint Theory and Foucault's concept of *parrhesia* or speech that discloses or confesses truth about oneself. This chapter seeks to find sites of resistance within the discourses of poor women, which attempt to disrupt the dominant popular negative depictions of their characters and their lives. It also expands the boundaries of *parrhesiastic* speech beyond the traditional articulate circle of the elite, the educated, and the moral to include those on the margins, in particular, poor women who are otherwise silenced.

Chapter V is the heart of this study, the place where women on welfare and women in poverty speak in their own words about their experiences with work, family, illness, success, and disappointment. The data used in this chapter was made available by the Alliance for Children and Families from interviews they conducted nationally just after welfare reform. These interviews were collected into a large database by state and are available at their web site and archive. Subsequent to their interviews, published reports of their findings and research have been made available in *Faces of Change*:

Personal Experiences of Welfare Reform in America and Faces of Change Analysis:

Welfare Policy Through the Lens of Personal Experience edited by Thomas Lengyel and David Campbell. The first volume published one hundred interviews of women selected from their database of over 200 narratives, while their second report examined the common social issues faced by poor women exiting the welfare system and provided extensive qualitative analysis of their needs. For my purposes, interviews were selected from several regions of the country with a focus on women who were reasonably representative of the group as a whole and who were textually productive.

Since the early 1990s and the growing concern over welfare reform legislation, the authentic voices of welfare receivers have begun to infiltrate scholarship in greater numbers. Therefore, Chapter V begins with a survey of current research about poor women that provides text in the women's own words. This research includes recent publications by Kathryn Edin and Laura Lein, Barbara Ehrenreich, Lynell Handcock, Katherine S. Newman, Valerie Polakow, and Virginia E. Schein. Then, I give a discussion of Foucault's concept of *parrhesia*, or truthful speech, and how it can be extended from the speech of the moral and elite to the discourse of the "other," or poor women, particularly in its definition as confessional expression. Next, I explain concepts from feminist standpoint theory informed by Nancy C. M. Hartsock, Dorothy E. Smith, Sandra Harding, Patricia Hill Collins, Eve Browning Cole, and others that influence my examination of welfare receiver's discourse and how these concepts combined with *parrhesia*, truth and confessional expression, offer a place from which women in poverty begin to resist the system that controls them. I believe that Foucault's concept of

parrhesia, combined with feminist standpoint theory, provides a heuristic to discover and recover the language of poor women as a site of resistance. Feminist standpoint theory allows for combining multiple perspectives from within particular socially constructed groups as a place of resistance to organized systems of power.

Finally, Chapter VI discusses this study's findings and identifies implications for further research in the language of social welfare. This study found the ideologies and rhetorics of care, work, morality, and family continue to permeate the discourse about social welfare receivers from the Elizabethan Poor Laws to the present, infiltrating the discourse of poor women as well. These rhetorics are ubiquitous in the speeches of presidents and in newspaper reporting about welfare reform. Furthermore, the need to identify, separate, and label the worthy poor from the unworthy poor remains entrenched in welfare discourse—this type of labeling discourse is especially evident in the institutions that account for and administer funds to welfare receivers. Although the women interviewed sometimes used the same pejorative labels as the media and social services system to identify errant individuals in their group, most of the time welfare receivers resisted those labels for themselves and their families. Additionally, many women resisted restrictive social welfare rules and regulations when survival of self, friends, or family seemed at stake. Through examination of these discourses, I found group-based experiences became evident in their language and constructed a standpoint from which a site of resistance formed.

The purpose of this investigation is not to perform a genealogy of poverty and social welfare—in fact, some of that ground was covered by Foucault in his research

concerning the histories of madness, the clinic, sexuality, and discipline and punishment. Nor was the purpose of this paper to examine the discursive interchange between social workers and their clients receiving welfare. Neither does this work trace the history of a particular concept associated with social welfare as others have done. However, it does concern itself with the rhetorical changes that accompany the ideological shifts about poverty that occur from the seventeenth century to the present. Moreover, this study offers rhetorical examinations of the language of three separate but interconnected discourses—political speeches, newspaper articles, and welfare receivers’ interviews—which contribute to the creation of popular concepts that construct the image of today’s welfare recipient, both for the public and also for the welfare recipient herself.

The work of social welfare is overwhelmingly complex. This study makes no claim to have comprehensively explored its depths or offer solutions to its numerous problems. Still, I hope to extend the work of others by offering a rhetorical perspective and interpretation of particular artifacts concerning the welfare reform debate during the 1990s as well as by offering an additional platform and perspective from which the voices of women receiving welfare and women in poverty might be heard.

Notes

ⁱ G. Ortes, a Venetian monk of the eighteenth century known for his great economic writings *Della economia nazionale libri sei*, 1777, in *Custodi, Parte moderna*, Vol. 21, pp. 6, 9, 22, 25, according to and quoted by Karl Marx in *Kapital*, p.800, ‘In the economy of a nation, advantages and evils always balance each other: the abundance of wealth with some people is always equal to the lack of wealth with others’ (la copia dei beni in alcuni sempre eguale alla mancanza di essi in altri): ‘The great riches of a small number are always accompanied by the absolute deprivation of the essential necessities of life for many others. The wealth of a nation corresponds with its population, and its misery corresponds with its wealth. Diligence in some compels idleness in others. The poor and idle are a necessary consequence of the rich and active.’ Also Marx notes “Ortes says, op. cit., p.32: ‘Instead of projecting useless systems for achieving the happiness of peoples, I shall limit myself to investigating the reasons for their unhappiness.’”

CHAPTER II

FOUCAULT AND THE RHETORIC OF SOCIAL WELFARE

[Poverty] is an unavoidable evil, to which many are brought from necessity, and in the wise and gracious Providence of God. Reverend Charles Burroughs, 1834.¹

Introduction

Historically, social welfare discourse and particularly the rhetoric of poverty have been inseparable from moral judgments about the inferior character of the poor. This chapter, using a Foucauldian lens, briefly explores social welfare discourse whose ideologies of work, morality, and care have infiltrated discussions of poverty from the Elizabethan Poor Laws to the present discussion about welfare reform. These ideologies rest on shifting ground; sometimes one dominates the discourse, while the others hide in the subtext. At other times, they find themselves in competing discourses, such as those of liberals, conservatives, academics, professionals, the media, and popular culture. Whatever their role, the ideologies of work, morality, and care have remained pervasive in the discourses about social welfare for centuries, and an understanding of their role is necessary to any discussion about the rhetoric of welfare reform.

Foucault extensively studied the origination of concepts that work inside institutions to define the relationships between power, discourse, and self. Some of his research included the examination of the history of clinical practice and the evolution of the concept of madness and reason (*The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* and *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*),

the history of sexuality and how sexual identity was and is constructed and has become an object of study (*The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*), the birth of prison systems and the interrelationship of the legal system, power, and punishment and their influence on self-surveillance and the normalization of the individual (*Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison*), and the examination of European thought in relation to individuals, discourse, and economics from the sixteenth century to modernity, particularly the shift from language as the foundation and source of knowledge to how the study of human beings influences how knowledge is formed (*The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*). In these works, Foucault stresses the importance of historically situating the examination of concepts through a genealogical investigation of its discourse. Foucault believed it was important to identify the disciplines and the state apparatuses through which knowledge of a particular discursive domain was generated, delineated, and perpetuated. To do this, Foucault conducted exhaustive research of textual and other artifacts from the periods he studied, particularly focusing on artifacts that appeared at the very lowest level at which power played out—between those who held authority and the people they controlled.

Review of Foucauldian Scholarship Related to Social Welfare

I will begin this section with a review of Foucauldian scholarship related to social welfare, then address feminist and other philosophical concerns associated with Foucault's rejection of universal principles from the Enlightenment period, specifically the history of reason, the question of eschatological history, and the objectivity of science, and then explain what I believe Foucault contributes to this study. Foucault

devoted much of his scholarship to examining how, during a specific epoch in history, institutionalized ideologies and practices infiltrated discourses and ways of knowing for individuals and groups to such an extent that these ideologies and practices eventually and unquestioningly became part of the fabric of what it meant to be human (Sonja K. Foss, Karen A. Foss, and Robert Trapp 213). Foucault was particularly concerned with uncovering the voices of those who were typically silenced or excluded from the discourses that affected them, which is one reason his work is so relevant today.

In his examinations, Foucault sought to establish the relationship between knowledge and power, especially in how knowledge about human beings becomes translated into possible sites where power could be exercised. By sites of power Foucault meant those circumstances where the institution at its lowest level interacted with those subordinate to it. His explorations reveal themselves in the painstaking detail evident in his histories about clinical medicine, prison systems, and sexuality. He examined how sites of power act on individuals with a focus on the relationship between power and the creation or understanding of self. Foucault's genealogical approach begins in the present by questioning how a particular practice constituted itself and what assumptions had to be in place in order for it to be so. He then begins a meticulous process of retracing the practice's evolution, identifying its impact on (or in the creation of) other disciplines, professions, and practices. In these processes, Foucault searched to find and disclose the voices of those who were silenced by the exercise of particular practices and power. Subsequently, his work has influenced research in a number of disciplines, including rhetoric, medicine, education, criminal justice, political science, and the social sciences.

Understandably, research applying Foucault to the issue of social welfare continues to grow. As early as 1982, Martin Hewitt contributed an important work entitled *Social Policy and the Politics of Life: Foucault's Account of Welfare*. In his analysis, Hewitt compares Foucault's approach to social welfare with Marxist social policy. Hewitt explains that Marx moves the subject of welfare away from the recipient to that of the social and economic systems that control them (17). For Marx, welfare laws and policies are created for the benefit of the policy makers and politicians, not for the recipients (17). According to Hewitt, Foucault "extends this process of decentering" begun by Marx, shifting the study of social welfare from its connection with "structures such as social class, ideological hegemony, social formation and the state," to the question of how these structures are constituted and perpetuated (17). To paraphrase Hewitt, Foucault is concerned with the discursive power relationship between the practitioner and the recipient as well as the manner in which the recipient becomes complicit in his own regulation—the social service system was designed to place the client at the center in an effort to regulate and normalize deviant individuals and to support and perpetuate existing forms of power relations (17-18). Hewitt sees Foucault's contribution as one of resistance—Foucault encourages the "construction of new subjects" through the examination of the rules, regulations, and methodologies used by the system to govern (18).

Also in 1982, Charles C. Lemert and Garth Gillan contributed a critical work, *Michel Foucault: Social Theory as Transgression* examining the problems some scholars experience with his theories and identifying his connection to social theory. They believe

the difficulty many readers find with Foucault occurs because he blends the economic, political, historical, and social using untraditional methods to identify how power and knowledge are constructed. As the authors note, the relationship between power and knowledge informs most of Foucault's writings. Foucault pushes the boundaries of the commonly accepted *a priori* history of human sciences to explore a new epistemological paradigm that privileges the history of discursive systems over seminal historical events, and he searches for new ways to approach thinking about the limits of knowledge (66-70). It is this exploration of "limits" that sets Foucault apart, for he questions the very language that is used to construct history by exploring how the "questions asked by history, philosophy, and politics" constitute and limit the content of history (59). Also, Lemert and Gillan identify the relationship Foucault draws between man and truth, how this relationship changed from the Classical Age's concept that man was defined in relation to truth to modernity's view that "humanity is truth taking shape within itself" (81). Further, they identify Foucault's concerns about sexuality, noting that the body is not just biological, or sexual, but a "discursive body," a sight of political and ideological definition and conflict (82). Subsequently, power relations are inscribed on the body and found in everyday life interactions and individual consciousness, not just in the workings of the state (111).

A specific application of Foucault to social welfare is Mary Jo Klick's master's thesis, *Crutches! Crutches! We All Fall Down: A Foucauldian Approach to Current Discourse on Welfare Reform*. Klick uses Foucault's genealogical approach to identify inconsistencies in the welfare discourse of the mid-1990s in Massachusetts, as the state

implemented policies that emphasized a transition to work. Klick examines some of Foucault's "propositions" concerning power connecting them to welfare discourse in Massachusetts. Further, Klick examines the differences between feminist critiques of Foucault by Nancy C. M. Hartsock and Francis Bartkowski, disagreeing with Hartsock's critique of Foucault's reluctance to define a better system and concurring with Bartkowski's emphasis on the concept of resistance to organizing systems of power. Klick finds resistance occurring more in women's behavior than in their discourse.

A recent collection of essays linking Foucault to social work is found in *Reading Foucault for Social Work*, edited by Adrienne S. Chambon, Allan Irving, and Laura Epstein. The purpose of this collection was to provide those in the field of social work a "set of lenses" constructed from the silica of Foucauldian theory through which they might examine and question the current practices of their discipline. Of particular interest to this study is the chapter by Ken Moffatt entitled "Surveillance and Government of the Welfare Recipient." From comprehensive interviews with social workers working in a specific northern metropolitan area of the United States, Moffatt found that the mechanisms put into place by the social service system to control physical interactions with clients, to guide interrogation of client behaviors, and to construct and identify which clients might be "welfare cheats" contributed to the dehumanization of clients in the welfare office. He also identified how the "technical and functional" language shared by the various institutions cohabiting the social welfare domain ("police, parole officers, and social workers") work together to govern and categorize the client, constructing them as objects of study and discipline (232). One of Foucault's interests

was how those involved in power relations at the lowest point where interactions occurred managed to subvert or resist the imposition of such power. In his research, Moffatt found a number of instances where individual social workers subverted the system to “reconstruct [their] client as human” rather than treat them as a number in the welfare system (243).

Another important contribution to the examination of social welfare discourse using a Foucauldian approach is Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon’s “A Genealogy of *Dependency*: Tracing a Keyword of the U.S. Welfare State,” which examines the ideological implications of the concept of *dependency* and its use to label poor women in the United States. Fraser and Gordon traced the evolution of the term *dependency* from its roots in the Colonial period to its more recent connotations in the 1990s. They found that *dependency*, once a term connoting normalized social relationships of dependence, metamorphosed by the end of the nineteenth century into a complex combination of “analytically distinct registers” which they label as “economic,” “sociolegal,” “political,” and “moral/psychological” discourses (312-31). Their research found that the meaning of *dependency* shifted over time from a simple description of social relations to a complex amalgam of meaning which took on increasingly pejorative connotations and was progressively attributed to marginalized individuals or social groups.

Equally important is Nancy Fraser’s discussion of *needs* in “Talking about Needs: Interpretive Contests as Political Conflicts in Welfare-State Societies.” In her examination of the discourse of *need* in social welfare, she extends Foucault’s method in *Discipline and Punishment* that focused on the role of state apparatuses in the creation of

knowledge discourses which politicize and thereby defined *needs*. Unlike Foucault, Fraser recognizes the role of social movements as a discourse in dialog and even contestation with the administrative and expert apparatuses of governments. Fraser found that social movement discourse contributed to the politicizing of the definition of *need*. Fraser saw expert discourse as a “bridge” discourse between social movements and government administration of social services. As social movement and expert discourses engaged in a dialogic processes, social movement discourse contributed to the “expert redefinitions” of needs—in an effort to provide an “administrable satisfaction,” expert state administration individualized need, creating the discourse of “individual ‘cases,’” depoliticizing the social movement discourse, and rendering the individual into a controllable client (306-7). Social welfare recipients then become “passive” beneficiaries of services “predefined” by experts and government agencies rather than active “agents” involved in defining their own needs and “shaping” the “life conditions” in which they live (307).

Some feminist scholars criticize Foucault’s theories for their lack of agency, their focus on masculine gender, and their failure to provide specific approaches of active resistance to subjugating powers. Jana Sawicki examined these concerns in her analyses of Foucault in “Foucault, Feminism, and Questions of Identity,” “Identity Politics and Sexual Freedom: Foucault and Feminism,” and *Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power, and the Body*. In her analyses, Sawicki describes feminist criticism aimed at Foucault’s rejection of “universal theories of history.” These foundational theories are fundamental to feminist research since many feminists use these theories in attempts to transform

women's epistemic positions in domains that otherwise excluded them (296; Butler; Harding; Haraway; Hartsock). Of particular concern to some feminists are Foucault's questions about the complicity of individuals in their own subjugation (296). As Sawicki examines the feminist positions related to Foucault's work, she emphasizes the importance of the questions his work brings forward for discussion. Sawicki notes Foucault calls the concept of subjectivity into question, resulting in enlightened debate between feminist standpoint theorists and post-humanist feminists.

Feminist standpoint theorists (Nancy C. M. Hartsock, Sandra Harding, Patricia Hill Collins, Dorothy E. Smith) draw on universal histories of economics, science, and politics to uncover, identify, and redefine women as subjects capable of resisting patriarchal systems of domination and definition. Frances Bartkowski questions Foucault's limited treatment of resistance in relation to power, noting that Foucault's definition of power is created and derives its substance through its opposition to resistance (44-45). Resistance is particularly present in the act of confession, yet, as Bartkowski notes, controlling institutional practices work to suppress confessional discourses that actually "shore up" the practices themselves (45). Further, Biddy Martin notes Foucault's warning that when we examine any confessional situation and explore its relationship to Western institutional forms of power, we examine the ways in which truth is produced and the influence of power on its production (13-14). Moreover, as Winifred Woodhull argues, using Foucault's theories concerning sexuality, resistance, and female sexuality "is bound up with economic and political structures, language and philosophy, the world of work and the world of play" (169). Foucault believed that

sexuality was socially constructed and that resistance must begin by a “desexualization” of the categories identifying individuals by their sexuality, such as “woman,” “homosexual,” or “lesbian” (169). Foucault even went so far as to offer that “rape” should be “decriminalized” and turned into a civil offense; he saw this as a form of resistance, identifying rape as a “crime of power, not of sex” (169-170). And, indeed, when women turn to the state for protection from rape, they turn to the very institution that produces the social and cultural ideologies that underlie their vulnerability to the act itself (173).

Like other feminists, Martin acknowledges Foucault’s genealogy of discovery that explicates the inherent interconnectivity of discourse and representation to “subjectivity . . . identity, and . . . sexuality” of women (9). Moreover, like Martin, Donna Haraway and Judith Butler examine Foucault’s concept of the self, not as a constituted subject, but as an on-going project of “self-representations” that are constantly in the “process of signification” within ever-changing, overlapping fields of discourse (qtd. in Sawiki 299). These feminists find in the ambiguity of Foucault’s method a fluidity that allows women the freedom to remain undefined and unlimited by prescriptive principles derived from history, and they recognize that Foucault’s theories provide insight and provoke questions about how power, discourse, and self are interrelated in the governing and subjugation of self and others.

Along with feminists, other scholars of philosophy debate Foucault’s rejection of the Enlightenment principles of reason, humanitarianism, and science. Some of this debate is captured in David Couzens Hoy’s edited volume *Foucault: A Critical Reader*

which includes important discussions from Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor, Richard Rorty, and others. Habermas captures the essence of the critique of Foucault by juxtaposing Kant's philosophy of epistemological history as a continuing and transcendental progression of knowledge *anthropocentrically* focused and supported by science against Foucault's preoccupation with the ideologies that have historically insinuated themselves in "universalistic thought" and discourse since the Enlightenment (106-107). Habermas concludes from Foucault's later work about truth that he was moving towards a return to the philosophical "circle" of discourse concerned with modernity, a discourse which Foucault in much of his earlier work sought to "explode" (108).

Charles Taylor's examination of Foucault found his rejection of the institutional apparatuses that influence how people perceive and define themselves and the world problematic. According to Taylor, Foucault's theoretical approach was incomplete because any form of resistance to the subversively dominating systems that do the controlling is by definition created by the very system it rejects, and is therefore invalid. Further, for Taylor, Foucault's approach left no place for resistance to develop untainted by all that it refused. Though Taylor found that Foucault's research provided "valuable historical insights," he critiqued Foucault's refusal to acknowledge how the system has progressively created opportunities for individuals to collectively take action against oppression (81-2). Taylor discusses Foucault's theoretical connection to Nietzsche and credits Foucault for requiring his readers to examine how Western ideologies participate in the construction of subject/object identities. But, in the end, Taylor questions whether

one really wants to arbitrarily reject the self-reflective epistemology inherent in the Western (Augustinian) tradition (99).

In the same vein, Richard Rorty questions Foucault's genealogical method, exploring whether it is a theory of knowledge or a collection of "negative maxims," which according to Rorty, do not comprise a "theory" or a "method" (47). Rorty provides insight into Foucault's method by examining his break with both "Cartesian epistemology and Hegelian eschatological historiography," noting that many, upon reading Foucault for the first time, mistakenly associate him with Hegelian historicism (44-46). Rorty points to Foucault's rejection of the continuity of Hegel's dialectical determinism; indeed, Foucault creates and interjects a discourse that seeks to rupture the very fabric of historicity (46). This rejection, according to Rorty, is worthy of exploration by philosophers (47-48).

Responding to critiques of Habermas and others, Thomas Flynn, in "Truth and Subjectivation in the Later Foucault" and "Symposiums Papers: Foucault and the Politics of Postmodernity," defends Foucault's method, pointing out that Foucault's intent was not to provide a "prescription" to resist the pervasive, subjugating apparatuses of government and the system that participates in the social construction of the individual, but rather to offer ways to describe and critique that system ("Truth" 188). According to Flynn, Foucault's concern was always focused on the power relationships between those who exercise power and those who submit to it (188). Flynn offers that Habermas rejects Foucault's claims concerning power relationships because Foucault's own theory is based on the very ground that he is arguing against, and therefore, "collapses" on itself

(191). Foucault's relativism is problematic for Habermas, but Flynn argues that Foucault's purpose was not to provide "principles" to be followed and maintained, but a way of seeing and being in the world that was in constant critique of the historical precepts that constructed the current domains of power and knowledge which in turn construct individuals and the social systems in which they live.

Many of the critiques of Foucault's theory point to his rejection of universalizing and foundational themes underlying much of modernity as well as its lack of clarity as a method of resistance. However, like Sawiki and Flynn, I think Foucault's methods ask us to rupture those paradigms in an effort to examine discursive relationships as they are presently being executed in everyday life. As far as his failure to provide a method of resistance, I believe with others that this was a deliberate omission—to do so was not his purpose; his purpose was to question and expose relationships of power and how they functioned through discourse, not to remedy them. That is why I combine Foucault's exploration of truth with the strength of feminist standpoint theory in Chapter V when I seek to identify a ground of resistance in the language of welfare receivers.

Although Foucault cautions one to question the use of confession as a form of resistance, he also in his work concerning *parrhesia* identifies confession as a form of truth telling and possibly a method of self-dialectical enlightenment. Flynn offers Foucault's own work as a kind of *parrhesia*, a truth-seeking-telling method ("Truth"). Throughout this study, I use Foucault's methods as a lens, a sensitivity, and a reminder that today's social welfare discourse lives not only in partnership with the myriad other

discourses and disciplines intersecting and sharing the current noetic field, but also that it lives in the shadow of its own history.

Definitions of the Poor

As mentioned earlier, a web of ideological meaning surrounds the description of someone labeled as *poor*. What is meant when someone is described as *poor*? What is the contemporary meaning of the term *poverty*? Many social scientists report that the terms *poverty* or *poor* have historically encompassed theological, geopolitical, social, cultural, and theoretical interpretations. The contemporary meaning of the word *poor* is divided into a number of definitions: 1) wanting in or lack of material possessions; 2) wanting in amount of capacity; 3) worthy of being pitied; 4) inferior in quality; 5) being in emaciated condition; 6) characterized by unproductiveness; 7) fairly unsatisfactory; or 8) characterized by inefficiency or inability to meet a standard (*Merriam Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, unabridged).

The term *poor* incorporates any number of complexities reflective of its long history, the intricate mythologies surrounding the notion of poverty, and the complex emotions evoked when addressing situations of need. There are over 240 synonyms for the word *poor*, which refer to either those who are in need or describe the quality of a person or object. Some synonyms used to refer to those who are in need include: destitute, poverty-stricken, impoverished, penurious, beggared, pauperized, penniless, indigent, and needy. Interestingly, some synonyms include words that allude to luck or have religious or superstitious connotations, such as out of luck or down on one's luck.

These words imply a mythic or religious reason, possibly beyond the control of the individual, for a person's state of poverty. As further examination will show, the question of culpability weaves in and out of social welfare discourse throughout its history.

Finally, many synonyms traditionally used to describe objects bleed over into the descriptions of poor people—identifying them not only as individuals lacking material possessions but also as persons who are inferior within themselves. This obfuscation of meaning results in the poor seeming to *embody* the quality of poorly made merchandise not just the predicament of poverty, as seen in those synonyms which show a deep contempt for and blaming of those who find themselves in poverty. This rhetoric of blame includes words, such as: base, ignoble, dishonorable, disreputable, discreditable, disgraceful, shameful, contemptible, despicable, execrable, abominable, corrupt, wicked, depraved, perverted, debased, and miscreant. Poor people, then, are identified with terms which carry serious moral judgments, at least in these contemporary definitions, and as we shall see after a brief review of the history of social welfare, it has almost always been so.

Historical Perspectives of Social Welfare Discourse

The following discussion offers a historical perspective of social welfare discourse. Although numerous texts helped to historically situate American social welfare in the 1990s, several important recent works were found to be particularly relevant to this study. Walter I. Trattner's *From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America*, proved critical to gaining a historical perspective, insightful

interpretations, and comprehensive resources concerning the discourse of social work and social welfare. This thorough and well-researched volume discusses the systemic economic sources of poverty and why they create and, indeed, inherently require social welfare. Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward's *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* broadened the discussion of social welfare by exploring how economics and civil control contribute in the making of social policy. Piven and Cloward develop an extended argument about how relief programs have been expanded throughout history to silence civil disorder and then restricted, when necessary, to perpetuate work norms.ⁱⁱ In his work, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, Michael B. Katz examined the shifting focus of social welfare, identified the shifts in categories used to represent the poor, and explored the relationship between poverty and how work has been organized in America since the eighteenth century, delineating the shift from the war on poverty to the war on social welfare itself. Also, Katz, in "'Underclass' as Metaphor" included in the collection of essays he edited in *The Underclass Debate: Views from History*, examined how behavior is privileged over economics in the definition of poor people, especially in the media. Catherine N. Axinn and Mark J. Stern's *Social Welfare: A History of the American Response to Need* was of significant importance to this chapter since it focused on the economic and social forces that have surrounded the issue of social welfare in America since the colonial period. Their inclusion of many primary source texts and their examination of how these texts differ in important ways from the traditional interpretations appearing in social policy discourse were particularly insightful and key to understanding the history of social welfare and its discourse.

Early Christian and Medieval Periods

Comprehension of the current debate on American welfare reform calls for at least a cursory understanding of the ideological beginnings of the notion of aid to the poor. Most historical examinations of America's social welfare system trace its roots back to the Elizabethan Poor Laws of 1601, but in fact its roots can be traced back to the beginning of recorded history. Many sociologists and anthropologists believe that man has always helped others within his family, clan, or community. References to the poor are found in western texts as early as the works of the Babylonians as well as the Greeks and Romans (Trattner). In fact, many scholars point to the often quoted Judeo/Christian reference to the poor found in the Old Testament:

If there is a *poor man* with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your brother, but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall *generously lend* him sufficient for this need in whatever he lacks (emphasis mine). (Deuteronomy 15:7-8)

Western literature, both religious and secular, is full of references, poems, and novels about the poor. Indeed, three of the four gospels of the New Testamentⁱⁱⁱ point to the inexorability of the poor. Charles Dickens, as many other English authors and poets, wrote prolifically about the poor in well-known novels such as *Oliver Twist*, *Bleak House*, and *A Christmas Carol* as did Bernard Shaw in *Pygmalion*; and in American

literature, who describes the condition of poverty more profoundly than John Steinbeck in *Grapes of Wrath*, Toni Morrison in *The Bluest Eye*, Joyce Carol Oates in *Them*, or Victor Villaseñor in *Reign of Gold*? Those in poverty have always captured the hearts and minds of artists and are integrated in the West's theologies, laws, and literatures.

Historically, poor people proved to be a preoccupation of Christians; they were perceived as a vehicle by which the devout might demonstrate their faith through good works and charity. Many social scientists believe the influence of Christian theology on western social welfare systems and discourse could not be over stated (Trattner). So, the concept of the *poor* or *poverty* is often co-located with the idea of *charity* in many texts and laws, and it under girds the idea of the Protestant work ethic, admonishing all able bodied persons to work hard and lead independent lives. This interconnectedness of poverty, charity, and work infiltrates the laws, norms, and discourses of disciplines throughout the western tradition.

Early Hebraic/Christian philosophies differ from twentieth-century social welfare characterizations of the poor. Hebraic and Christian ideas of poverty did not characterize poverty as a crime or address a poor person with scorn; indeed, giving to someone in need, in Trattner's words, was considered "justice" not "charity or mercy," and it was this attitude that informed an individual's "right to assistance" (4). During the medieval period in Europe when times were difficult, the feudal liege lord system protected serfs and field workers, while trade guilds provided for laborers in the cities (4-5). Moreover, the church during the medieval period was "a public institution and the tithe a compulsory tax"; in fact, the church routinely gave one-fourth to one-third of their

contributions to the poor and was considered the key provider of relief to the needy during the medieval period (5).

The Renaissance

During the Renaissance, the state began to assume more responsibility for the poor. There was a decline in agricultural work and an increase in a “money economy” and “factory system” where an individual’s ability to provide for herself became less dependent on her abilities and more dependent on the work or jobs industry made available (Trattner 6-8). Research on the history of labeling the poor shows that the concept of the *worthy* and *unworthy* poor began to emerge at this time, distinguishing between those found too sick or too old to work as *worthy* and those who were able-bodied but unemployed as *unworthy*^{iv} (Gans 14; Katz, *Underclass* 6). The rhetoric of worthiness remains embedded in social welfare discourse from this point forward.

During the fourteenth century, state laws were implemented which condoned “repressive” measures that “immobilize laborers” helping to create a “subservient workforce” and forcing the unemployed to work for any employer who would hire them (Trattner 8). These repressive measures and regulating efforts by employers to force workers to work in any capacity for any wage become a repetitive occurrence and infiltrate the rhetoric of work and poverty (Piven and Cloward). By the sixteenth century in England, the state had taken over responsibility for the poor and implemented compulsory taxes to help pay for a new state position, an “overseer of the poor,” whose job it was to find work for the able-bodied unemployed (Trattner 8-9).

A significant shift in ideology occurs in the early seventeenth century when economics infiltrates social welfare discourse and exerts its power through legal or state rhetoric. In 1601, the government of England determined “that poverty was an economic rather than personal matter” and moved to address the many forms of need resulting from unstable social and economic circumstances (Axinn and Stern 10). The Elizabethan Poor Laws of 1601^v were developed in response to increasing “mercantilism and paternalism” and the possible rebellion of those who were “disenfranchised” from the system (10). Indeed, the Poor Laws of 1601 explicitly state that individual parishes were to monitor “the poor of the same parish” and were responsible “for setting to work the children” and “set[ting] the poor on work” (10). The Poor Laws “firmly established the individual’s right to public assistance” and remained the fundamental reference for treatment of the poor in England and America for decades if not centuries after its adoption (11-12) and, as mentioned earlier, is the starting point for most contemporary histories of social welfare.

Each colony in the new America shouldered the responsibility to create its own laws to provide relief for its needy and poor and did so by borrowing heavily from the English Poor Laws. America also borrowed many labels for the poor from England, including the terms *deserving* and *undeserving* poor, which Gans found in discussions surrounding the 1834 Poor Laws (14). Undoubtedly, the rhetoric of moral judgment crossed the Atlantic and planted itself firmly in the fertile soil of the Puritan settlements.

The Rhode Island colony emphasized the responsibility of the community to support the poor, requesting each town to “maintain the impotent, and to employ the

able” (Gans 14). However, in the early colonial environment of scarcity, the Puritan work ethic helped to create a punitive feeling toward the poor and placed an emphasis on the accumulation of individual wealth and family responsibility (Axinn and Stern 14-18). In other words, acquiring wealth, for the Puritans, was a sign of God’s grace (18; Trattner 16). Although being poor did not “equate with unworthiness,” it did signify “a moral flaw that dare not be pampered,” not only to keep the financial strain on the community at a minimum, but also to avoid adversely affecting the “individual’s state of grace” (18; Trattner 16). Little sympathy was felt for those who could not support themselves as seen in the Puritan rhetoric of Cotton Mather, a leader of great influence who said, “For those who indulge themselves in idleness, the express command of God unto us is, that we should let them starve” (Trattner 22). The rhetoric of morality remains so strongly entrenched in the practice of charity that starvation is considered a legitimate exorcism for the soul of those found to be “unworthy.”

Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

By the eighteenth century, America had developed an economic system that demanded mobile workers; at the same time, local governments felt the need to have more control over benefits for the poor. The boundaries between the rhetoric of work and the rhetoric of poverty blurred when filtered through the words of religious leaders who believed that the poor existed to do the work that a privileged few chose not to perform. The rhetoric of poverty becomes justification for assigning the poor the most miserable of jobs. As Karl Marx notes in his discussion in *Capital* of the English poor laws, no one puts this idea forward quite as poignantly as the Reverend J. Townsend did in 1786:

It seems to be a law of nature that the poor should be to a certain degree improvident that there may always be some to fulfill the most servile, the most sordid, and the most ignoble offices in the community. The stock of human happiness is thereby much increased, whilst the more delicate are not only relieved from drudgery . . . but are left at liberty without interruption to pursue those callings which are suited to their various dispositions.^{vi} (800)

Townsend's discourse attempts to rationalize his ideas about the poor. His first sentence starts with qualifiers, and he uses the mask of genteel language to disguise his convenient conclusion that the poor are put on earth to perform the most distasteful work necessary for society to function.

In the late eighteenth century, discourse about poverty centered on distinctions between public and private relief. As the public Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections proved, the rhetoric of morality and work are enmeshed in discourse about community and public good. Even the title of one speech given at these proceedings clearly demonstrated this connection: "The Economic and Moral Effects of Public Outdoor Relief," while the content of this speech provided further evidence of this connection:

I admit, of course, that there are persons who need relief (that is *help*) in their own homes . . . 'Great care should be taken, in relieving their distresses, not to throw them into the great class of vagrant and homeless poor.' Such people, however, are, to my mind, not proper subjects for public relief at all; for what is public

relief, and upon what grounds is it to be justified? Public relief is money paid by the bulk of the community (every community is of course composed mainly of those who are working hard to obtain a livelihood) to certain members of the community . . . by public officers from money raised by taxation. The only justification for the expenditure of public money (money raised by taxation) is that it is necessary for the public good. (Mrs. Charles Russell Lowell qtd. in Axinn and Stern^{vii})

The rhetoric of work infuses this text with terms, such as “expenditure,” “taxation,” “money,” and “livelihood,” while the rhetoric of care appears in terms about “care,” “distresses,” and “help.” This eighteenth-century classificatory discourse shows a preoccupation with separating the worthy from the unworthy poor as the speaker emphasized the need to keep “persons who need relief” separated from the “great class of vagrant and homeless poor.”

Key to the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century poor relief efforts was the idea of reforming the individual. This shift occurs, according to Foucault, between the Enlightenment period and modernity. Foucault, in *The Order of Things*, explains this shift as the transformation of man as the “object” of study from a category under the heading “nature” to man as a knowing being—as both object and subject. Part of the systemic reformation was the need to identify and name those characteristics that needed to be changed. A “nineteenth-century classificatory scheme” answered that need by categorizing the undeserving poor into a “trichotomy” of labels: “defective, dependent, and delinquent” (Gans 15). These labels identified cultural, moral, biological, or criminal

behaviors and were used in any combination to describe and classify the poor (15).

Reform efforts of Andrew Jackson's presidency focused on the individual, and produced movements such as "suffrage, temperance, more effective poor relief . . . rehabilitation of criminals," and especially free public education, indicative of the kinds of individual reform thought to be the panacea for poverty (Axinn and Stern 46).

Women's voices were particularly strong in the reform arena from the 1820s to 1860s, especially in the areas of "temperance, suffrage, and the abolition of slavery" (Axinn and Stern 47). Women highlighted their growing concern about the progressive connection between "drinking to unemployment to pauperism" and the abysmal lack of employment for women, which forced them to stay in the home or, in some instances, resort to street-walking (47). For many reformers such as the Quakers, Transcendentalists, free blacks, activist women, and others, this period marked a general belief that one should help others to fulfill one's unique potential and thereby maximally benefit society (47-9).

In the eighteenth century the idea that poverty might be a result of a malfunction in the economic system grows stronger. Economic discourse challenged the idea that poverty was the result of individual moral flaws, such as "ignorance, idleness, intemperance, and imprudence (especially to marry)" (Axinn and Stern 52-4). This charge was serious, for if the economic system was to blame, then the state needed to assume more responsibility for the unemployed, and subsequently, those in poverty (52). Thomas Paine (1792) and Mathew Carey (1833) argued that the mechanization of skilled work resulted in the reduction of available jobs and labor wages, thereby creating

conditions of unemployment and poverty (53). Their voices did not improve the benefits allotted for the poor, although they did help prevent the removal of the poor laws altogether, which were at risk of being eliminated (53).

The rhetoric of economics and work infiltrated the discourse of social organizations. The professionalization of social work began after the Civil War and expanded during the Progressive Era and resulted in the formation of organizations such as Charitable Organizations and Settlement Houses. Charitable Organizations began keeping records of their poor recipients during the nineteenth century, and from their findings began to develop an understanding of how social and economic conditions could influence a family's ability to support itself (Trattner 100-2). Subsequently, the disciplines of economics, social work, and faith-based charity found their discourses intersecting around the rhetoric of poverty and social welfare.

Twentieth-Century Perspective

The twentieth century experienced more dramatic changes in social welfare policy than any other century. The rhetoric of work and morality pervaded the debate and discussion surrounding social welfare policy. During the National Conference of Charities and Corrections (NCCC) in 1910, much discussion was held about whether mothers, if given pensions, should be required to work outside the home and how much their contribution should be:

The granting of this aid [mother's pensions] was intended to meet the needs of the budget. . . . In theory this was a clearly established policy . . . but in practice . . . in many of the states the mother is expected to earn a very large share of the

budget and much more than it is best that she should earn in view of her own needs and those of her children. (Emma O. Lundberg and C. C. Carstens qtd. in Axinn and Stern 144)

The rhetorics of economics and work infiltrate this discourse with terms, such as “budget,” “policy,” “practice,” “earn,” and “share,” and overtly competes with the rhetoric of care: “the mother is expected to earn . . . much more than it is best that she should earn in view of her own needs and those of her children.” The co-mingling of the rhetorics of economics and care changed very little between Mrs. Lowell’s remarks in the late eighteenth century and the discourse of Lundberg and Carstens’ in the early twentieth century.

By 1911, a number of states passed the first mother’s pension laws, which meant now states were taking responsibility for aiding mothers and their dependent children with public funds. States remained the primary givers of aid to the poor until the 1930s and the Great Depression when the federal government, facing a national crisis, began developing programs to help the unemployed and poor. During 1923-1924, the Children’s Bureau conducted a study finding that families receiving pensions were “on a par with . . . self-supporting families.”^{viii} Reports during this period also found that mothers were providing a significant amount towards their own support, but at a high cost in health and well-being for themselves and their families (Axinn and Stern 45). Importantly, the reports from the Children’s Bureau found, through testimony from their executives and case workers, that “aid did not tend to develop a spirit of dependency but on the contrary developed self-confidence, initiative, and generally a desire for economic

independence at as early a date as possible.”^{ix} Women who were helped worked hard to help themselves and wanted to end their dependency as soon as possible. In the twentieth century, the ideologies of dependency and cycles of dependency began to find currency in social welfare discourse as family behaviors became more and more the subject of study by social work professionals.

Indeed, state discourse supported the concept and categorization of dependency through the lexicon of the numerous branches of government, such as the Census Bureau, the Internal Revenue Service, and the Departments of Health and Human Services and Labor (Fraser and Gordon 320). The category of dependency before the twentieth century was a neutral description of those individuals who were not earning wages (320). After the twentieth century, two categories of dependency emerged, one associated with dependent “children and wives” and the other, more pejorative connotation, identified with those receiving “public assistance” (320). Both of these categories found themselves represented in government discourse that accounted for women and children as dependents of their husbands or dependents of the state.

As a number of social welfare studies have noted, the plight of minorities was significantly worse than that of whites, since aid given during the first part of the twentieth century tended to ignore them. In response to their needs, in 1910 both the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the National Urban League were created and worked to advocate for the social welfare needs of unemployed and underemployed blacks. Racist rhetoric began to permeate the discourse associated with black social welfare issues and reaches its apogee in the 1960s as greater

numbers of black families applied and received welfare subsidies under the Great Society programs of President Lyndon B. Johnson.

In the early twentieth century, corporations, government offices, and social institutions created managerial and supervisory hierarchies and developed new terminologies to describe their structures and their work. In the social sciences, new terms such as “scientific philanthropy” emerge to describe the formalization of methodologies for studying poverty (Axinn and Stern 151). New procedures and techniques were identified and codified such as those developed by Mary Richmond in *Social Diagnosis* (1917) and *What is Social Work* (1922) for social workers who conduct “individual investigations of families” and for the use of casework, influenced by Freud, as a “therapeutic model of professional service” (151).

The Great Depression devastated the hopes and lives of families from across the nation during the 1930s and resulted in the creation of New Deal programs and new ways of discoursing about poverty. In October 1933, the Relief Census^x found “3 million families, consisting of more than 12.5 million persons (about 10 percent of the population)” living on unemployment benefits (Axinn and Stern 169). The idea that a malfunctioning economic system could be the cause of poverty and not the inferiority of the workers began to surface again. For the first time the federal government assumed significant responsibility for the unemployed, although administration of welfare monies was still controlled by the state. During the 1930s, President Roosevelt’s New Deal programs reorganized government to meet the country’s economic crisis and to alleviate unemployment and provide relief to the poor including the Social Security Act, which

provided benefits to older women, widows, and dependents. Roosevelt's First Inaugural Address contributed to the rhetoric of work, hope, and unity as well as of the "American spirit of the pioneer" and "the good neighbor" (Kinneavy 230).

Moreover, an important shift in social welfare terminology occurred during this period. As the proceedings from the National Conference of Social Work shows, social work discourse moved from addressing political and social change to focus on social work "methodology," "agency administration," and professional "education" (Axinn and Stern 201). At the same time, the federal government created emergency relief agencies with rules and regulations developed to oversee the administration of monies to the poor and unemployed. Legal discourse surrounded the administration of funds, the categorization of qualified and unqualified individuals, and the projects developed to assist in work relief.

It is important to note that the discussion moved away from whether or not widows should receive support, to the way in which public funds should be monitored by professional social workers (Axinn and Stern 154). The discourse became as much about the professional behavior of social workers as it was about the deviant behavior of the poor. But the longstanding rhetoric of morality remained in place, only now it was codified and legitimated in the language of social science. As Foucault argues in *Archeology of Knowledge*, it is in the rules, observations, and institutional practices that make possible the perceptions that infiltrate the discourse of particular practices. Therefore, at this time, the sixteenth-century discourse of "morality visits," once performed by the clergy, now becomes the twentieth-century social science discourse of

caseworkers (Piven and Cloward 128). In the 1930s, state welfare laws enabled “fornication” charges to be brought against “mothers of illegitimate children” (128). At the same time, there was a renewal of the feelings associated with the “rich helping the poor” and the idea of “individual and family responsibility” (154). The rhetoric of morality, family, and social obligation continues to find itself coexisting between the professional institutions of social work, the economic elite, and the family.

Minor children were supported by mother’s pensions from the Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) program, whose primary mission was a “defensive measure for children”:

They are designed to release from the wage-earning role the person whose natural function is to give her children the physical and affectionate guardianship necessary not alone to keep them from falling into social misfortune, but more affirmatively to rear them into citizens capable of contributing to society.^{xi} (qtd. in Axinn and Stern)

The single mother’s most important function was to provide “physical and affectionate guardianship” while turning her children into competent “citizens.” The subtext here is that single mothers were willing and capable of performing these tasks. Later, in the twentieth century, as the face of the single mother acquired a different race and ethnicity, her willingness and capabilities are called into question. At the time of the Great Depression, however, the personalization of poverty and unemployment spread like a blanket over the country as neighbors saw the overwhelming need of families in their own communities. In the words of Harry Hopkins:

We are now dealing with people of all classes. It is no longer a matter of unemployables and chronic dependents, but of your friends and mine who are involved in this. Everyone of us knows some family of our friends which is or should be getting relief.^{xii} (qtd. in Axinn and Stern 187)

The rhetoric of work and poverty became a universal, yet personal discourse, including terms such as, “people of all classes,” “your friends and mine,” “[e]veryone of us,” and “our friends.” Almost everyone appeared worthy in the overwhelming discourse of need. Relief controlled by the federal government focused on the creation of jobs and employment programs, but responsibility for relief for the “unemployable” remained the responsibility of state agencies. Private agencies no longer were allowed to distribute public relief funds. Social insurance was designed to provide for the unemployed and those in old age, based both on prior individual contribution and on need, and eventually included survivor benefits, as the Social Security Act of the 74th Congress clearly states:

To provide for the general welfare by establishing a system of Federal old-age benefits, and by enabling the several States to make more adequate provision for aged persons, blind persons, dependent and crippled children, maternal and child welfare, public health, and the administration of their unemployment compensation laws; to establish a Social Security Board; to raise revenue; and for other purposes. (Pub. L. 271—74th Congress, II.R. 7260, qtd. in Axinn and Stern 208)

The depression changed the way the public thought about poverty and social welfare. It moved the discourse away from individual responsibility for work to a more

depersonalized public view, recognizing the responsibility of the state to the individual who was often the innocent victim of the economic system.

Following the Great Depression, the period from 1940 to 1970 was one of dramatic economic change for families, which saw increased earnings and savings and an expanding disposable income. In 1960, 22.4 percent of the population was categorized as poor, nearly 40 million people (Axinn and Stern 221). In 1970, 12.6 percent of the population was categorized as poor, a drop to 25.4 million people; blacks were three times more likely to be poor as whites^{xiii} (222). Poverty rates fell between 1960 and 1970 as wives and mothers entered the workforce, even though by the end of the 1960s women were earning little more than half the wages received by their male counter parts (222).

Social welfare discourse revolved around the family during the 1960s and appeared in some of the new legislation of the period. For example, according to the 1965 (Hart-Celler) Immigration Act, immigration rules shifted from “[r]ace, national origin, and ancestry quotas” to an emphasis on “family relationship, occupation, and skill”; while in 1946, the War Brides Act “eased entry of wives, husbands, and children of servicemen and women” into this country (Axinn and Stern 224).

World War II gave women and minorities opportunities for work and set the stage for the civil rights and feminist movements that would come later in the 1960s (Axinn and Stern 228). After World War II, the economy flourished and women continued to seek work with thirteen percent of wives working outside the home (234). Although many enjoyed prosperity after the war, welfare legislation of the period reflects the growing need for assistance, including the National School Lunch Program (1946), the

Housing Act of 1949, and the Milk Program (1954), to name a few (235). In the 1940s social welfare programs became more liberal and recipients increased across a number of categories, especially the aged, disabled, and mothers with dependent children (235-236).

Dramatic population and demographic changes occurred during the 1940s and 1950s including higher birth rates and longer life expectancies. Additionally, many large cities found themselves with large minority populations as the white populations moved to the suburbs. As families became more mobile, divorce rates increased to more than double (“from 2.0 to 4.3 per 1,000 of population”^{xiv}), and the number of illegitimate births nearly doubled (“1940-1950, the number of illegitimate births per 1,000 unmarried women, 15-44 years of age, increased from 3.6 to 6.1 for white women and from 35.6 to 71.2 for nonwhite women”^{xv}) (Axinn and Stern 226). This period also saw a growing number of youths leaving school and taking industry jobs during the war years, with J. Edgar Hoover “report[ing] ‘an alarming’ increase in juvenile delinquency”^{xvi} (226). Mobility became a way of life for Americans, and with this new trend came new social problems providing new challenges for social welfare. As the public became aware of an ever-expanding number of working poor and the increasing rolls of the Aid to Dependent Children program, the social welfare problem became increasingly “identified as a ‘black program’” (227). At the same time, because the economy was strong and many were working, the public renewed its belief in the ideologies of work, individual responsibility, and opportunity.

In 1950, families on welfare began receiving medical benefits and a “caretaker provision” was added to ADC providing federal funds “to support the parent of a

dependent child” (235). Not only were welfare roles expanding, but the welfare recipient’s face continued to change from that of a “worthy, responsible” older person or [white] widowed mother with dependent children to one of an “unworthy,” “young,” “able-bodied,” “unemployed” “unmarried” “urban,” “black,” “female” with illegitimate babies (237). The rhetoric of social welfare begins a pejorative downward cycle. Although it maintains its discourse about work, morality, and family, the categories of undeserving broaden to incorporate and focus on race, ethnicity, location, and legitimacy.

As a remedy to growing social welfare budgets and concern about recipient legitimacy, the federal government shifted responsibility to the states. Now, the discourse of social service oversight and management to legitimate expenditures infiltrates social welfare discourse. In *The Birth of the Clinic*, *Discipline and Punishment* and *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault identifies the origins of the professional “gaze,” as it was carried out by medical doctors, the prison guards, and psychologists in the nineteenth century. This gaze is based on Jeremy Betham’s *Panopticon*, in which he recommends a circular architectural structure for housing and monitoring the behavior of the incarcerated. He places an observer in a tower in the center of a circular building that allows the observer in the tower to at all times observe those who are imprisoned in cells occupying the space surrounding the tower. In this way, whether the person incarcerated was a criminal, a madman, or some other subject needing surveillance, they were always available to be observed and studied by the observer. Nothing was beyond the view of the observer as they scrutinized their objects of study exerting their power to control and punish the subjects of their inquiry. The pinnacle of this paradigm was reached whenever

the subject of study developed their own habits of self-surveillance—in other words, when they behaved as if they were being watched at all times because they never knew when they were under direct observation. As the federal government shifted more responsibility to the states, states expanded their own apparatuses to gaze at the poor through the implementation of institutionalized welfare rules and case management. States developed new procedures and conducted “investigations” into the living arrangements of women on welfare, searching for evidence of a “man-in-the-house” to determine if a home was “suitable” (Axinn and Stern 236-237). Although many have noted that the increase of welfare recipients can be explained by normal factors such as population growth and changes in the categories of benefit authorizations, the public image of the welfare recipient continued to deteriorate and, subsequently, support for welfare programs diminished.

Many social scientists believe the 1950s was a pivotal moment in how social welfare was perceived by the public. Kenneth Galbraith asserted in 1958 that there were “two types of poverty: ‘insular’ and ‘case’” (qtd. in Axinn and Stern 237). Insular poverty, according to Galbraith, was the result of economic system failures resulting in unemployment, usually connected to a specific region of the country; while case poverty was the result of “*personal deficiency*, such as ill health, lack of education, or even racial or sexual discrimination” [emphasis mine] (237). By 1959 and in an effort to define the welfare recipient more clearly, the government began gathering statistical information about individuals and groups in poverty, establishing a poverty index (237). The professional gaze (qualitative) would now be supported by categorical information

(quantitative) turning welfare recipients into definable objects of study by the various institutional apparatuses that supported them.

During the 1960s, the rhetoric of work for mothers receiving aid began to escalate. The government shifted their emphasis from cash assistance to providing social services, education, and rehabilitation programs. Social service discourse continued to place a heavy emphasis on the family, but also sought to uncover fraud, find absent fathers, analyze the role of “dependency,” and identify individual human failings that might cause poverty. President John F. Kennedy’s programs very much resembled past programs as he suggested that states combine the worthy poor, the “aged, blind, and disabled,” to simplify administration, while leaving women with children, who were potential workers, in a separate category (Axinn and Stern 242). This change meant that women capable of working were potentially *unworthy* of government support. Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) was changed to Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) through the implementation of Public Law 87-543, signed by Kennedy July 25, 1962 (242). Though Kennedy was concerned about the “least fortunate citizens” and the “humanitarian side of freedom,” his discourse contains the categorical language of earlier times:

But the times, the conditions, the problems have changed—and the nature and objectives of our public assistance and child welfare programs must be changed, also, if they are to meet our current needs. . . . The pattern of our population has changed. There are more older people, more children, more young marriages,

divorces, desertions, and separations. ("Public Welfare," February 1, 1962, H.

Doc. No. 325 qtd. in Axinn and Stern)

Kennedy's speech reflected the growing discourse about the changing demographics of poverty. It is a subtle discourse about changing family values, disintegrating marriages, and the perception of growing minority populations developing patterns of behavior that needed to be addressed.

During the Johnson presidency over one million families and nearly four million people were on the welfare rolls (Axinn and Stern 244). President Johnson declared a war on poverty and with the Economic Opportunity Act implemented programs for youth, such as the Job Corp; programs for the rural poor, such as the Area Redevelopment Act; programs for AFDC parents through "Family Unity Through Jobs"; and rehabilitation of slums through the work of adult volunteers in "Volunteers in Service to America" (VISTA); as well as programs for early childhood development and drop outs such as Head Start and Upward Bound (245). The underlying theme of all these programs was that "work and jobs . . . strengthen family life" (246). Though the pithy sayings about poverty changed, social welfare discourse remained the same containing an emphasis on work, family, and moral obligation.

By the end of the 1960s, the discourse about single mothers staying home to offer guidance and affection to their children while preparing them to become good and faithful citizens was no longer in vogue. The rhetoric of welfare discourse was moving more strongly now to name and blame particular categories of welfare receivers.

Although, by all accounts, it still contained the language of work, responsibility,

morality, and family—it began incorporating pejorative discourse, only thinly disguising racism, sexism, and elitism. Racist language in particular was humiliating and pejorative as noted in Henry Louis Gates Jr.’s well-known essay, “What’s in a Name?” where he begins by quoting Trey Ellis:

. . . blood, darky, Tar Baby, Kaffir, shine . . . moor, blackamoor, Jim Crow, spook
. . . quadroon, meriney, red bone, high yellow . . . Mammy, porch monkey, home,
homeboy, George . . . spearchucker, schwarze, Leroy, Smokey . . . mouli, buck.
Ethiopian, brother, sistah. . . (qtd. in Mercer 1)

African Americans were labeled with words depicting animals, slothfulness, and stupidity. Gates offers the terms “jigaboo” and “nigger” as words his parents used in anger or disgust (1). These terms operated to dehumanize individuals by equating darkness of skin to inferiority. Indeed, bell hooks identifies in her numerous works how “blackness” is used in a white supremacist society as a “sign” of “hatred and fear” (*Black Looks* 10, *Killing Rage, Talking Back*; Abramovitz 62-63; Gans 28-31; Wodak and Reisigl). The body, marked by its color, signifies a multitude of meanings, including poverty, crime, and immorality:

From the mummies, jezebels, and breeder women of slavery to the smiling Aunt Jemimas on pancake mix boxes, ubiquitous Black prostitutes, and ever-present welfare mothers of contemporary popular culture, negative stereotypes applied to African-American women have been fundamental to Black women’s oppression. (Collins 5).

These kinds of characterizations evoke emotional responses from the public as the sign of blackness infiltrates the language of social welfare, and the image of the welfare receiver begins to wear a darker face.^{xvii} The Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968 did not eliminate the language of racism, although they did make discrimination in workplaces, housing, and voting booths against the law.

Axinn and Stern make an important distinction between the Johnson, Nixon, and Ford administrations. In 1968, Johnson formed a commission to review the Income Maintenance Programs. They found:

It is often argued that the poor are to blame for their own circumstances and should be expected to lift themselves from poverty. The Commission has concluded that these are incorrect. Our economic and social structure virtually guarantees poverty for millions of Americans. Unemployment and underemployment are basic facts of American life. The risks of poverty are common to millions more who depend on earnings for their income . . . The simple fact is that most of the poor remain poor because access to income through work is currently beyond their reach.^{xviii}

The rhetoric of blame was mitigated by the commission's findings. Not only was the commission's report ignored by the Nixon administration, but also President Ford's legislative priorities failed to even mention welfare reform (286).

The Welfare Administration and Bureau of Family Services, established in 1962, was abolished and a new agency called Social and Rehabilitation Services (SRS) was

created in 1967 (250). The name change exemplifies the shift in discourse from language related to family to language related to rehabilitation—this discourse uses the metaphor of poverty as social and individual disease requiring therapy.

Also during this period, poor women banded together to create the National Welfare Rights Organization whose purpose was to reform the welfare system to provide a guaranteed income based on need not worthiness. NWRO began work in 1966, but because of disputes from within as well as conflict from without, including politicians and administrative officials, the group disbanded by 1975 (West).

The Reagan and Bush administrations worked to decrease the involvement of government in economic and social affairs. With the concern for “supply-side” economics, “interest rates,” “budget stability,” and “tax cuts,” the rhetoric of economics, investment, and capital elided the language of poverty. As unemployment reached eleven percent in 1982, the government faced the dilemma of trying to lower unemployment while at the same time controlling inflation:

How could government commit itself both to “full employment” and to using unemployment to fight inflation? Economists had provided an answer with one acronym: NAIRU. The “nonaccelerating-inflation rate of unemployment” was defined as the lowest unemployment rate that was consistent with low inflation. This rate—which was estimated at around 6 percent during the 1980s—was redefined as the “natural” rate of full employment. Thus, for more than a decade, government policy defined a

stagnant economy with more than 6 million unemployed workers as full employment. (Axinn and Stern 272)

Economic rhetoric proliferates during the Reagan administration with economics as their top priority. During this time of high inflation, many high-wage industrial jobs were lost, replaced by lower-wage service industry jobs. The loss of high-paying industrial jobs left many workers seeking employment in the new service industry, where jobs were typically “involuntarily temporary” and the pay was significantly lower and where most of the workers were women and minorities (272). At the same time, economic studies show that “[t]he number of billionaires quadrupled during the 1980s; [while] the number of people below the poverty line increased by 35 percent” (270).

As social welfare rights and benefits expanded for the aging and the disabled, social benefits for the poor became more restrictive and punitive resulting in a 32 percent increase in the poverty rate from 1970 to 1990, meaning 33.6 million people fell below the poverty line (274-77). Visual evidence of this expansion presented itself in numerous ways in most major cities, such as a growing homeless population sleeping on the streets, increasing number of single parent households, and expanding youth delinquency and violence (274-77).

The rhetoric of control dominated the social welfare discourse of the 1980s. Rules, regulations, requirements, and sanctions took priority over the language of need. In 1988, the Family Support Act was passed, requiring recipients with children as young as three to get a job, attend a job-training program, or enroll in school (Axinn and Stern 281). If the state felt the recipient was not following their “behavioral rules,” the

recipient was “sanctioned” and lost part or all of her grant (281). The Family Support Act also included paternity and child support requirements. And, through the Jobs Opportunity and Basic Skills (JOBS) program, it provided new funding for work skills training and education, with states providing “transitional childcare, transportation, and health care benefits” (288). There was great hope for this work-oriented, comprehensive approach to welfare reform, but because of the 1980s recession, states found they could not comply with their portion of matching funds (e.g. transportation, childcare, and healthcare) (288). As a consequence, social welfare discourse changed once again, this time from a focus on enabling people to work and providing training opportunities to reducing welfare rolls and cutting budget funds.

The 1990s saw serious changes in social welfare legislation for the poor. Discussion about social welfare often inflated the size and cost of the program and permeated the debate with highly-charged concepts, such as “cycle of dependency” taken from various popular publications about families and poverty by recognized authorities including David T. Ellwood and Daniel P. Moynihan. Many thought welfare recipients were caught in an endless cycle of poverty, which became one of the key concepts driving the welfare debate in the early 1990s. In actuality, most welfare recipients received benefits for less than two years and only a small minority remained on welfare roles for more than eight years (316). The federal government spent less than 2 percent of its overall budget on welfare while the states spent 20 percent of their budgets on AFDC and Medicaid (316), so it is no surprise to see states driving welfare changes in their discourse. One way states impacted federal programs was by refusing to participate

in federal programs for the poor that required matching state funds. Often federal program monies went unused because states failed to match funds for job training (Axinn and Stern 317).

Also, in the 1990s other dynamics contributed to a significant change in welfare legislation. The New Right tied morality to welfare reform and found strength in numbers when Republicans began controlling the House and Senate with Newt Gingrich leading the charge and pushing the *Republican Contract with America* (1994). Nowhere was the discourse more coercive than in the rhetoric of change and control that permeated the ultra-conservative agenda. For example, the first three bills of the ten bills they promised to bring to the floor included the following language:

1) . . . [T]o restore fiscal responsibility to an out-of-control Congress . . . 2) . . . to fund prison construction and additional law enforcement to keep people secure in their neighborhoods and kids safe in their schools . . . [and to] 3) . . . discourage illegitimacy and teen pregnancy by prohibiting welfare to minor mothers and denying increased AFDS for additional children while on welfare . . .

Their language was formidable and infused with punitive terms that acknowledged their newly won power and control, such as “constraints,” “exclusionary,” “denying,” “enforcement,” “penalty,” “repeal,” “mandate,” and “tough.” They passed eight of their ten proposed bills within their first year. However, Clinton surprised the Republicans when he responded to this language by co-opting parts of it and using it in his speeches about welfare reform, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) H.R. 3734 in 1996, ending welfare entitlements, replacing AFDC with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), which placed time limits on benefits, and restricted eligibility for welfare funds. This act's name and language was infused with the ideologies of individual responsibility, family, and social control (much of which came from the *Republican Contract with America*). For example, the beginning statement in the Findings of the section on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families states:

Title I – Block Grants for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

Sec. 101. Findings.

The Congress makes the following findings:

- (1) Marriage is the foundation of a successful society.
- (2) Marriage is an essential institution of a successful society which promotes the interests of children.
- (3) Promotion of responsible fatherhood and motherhood is integral to successful child rearing and the well-being of children. . . .

This legal discourse clearly aligns the rhetoric of poverty with the rhetoric of control, especially control of the American family's composition. Additionally, it defines who would now be considered the worthy poor—"legitimate" mothers and children.

This new legislation meant block grants of funding would be allocated to the states. Overall, the rhetoric of work began to permeate social work discourse through terms, such as "work first" and "workfare." States focused on placing employable

welfare recipients into jobs, any jobs. Social workers and other workforce development personnel found that placing former welfare receivers into jobs was easier than keeping them in jobs. Many of the jobs paid such low wages that mothers found themselves still in poverty without the benefits of healthcare and childcare subsidies. Indeed, Piven and Cloward cited a number of studies that proved “workfare” did not work in the majority of cases, primarily because recipients did not end up in full-time year-round jobs that paid a living wage^{xix} (387-395).

Implications for This Study

The rhetoric of moral judgment pervades early welfare discourse connecting economic status to moral behavior and attributes, a practice that finds its apogee in the 1994 *Republican Contract with America* and finally its culmination in the 1996 welfare reform legislation. How and why Clinton signed PRWORA will be discussed in the next chapter. What is important to note here, however, is how the language of welfare reform creates, what Foucault calls, a discursive formation. It is a language that repeats and reproduces itself across centuries. It is self constituting as well as socially constructed by numerous disciplines, including religious, political, cultural, social, academic, scientific, and racial institutions. As I have shown, the language of welfare reform moved into the 1990s incorporating the discourse of previous centuries: the rhetoric of morality, of family, of work and individual responsibility, of economics, of science, and of academia. During this process, welfare discourse picks up the additional, more pejorative language of racism and sexism—a byproduct and a repercussion of what many social scholars believe to be a conservative backlash against civil rights and feminism of the 1960s and

1970s. The following chapters will explore how this expanded discourse of welfare reform is reflected in presidential speeches, newspaper stories, and women's narratives during the 1990s.

Notes

ⁱ Charles Burroughs, "A Discourse Delivered in the Chapel of the New Alms-House, in Portsmouth, N.H. . . ." (Portsmouth, N.H.: J. W. Foster, 1835), p. 9 as quoted and cited by Michael B. Katz, "Underclass as Metaphor," in *The Underclass Debate: Views from History*, Ed. Katz, Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993, p. 6.

ⁱⁱ Trattner includes Piven and Cloward in his discussions and includes an extensive footnote acknowledging those who differ with Piven and Cloward's conclusions (see Trattner p. 315-16 discussion and p.315, footnote 6). Piven and Cloward believe the U.S. government loosened the strings to welfare money in response to public demonstrations and in an effort to control public responses to need. Others differ with this assessment and attribute high divorce rates, elimination of the "stigma" of welfare, and less restrictive rules as some of the factors that helped increase the welfare roles. For extended criticism of *Regulating the Poor*, Trattner recommends, Eugene Durman, "Have the Poor Been Regulated? Toward a Multivariate Understanding of Welfare Growth," *Social Service Review* 47 (September 1973): 339-59; and Frances F. Piven and Richard A. Cloward, "Reaffirming the Regulation of the Poor," *Ibid.* 48 (June 1974): 147-69; also Walter I. Trattner, ed., *Social Welfare or Social Control?* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983): 152-57.

ⁱⁱⁱ Mathew 26:11, Mark 14:7, and John 12:8.

^{iv} See Gan's first chapter, "Ways of Labeling the Poor: A Historical Survey," in his *War Against the Poor: The Underclass and Anti-Poverty Policy*, (1995): 11-26.

^v According to Trattner's footnotes: "Although the 1601 Act is the most famous and is thought of as the most important poor law, it was in fact anticlimactic. In 1597 and 1598, a comprehensive poor law was enacted which brought together all the previous legislation on the matter. . . . As Karl de Schweinitz has pointed out, the 1601 statute has been considered a landmark in the relief of economic distress largely because it was the last rewriting of the total law" (10, footnote 5).

^{vi} *A Dissertation on the Poor Laws. By a Well-Wisher of Mankind*, 1786, republished in London, 1817, pp 15, 39, 41. (qtd. in Marx, *Capital* 800)

^{vii} Full text qtd. in Axinn and Sterns, 114-16.

^{viii} U.S. Department of Labor, Children's Bureau, *Administration of Mother's Aid in Ten Localities*, prepared by Mary R. Bogue in Children's Bureau Publication No. 184 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1928), 4, qtd. in Axinn and Sterns, 165.

^{ix} Mary F. Bogue, *Administration of Mother's Aid in Ten Localities: With Special Reference to Health, Housing, Education and Recreation*, Children's Bureau Publication No. 184 (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1928), p.5.

^x Study conducted by the Federal Emergency Relief Administration during 1933.

^{xi} *The Report of the Committee on Economic Security* (Washington, D.C.: January 15, 1935), 36.

^{xii} Harry L. Hopkins, "The Developing National Program of Relief," *Proceedings: NCSW*, 1933, p.68.

^{xiii} U.S. Bureau of Census, *Current Population Reports*, Series P 60, No.77, May 7, 1971; as noted in Axinn & Stern, p.266.

^{xiv} *Vital Statistics of the United States*. annual; qtd. in Axinn and Stern, p.266.

^{xv} *Statistical Abstract: 1973*, op. cit., p.54, Data from U.S. National Center for Health Statistics, qtd. in Axinn and Stern, p.266.

^{xvi} Nathan E. Cohen, *Social Work in the American Tradition* (New York: Dryden Press, 1958), 226; qtd. in Axinn and Stern, 266.

^{xvii} For a discussion of race and welfare see Martin Gilen's *Why Americans Hate Welfare*. For a comprehensive examination of racial discourse and its history see Ruth Wodak and Martin Reisigl's "Discourse on Racism" in the *Handbook of Discourse Analysis* and Teun A. van Dijk's numerous works on the subject, including "Critical Discourse Analysis," *Elite Discourse and Racism*, "Discourse and Racism," and *Political Discourse and Racism*.

^{xviii} United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare. *Poverty Amid Plenty: The American Paradox*, report of the President's Commission on Income Maintenance Programs, November 1969; qtd. in Axinn and Stern, 305.

^{xix} Piven and Cloward have a chapter on "Workfare Failures" (pp.387-395) and cite studies and surveys by groups such as the federal Bureau of Family Services (1962), Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Block and Noakes, the Brookings Institution, Schwarz and Volgy, Jencks and Edin.

CHAPTER III

ROGERIAN ARGUMENT AND CLINTON'S SPEECHES ON WELFARE REFORM: CHANGING THE TERMS OF THE WELFARE DEBATE

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master—that's all."

Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass* (1872)

Introduction

Discourse about welfare is a curious blend of politics, policy, and rhetoric. Historically, discourse concerning social welfare developed under the auspices of religious rhetoric through local charitable efforts. Later, welfare discourse expanded through the language of policy, legislation, and debate at the local, state, and federal level and was often reinforced and extended through government-sponsored research by social science and psychology professionals. Even anthropologists weighed in on the "culture of poverty"—following the lead of politicians with language that supported America's entrenched moral and cultural ideologies of family values, the Protestant work ethic, individualism, boot-strap mentality, and so forth. Politicians and many academic disciplines supported and perpetuated what could easily be called an exnominated discourse about social welfare with its inherent pejorative labeling of those who received welfare support. For centuries, although the labels for those on social welfare changed, the message remained the same—there are those who have earned or deserve social assistance and those who are undeserving of social support. Couched in a rhetoric of

hope, responsibility, and blame, a peculiar blend of the Clintonian *New Covenant* and the *Republican Contract With America*, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) was formed to “end welfare as we know it.” Though it was planted in the rhetoric of change, not only did PRWORA retain the age-old message about the deserving and undeserving poor, but its consequences grew even harsher. It is this rhetoric that this study seeks to explore, the rhetoric of Clinton, which becomes most pertinent to defining, delineating, and developing distinctions in the 1996 language of welfare reform. For it is his rhetoric that is key to understanding the discourse of welfare reform in the 1990s and, subsequently, its impact on the discourses, the voices, and standpoints of the women the act was created to control.

Rogsonian Rhetoric and Clinton’s Welfare Discourse

This chapter will begin with an examination of Clinton’s welfare discourse including a close analysis of the rhetoric in his First Inaugural Address (1993), his first four State of the Union Addresses (1993, 1994, 1995, 1996), and his speech to black ministers on November 13, 1993 in Memphis, Tennessee. These speeches were selected because they delineate his program objectives for the years just prior to welfare reform.

Clinton found himself caught between several factions: a conservative campaign to abolish welfare rights, liberal groups that sought to increase welfare benefits and redefine the welfare problem, and a general populace that just wanted welfare to be fixed. Clinton chose a middle way. Rogsonian collaborative rhetoric offers a method for exploring how Clinton went about finding a middle way by managing to co-opt the conservative agenda for welfare, attempting to appease liberals, while skillfully

repackaging welfare reform to the American public as his own. Since the purpose of this study is to explore how discourse is used to define social welfare and to constitute women, singly and as a group, I will also perform analysis on particular lexical items and discourse techniques that are used to create, identify, name, and label individuals and communities. I will examine how Clinton succeeded in changing the terms of the debate on welfare reform by using some techniques that offer ideological insight (Kinneavy) and that work to constitute subjects including: paraphrasing, synonymy, and substitution (Woods), synecdoche (Schram and Soss), metaphorical representation and overwording (Johnstone), and co-reference, repetition, and re-phrasing (Woods, Johnstone, Kinneavy).

Rogsonian argument emerged over thirty years ago in the work of Richard E. Young, Alton Becker, and Kenneth Pike as a response to Carl Rogers,ⁱ when he questioned whether his theories about communication could be used in more high-stakes communicative situations (Young, "Rogsonian Argument" 109). Since then many rhetoricians and composition theorists have weighed in on the debate about the meaning and nature of Rogsonian argument, including Rogers himself (Bator, Baumlin and Baumlin, Coe, Ede, Foss and Foss, Hairston, Lundsford, Teich, Young, and Zappen,). For many scholars, Rogsonian rhetoric easily extends Aristotelian argument (Bator, Coe, Lundsford, and Hairston). Others find classical connections to Rogers in Platonic dialectic (Baumlin and Baumlin). Some believe extension of Rogers's theories to rhetoric are unnecessary when Kenneth Burke (identification and consubstantiation) and Chaim Perelman more than cover similar territory (Ede in interview with Teich 80-81).

For purposes of this study, the scholarship examining the connection of Rogerian argument with classical rhetoric will be used, particularly Coe's connection of Rogerian argument to Aristotelian rhetorical concerns about analyzing situation (audience and purpose) and the importance of creating speaker *ethos* because it helps to explicate the techniques used by Clinton to empathize with and move his audience. Also of interest is Baumlin and Baumlin's exploration of Rogerianism with Platonism, especially the connection between therapeutic discourse, speaker/audience equity and intention, and the struggle of discourse participants to discover and define what for them is truth and reality.

Richard E. Young, Alton L. Becker, and Kenneth L. Pike in their important work, *Rhetoric, Discovery, and Change*, offered insights and strategies for incorporating Roger's theories about communication into the writing process, focusing on elements concerning context, empathy, understanding, and congruence. As part of their development of Rogerian argument, they delineated a four part structure for developing a non-combative, collaborative argument. Paraphrasing Young, Becker, and Pike, writers using Rogerian rhetoric would:

- 1) Introduce the problem while showing understanding of the opposing position,
- 2) Identify the context in which the opposing position is valid,
- 3) State their position and identify the context in which it is valid, and
- 4) Draw connections between the writer's position and the opponent's and identify benefits to the opposition for adopting the writer's position. (283)

Maxine Hairston, following Young, Becker, and Pike, extends Rogerian argument placing emphasis on minimizing evaluative language and expanding understanding and acceptance of the opponent's point of view. She offers guidelines for developing a "non-threatening framework" for argument. Hairston places emphasis on objectivity and empathy:

- 1) Provide an 'objective' statement of the issue,
- 2) Summarize, with empathy, the oppositions' case,
- 3) Provide writer's case 'objectively,'"
- 4) Identify common ground and irreconcilable differences, and
- 5) Propose solution, including benefits to both sides. (375-376)

Additionally, Hairston identifies the importance of rhetorical stance for effective Rogerian rhetoric. I will examine rhetorical stance more closely when analyzing Clinton's rhetoric. To summarize Hairston's discussion of rhetorical stance, she believes the rhetor must develop a "persona" that engenders trust from the audience, the rhetor must analyze the audience's perspective with "compassionate detachment," the rhetor must state her opinion using unthreatening language, and the rhetor must offer a "reasonable solution" acceptable to both sides (376). These techniques, Hairston believes, will be difficult for many rhetors to accomplish, but are absolutely necessary to develop an effective argument both using and staying true to the spirit of the Rogerian approach (376-77).

Hairston's techniques appear in Clinton's personal brand of rhetoric, a rhetoric that in many ways is Rogerian. Clinton easily shows empathy with his audience and

conveys a deep understanding of their problems. Clinton's top speech writer from 1993-1999, Michael Waldeman, argues that the former president played the role of "mediator between voters and the elites" (36). In his book, *POTUS Speaks*, Waldeman explains how Clinton infused his own rhetoric into the speeches he delivered both before and after the final drafts. During delivery, Clinton would intuitively read his audience, and if his speech failed to connect with them, he changed the speech ad hoc until he made the connection. Waldeman said Clinton "drew energy" from his audiences (142). While on the campaign trail for his re-election in 1996, Clinton "pressed and pressed until he found a connection" with the people he was addressing. The connection might be "historical or emotional or substantive," but no matter what the connection, it was one "that bonded him to the audience" (142).

Clinton wanted to understand his audience's needs and perspectives. Waldeman said that after delivering his speeches, Clinton often spoke personally with the crowd and gathered personal anecdotes which he shared later with his staff. When the staff returned to verify the stories, invariably the stories were confirmed—Clinton heard what the people said and shared it later in other speeches (142). His connection with the audience, his care to hear their ideas and problems, and his reiteration of their stories in later speeches all describe a speaker using Rogerian methods. Moreover, in terms of presidential responsibility, he fulfills his role on behalf of the people, for it is he who "represents the views of the nation" filtered through the "lenses of party, ideology, political and economic constraints" (Medhurst 10).

Clinton's masterful use of Rogerian discourse might be traced to his family's history of problems with addiction and violence. Joe Klein's close look at Clinton during his presidency in *The Natural: The Misunderstood Presidency of Bill Clinton* observes that Clinton entered family therapy with his brother during his governorship in Arkansas in an effort to help his troubled younger brother with his cocaine addiction (24).

Clinton's mother regularly attended AA meetings for the "comfort" they afforded her; after all, she tells Klein, her husband (Clinton's stepfather) had been an alcoholic and one of her son's was a drug addict (24). In fact, Clinton, as a fourteen-year old, defended his mother against the physical abuse of his stepfather (Greenstein 175). Clinton, through these experiences, was familiar with the language of therapy. In his own words Clinton says, "In an alcoholic family, I grew up with much greater empathy for other people's problems than the average person. . . . I learned some good skills about how to keep people together and try to work things out" (Baer, Cooper, and Gergen qtd. in Greenstein 175).

Indeed, Clinton evidenced a "mastery of the therapeutic vocabulary," which, according to Klein, was a "subtext" to his success in politics, helping him create a "sense of intimacy" with his audiences (25). This intimacy can be seen not only in portions of his formal and ceremonial speeches, but also in his more intimate speeches for smaller more specific audiences. One excellent example of Clinton's use of Rogerian rhetoric can be found in his November 13, 1993 speech to black church leaders in Memphis, Tennessee. In this speech, Clinton moves immediately to connect with his audience. This speech was delivered in a "hallowed space" where Martin Luther King delivered

“his last sermon” (John M. Murphy 242). Clinton begins his speech by donning the mantle of Martin Luther King’s memory. He creates a connection both emotionally and literally with the black ministers through the invocation of their most beloved leader. Hairston notes that the Rogerian rhetor must have “strong ethical appeal,” (376). *Ethos*, for Clinton, is charisma, connection, and conciliation. Clinton says, “If Martin Luther King were to reappear by my side today and give us a report card on the last 25 years, what would he say?” Clinton includes himself in the group of ministers and connects with the black community—what if King gave “us a report card”—by using the inclusive pronoun “us.” He also expands his *ethos* by invoking King, speaking on King’s behalf, and by giving King equal stature to himself with the spatial connotation “by my side.”

Rather than begin by defining the problems in the black community, all of which the black ministers undoubtedly are already acutely aware, Clinton begins by showing respect for their accomplishments. Aristotle, in his discussion of *ethos*, tells us that we “feel friendly towards those who praise such good qualities as we possess” (Corbett 101; James J. Murphy 140). By sincerely recognizing gains made by the black community, he gains his audience’s good will and connects with their pride over their accomplishments. He not only names them, but he also uses repetition of a complementary phrase to preface each acknowledgement of the gains they have made. “You did a good job,” Clinton says, “voting and electing people who were formerly not electable,”—“You did a good job” helping people live wherever they want to—“You did a good job” putting people of color into important jobs,”—“You did a good job creating a black middle class . . . and opening up opportunity” (par. 1-4). His repetition of the

phrase “You did a good job” mimics King’s style in “I have a dream” (John M. Murphy 242) and works effectively to help Clinton connect with the audience by acknowledging the struggle the ministers and their people faced in making civil and economic advances.

Next, Clinton turns his speech to the problems he believes the black community faces and which he specifically seeks to address with this audience. He makes his shift with the conjunction “But” and then moves into the specifics of the problem. For the next six paragraphs, Clinton identifies problems in the black community. As he employed repetition to tie the black community’s gains together at the beginning of the speech, he does so again in this middle section of the speech as a discourse technique to emphasize and focus his audience’s attention on their issues. Clinton repeatedly refers to King’s life and death as well as King’s mission to bring freedom to his people in connection with the black community’s problems. Speaking for King, Clinton says,

[H]e [King] would say, “I did not live and die to see the American family destroyed. I did not live and die to see 13-year-old boys get automatic weapons and gun down 9-year-olds just for the kick of it. I did not live and die to see people destroy their own lives with drugs and build drug fortunes destroying the lives of others. That is not what I came here to do.” (par. 5)

Clinton proceeds in stark detail to outline the ugly, debilitating problems the black community faces in poor sections of urban American cities: “reckless” killing, children impregnating each other, black-on-black violence, drug-related destruction, loss of hope, and desperation so extreme that an eleven-year-old child prepares in advance for her own funeral. He walks a fine line here. Aristotle tells us that “shame about a thing if it is

done openly, before all men's eyes" can be problematic (Corbett 109). Shame can be used against an opponent in classical argumentation, but for Rogerian argument, shame or blame have no comfortable resting place. Through his use of empathy, Clinton avoids shaming his audience, he speaks to them as one of them, using the inclusive pronouns "us," "our," and "we" (par. 1, 11, 16). He says, "If Martin Luther King were to appear by my side today and give *us* a report card on the last 25 years, what would he say?"; "And I tell you it is *our* moral duty to turn this around"; and "*We* have to make a partnership [emphasis mine]" (par. 1, 11 16). He creates a safe environment for change; he demonstrates trust towards the ministers in his audience, and he includes himself as a partner in solving the problems facing the black community.

Clinton's empathy with his audience is also a classical *pathetic* appeal or *pathos* (emotion), employed as a means of connecting with his audience and moving them towards change. Aristotle identifies the *pathetic* argument as the most powerful rhetorical device in a rhetor's repertoire and devotes more chapters to *pathos* than any other rhetorical technique (Kinneavy 241). *Pathos* is often used in an argument to appeal to individual emotions, such as anger, calmness, fear, confidence, shame, shamelessness, kindness, pity, and indignation (241; Corbett 91-121). How these emotions are used to arouse an audience is generally based on the age, class, race, or other determining social classifications (241). A key to understanding Aristotle's concept of *pathos* is its integration and operation through *logos*. According to James J. Murphy, for a rhetor to effectively use *pathos*, she "must make a complex judgment about [her]self in relation to external events" (47). Through this judgment a "state of feeling" is accomplished which

allows the psychological proofs to be integrated with the logical proofs (including the enthymeme) creating a powerful persuasive argument (47). The integration of *pathos*, particularly empathy, in Rogerian argument is fundamental to Clinton's success, and he accomplishes this by displaying calmness, kindness, and respect towards his audience. He emulates the repetitious language of sermons familiar to his audience, embedding *pathos* (emulation, friendship, and indignation) in both his presentation of the problem and the solution.

So, after acknowledging gains made by the black community, then delineating the difficult problems the community faces, Clinton comes to a transition point in his speech. Coe discusses a four part strategy for presenting one's position in Rogerian persuasion. His strategies are similar to Hairston's and Young, Becker, and Pike's, except Coe emphasizes the importance of the turning point in the argument, that point at which, after introducing the problem and showing empathy and respect for the opposing views, the rhetor makes a transition to her position (93). If this transition is not handled with care, Coe says, the rhetor can appear manipulative and insincere (93). Clinton handles his transition masterfully. He moves skillfully from presenting the problem to presenting his solution with an inclusive indirect imperative: "And I tell you it is *our moral duty* to turn this around" (par. 11, emphasis mine). Here Clinton blends both Rogerian persuasion and classical rhetoric by presenting his solutions, making promises to assist his audience in the carrying out of those solutions, and by calling his audience to action. He also plays to their religious values when he says "it is our moral duty" as ministers and leaders to "turn this around." Clinton transitions from the problems he has just outlined to the

solution he wants his audience to consider. He strongly admonishes his audience, with an appeal to “moral duty,” that the solutions to their community’s problems will require much of them. At the same time, he acknowledges that the work to be done is both his and theirs to carry out. Throughout his presentation, Clinton uses familiar language that keeps him connected to his audience, for example; he shares one anecdote given to him by the mayor of Baltimore, “a dear friend of mine,” about “little-bitty ones” surrounded by boys killing boys (par. 8). These are not Clinton’s stories. These are stories told to him from members of the black community about their community’s problems—he is sharing them with his partners, his audience, who he is going to help to turn these problems around.

In the solution section of his speech, Clinton uses the normally polarizing terms “insider/outsider” numerous times. The term “insider” is commonly equated with the dominant culture. It is an exnominated position, rarely questioned, just as “outsider” usually refers to the “other.” Clinton reverses their definitions. He uses “insider” in reference to the black community—empathizing and deliberately re-presenting the world through the eyes of the black ministers. They are the insiders and those outside the black community are the outsiders. He tells the ministers that “outsiders” (government, society, governors, legislators, mayors) are limited in the solutions they can offer to the black community (par. 12). Only the “insiders,” the black ministers and their community, can find the answers to the problems plaguing their community through “values,” “love,” “stirrings,” and “voices” that speak from within them (par. 13). The ministers must be there for their people “to give structure, role-modeling, discipline, love,

and hope” to their children (par. 16). *Pathos* integrated with the discourse of family therapy infiltrates Clinton’s language as he describes the role the ministers must play in saving their community.

Although Clinton is part of the “outsider” government, he builds and shows empathy with the ministers by calling on his/their shared religious/spiritual frame, firmly placing himself within their community. He says, “and in the spirit of my faith, I count myself as one of you to turn this thing around from the inside-out as well as the outside-in” (par. 12). Where there is “faith,” for Clinton, there are no “insiders” or “outsiders”; he is reminding the ministers that everyone is equal in the eyes of God.

Towards the end of his speech, Clinton uses direct imperatives to allude to his legislative agenda, “We have to make a partnership,” and “You must do that, and we will help you” (par. 16-17). Although he is calling the ministers to action in a classical way, he is once again empathizing with his audience and reassuring them that he is their partner, in a Rogerian manner, as he promises to assist them in finding answers to their problems. Sonja K. Foss and Karen A. Foss, in their text, *Inviting Transformation: Presentational Speaking for a Changing World*, identify several modes of rhetoric: conquest and conversion rhetoric (classical), benevolent rhetoric (e.g. religious or health related), advisory rhetoric (e.g. counseling or education), and invitational rhetoric (Rogerian) (5-7). In Clinton’s Memphis speech, he is using what Foss and Foss call invitational rhetoric. While he is “clarifying” the problems they face, he is also “inviting” the ministers to see their problems as he has stated them, and he is encouraging the ministers to join him in trying to find mutually satisfying solutions.

A key paragraph of his Memphis speech defines what Clinton thinks about the concept of work, which is one clue as to why he, against the wishes of many of his supporters, found it within himself to sign welfare legislation that contained such a heavy emphasis on “work first.” This paragraph defines, according to Clinton, what work means to people’s lives and to the health of society:

From the outside, we’re doing our best, but I do not believe we can repair the basic fabric of society until people who are willing to work have work. Work organizes life. It gives structure and discipline to life. It gives meaning and self-esteem to people who are parents. It gives a role model to children . . . We cannot repair the American community and restore the American family until we have the structure, the values, the discipline, and the reward that work gives us. . . .

(par. 15)

Although, he emphasizes the importance of work, Clinton fails to answer the country’s dilemma about how to ensure there is “work” for those who are willing to work. Clinton promises he will help, but in this particular speech, he does not delineate specifically how he will go about doing so. In numerous other speeches, however, he clearly outlines his economic agenda to help create jobs, while at the same time he calls on corporations and small employers to give welfare leavers a job. As in most of his speeches concerning the economy or social issues, throughout the Memphis speech, there is a subtle subtext about welfare reform, and the ideas of individual responsibility and work are more than obvious.

Clinton's Inaugural and State of the Union Addresses

Inaugural Addresses and State of the Union Addresses are by their very nature political. Inaugural Addresses, though highly ceremonial, not only address the occasion, but also superficially set the agenda for the future and are structured to persuade the American people and their representatives in Congress to support the incumbent president's programs. State of the Union Addresses provide an opportunity for presidents to speak to the economic and programmatic challenges the government faces, while at the same time outlining actions and programs the administration proposes to address them. According to political analyst, Joe Klein, Clinton's State of the Union Addresses became a "six-month policy-making process" reflecting "his substantive agenda" for the coming year; and, annually, Clinton eagerly anticipated delivering his message directly to the American people without the filter of the media (6).

Clinton's inaugural addresses, state of the union messages, and many other speeches and statements carry a common theme of reform and promise, a message of change, and the importance of work, family, and investment in the future. In 1991, Clinton consolidated his programmatic agenda under the title, *The New Choice* (Klein 13). During his campaign and, specifically, in his third state of the union message in January 1995, Clinton's theme of reform coalesces under a different title, the *New Covenant*, where he wraps his concepts of change, investment, and renewal in the cloak of the scriptural, a technique he uses throughout most of his speeches. Interestingly, later, in 1996, Clinton refers to his economic and social philosophy as *The Third Way*, seeing his role as one that transitions the nation from an industrial society to one based on

information technology (Klein 13). For Clinton, *The Third Way* encompasses his ability to find middle ground or to find alternative solutions that go beyond traditional pathways to legislation and problem solving.

Welfare reform took place under the umbrella of Clinton's *New Covenant*, which also provides an interesting contrast with Roosevelt's *New Deal*, Johnson's *The Great Society* and its *War on Poverty*, and Reagan's *Agenda for the Future*. Although the *New Covenant*, by its name alone is least suggestive of the language of business and capitalism, it does in fact, encompass a far reaching agenda to reform taxes, "reinvent government," invest in people, and reform social programs. At one point, Clinton himself sums up the *New Covenant* with the terms "responsibility," "opportunity," and "citizenship," bedrock terms of the ideologies of individualism, capitalism, and nationalism (1995 State of Union).

Like Clinton, other twentieth-century presidents made economic assistance, or welfare reform, one of their key administration issues. These presidents faced the problem of addressing serious public concerns about public assistance to the poor in different situational contexts and from the vantage point of different party ideologies, but all found welfare reform to be of overarching importance and in need of revision. Some twentieth-century presidents played pivotal roles in describing and/or revising legislation related to the poor. A brief introduction to a few, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Lyndon B. Johnson, Richard M. Nixon, and Ronald Reagan, may help to set the context for the Clinton administration's need to "end welfare as we know it."

Franklin D. Roosevelt took office in 1933 in a desperate period of poverty for many Americans following the stock market crash of 1929. In his First Inaugural Address,ⁱⁱ President Roosevelt primarily appealed to those who were unemployed, but also to those in poverty, describing, often in moral terms, the problems they and the country faced, outlining the leadership and action he would bring to bear against those problems, and giving them and the country a promise of his own courage and devotion to waging a war on the economy until the nation's economic system was rebuilt and work opportunities were created or restored. As a result of his leadership, New Deal programs were enacted and the Social Security System was established. Roosevelt assisted millions of American families to recover from unemployment and poverty. His programs continue to be described as the most far-reaching and comprehensive social service programs in the United States up to that time.

Aid to Families with Dependent Children or AFDC originated in the expansive legislation of the mid 1930s called the Social Security Act. When first enacted the program was called Aid to Dependent Children (ADC). Its primary purpose was to provide aid to widows with children, usually widows of miners or soldiers. Over time the AFDC program expanded to encompass almost all women with children living in poverty no matter what their marital status. As a result, eligibility encompassed not only widows, but also mothers who found themselves divorced, deserted, or unmarried. By the end of President Johnson's *War on Poverty*, welfare rolls had grown at an astonishing rate. This growth was attributed by most social theorists to civil rights, the expansion of programs during the Johnson administration, and the growing awareness of minorities about their

rights to entitlement programs. Most of the Republican presidents following Johnson tried to reign in this expansion by reforming the system, but little substantive change occurred because of a Democratically controlled Congress, which consistently worked to keep any kind of dramatic welfare reform in check.

Lyndon B. Johnson, in June 1965, gave a commencement address at Howard University, described by Daniel P. Moynihan as “the high-water mark of civil rights rhetoric in America” (*The Politics of a Guaranteed Income* 329). In this speech, Johnson articulated a moral rhetoric of obligation, rights, and action by explaining the genesis and “special nature” of the plight of “American Negroes” in poverty and by promising that their problems would be “the chief goal” of his Great Society program for the following year. For Johnson, white society was morally obligated to shoulder the responsibility to help in the restoration of black families and in the development of equal access to education, livelihoods, and housing for all minorities. For Johnson, public aid and assistance was a valid expectation of those black families who historically found themselves “crippled” in poverty as a result of the oppression and discriminatory practices of white society.

Also during the 1960s, Daniel P. Moynihan published his research from the Department of Labor concerning what he called the movement from civil rights to welfare rights in the report *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (*Politics* 328). Using statistical data related to unemployment rates, Moynihan reported that since World War II, the rate of AFDC cases had a “strong correlation” to the unemployment rate of black men, and he tied poverty to some kind of “lower-class phenomena”

(Moynihan, *Politics* 328). The National Welfare Rights Organization, other minority rights associations like the NAACP, and academic social scientists like Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward developed arguments in response to Moynihan's premises. By the end of the 1960s, the rhetoric of welfare was embroiled in serious debate and quickly becoming the rhetoric of race, as discussed in the previous chapter.

In 1969, Richard M. Nixon proposed the Family Assistance Plan (FAP), which according to Moynihan, then Counselor to the President, would have in essence provided a type of guaranteed income to those in poverty.ⁱⁱⁱ This program was defeated to the distress and confusion of many. Four years later, in his March 1, 1973 State of the Union Message to Congress on Human Resources, Nixon vehemently denigrated the welfare system (Axinn and Stern 296-302). According to Nixon's message, the so called "welfare mess" penalized those persons who leave welfare and go to work and rewarded those who stay at home on welfare. Nixon metaphorically called it "a crazy quilt of injustice and contradiction that has developed in bits and pieces over the years." He bemoans the fact that the prior two Congresses failed to pass his "proposals for fundamental welfare reform," but states that one of his major goals for the next year would be to work "diligently" with Congress to pass the much needed changes (296-302). In lieu of that, his administration would work hard through administrative and management measures to strengthen oversight of the AFDC program and give more control to state and local governments (296-302).

In his 1983 State of the Union Message, Ronald Reagan uses what seems to be an exclusionary discourse when addressing the American people, narrowing his audience

specifically to “working mothers” and other workers who would help him rebuild the nation’s economy. By naming “working mothers,” he elided from the audience those mothers who were *not* working. Through omission, Reagan both ostracizes and makes invisible those who were on welfare or in poverty. It appears he refuses to speak to them. Reagan posits an “Agenda for the Future,” which will let go of the “failed policies” of the past (State of the Union 1986). Reagan calls on men and women of “vision” to help him knock down the barriers to economic growth. He commends the American people for “bringing America back” with their “quiet courage and common sense” (State of the Union 1986). Reagan’s speeches contain numerous references to traditional American values as well as celebrations of hard-working Americans, their families, and all freedom-loving countries around the world. Reagan addresses the welfare system in pejorative terms, calling the program a “welfare monster” or “outmoded social dinosaur,” and uses other negatively-loaded language including “dependency,” “fragmented families,” and “poverty trap” to denigrate the system (State of the Union 1986, State of the Union 1987, State of the Union 1988). Reagan notably referred to some women on welfare as “welfare queens” in campaign speeches, citing the story about Linda Taylor’s use of multiple names to scam the welfare system which broke in the *Lima News* “Welfare Queen” story on March 9, 1977.

In a like manner, during the Reagan period in the 1980s, Gunnar Myrdal’s 1963 term “under-class” (used by Myrdal to describe those people whose jobs were lost because of changing economic conditions) was co-opted by politicians and journalists and used as a pejorative word connoting a certain race, gender, and behavior of those in

poverty, in other words, the undeserving poor (qtd. in Gans 28). Reagan and his constituents were on a mission to denigrate the welfare system and its beneficiaries. Through use of color-coded language, the Reagan administration cemented the racial dimensions of the welfare cultural myth; subsequently, the welfare/race connection was easily recognized in the political press and public media by the time Clinton took office in the 1990s.

Clinton's First Inaugural Address and the Language of Change

As mentioned earlier, Clinton began his presidency with the themes of rebirth and change; in fact, in the first line of his First Inaugural Address (1993), he tells the Congress and the public, "Today we celebrate the mystery of American renewal." He began his presidency with the metaphorical representation of rebirth imagery as he states that "we force the spring" from the "depth of winter," indeed, "spring [is] reborn" as we "reinvent America" preparing her for the "change" necessary to "preserve American ideals" (First Inaugural 1993). Through the use of "overwording" (e.g. the appearance of a series of related synonyms (Fairclough 1992 qtd. in Johnstone, *Discourse* 49)), Clinton, from the start, embeds his underlying ideology of change in the terms "renewal," "reborn," and "reinvent." These terms reappear repeatedly throughout his speeches, signaling a strong ideological framework concerning *change* as a fundamental component of Clinton's approach to policy. But Clinton's concept of *change* is not just one of shifting the current policy to something different. For Clinton, the notion of change includes the idea of *reinvention*, which is grounded in the work of David Osborne and Ted Gaebler (*Reinventing Government*), whose concepts of reinvention include scraping

the old ways of doing business, re-envisioning what is possible, and moving to results-oriented government. Undoubtedly, this results-oriented framework is key to an understanding of Clinton's future position on welfare and its resulting legislation.

The theme of change is reinforced through the use of addressee references, direct and indirect imperatives, and implicit imperatives of maxim, all effective techniques of persuasion expressing urgency and action (Kinneavy 233). Clinton astutely sends a message to Congress and the people that the use of experimentation to effect change will be a touchstone of his presidency. In paragraphs 25-30 of his first inaugural address, Clinton speaks directly to the people in several passages using addressee reference to call the people to action: "Let us all take more responsibility, not only for ourselves and our families, but for our communities and our country" (par. 26); and "We must do what America does best: offer more opportunity to all and demand responsibility from all" (par. 25). Clinton uses the inclusive third person pronoun "we" to soften the demand, but weaves a thread of iron in the subtext for those who are generally the "other" in society. If one listens/reads closely, one hears/sees imbedded in this call for change a subtle message to those on public assistance, "more responsibility" will be "*demand[ed]* . . . from *all*" by this administration (emphasis mine). Further, he emphasizes this point later in the speech with an implicit imperative of maxim, "It is time to break the bad habit of expecting something for nothing from our government, or from each other" (par. 26). Here, Clinton incorporates a common maxim, "something for nothing," to underscore the idea that handouts will not continue and strongly foreshadows the changes he plans to make in government programs, especially welfare.

Continuing our examination of the First Inaugural Address, to those in Congress, Clinton underlines his intent with direct imperatives, “let us resolve to reform our politics” (par. 29); “Let us put aside personal advantage so that we can feel the pain and see the promise of America” (par. 29); “Let us resolve to make our government a place for . . . ‘bold, persistent experimentation,’ a government for our tomorrows, not our yesterdays” (par. 30). Kinneavy, in his examination of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s First Inaugural Address, notes that addressee references work together to create a “central emotional thesis” that aims at a “central legislative choice” (233). In this case, Clinton’s central emotional thesis is experimentation and change, which he intends to bring to bear on welfare reform and many other federal programs including reinventing government and healthcare. Resourcefully, Clinton connects with his audience by placing the onus of change squarely on the shoulders of the American people. At the same time, he validates the *ethos* of his presidency by describing his election as a mandate from the people:

The American people have summoned the change we celebrate today. You have raised your voices in an unmistakable chorus. You have cast your votes in historic numbers. And you have changed the face of Congress, the presidency and the political process itself. Yes, you, my fellow Americans have forced the spring. Now we must do the work the season demands. (First Inaugural Address 1993)

This mandate is reiterated in various forms in most of his speeches. He often gives credit to the American people for the accomplishments of his administration reconnecting his work to their mandate and clearly placing the genesis of his authority directly at their

feet, for example: “The American people have summoned the change we celebrate today” (First Inaugural 1993) and “In 1992, the American people demanded that we change” (1994 State of the Union). In a portion of his first inaugural speech where Clinton acknowledges the people’s mandate, his exuberant spirit of optimism infiltrates his discourse, resulting in strong lexical emphasis such as “celebrate today,” “unmistakable chorus,” “historic numbers” and “forced the spring” (First Inaugural 1993, par. 37). He uses superlatives to under gird his authority and build his *ethos*, to exemplify strength and determination, as he begins the hard work of his presidency.

Clinton’s State of the Union Messages and Welfare Discourse

Clinton begins his 1994 State of the Union Address with a sense of urgency and expectancy. We are living in a world of constant change, both “profound” and “rapid” which is “test[ing]” all nations. In America, our “heritage was abandoned,” “our country drifted,” and our family life “has been breaking down” (par. 4-5). Some of the solutions to these pressing problems include “renewal,” “reinvention,” “restoration,” and “reform”—especially healthcare and welfare reform.

End welfare as we know it. This statement might be called a Clintonism. It resurfaces in Clinton’s welfare rhetoric throughout his presidency, from his campaign speeches and radio messages, to his state of the union addresses. In fact, in his 1994 and 1995 State of the Union Addresses, just prior to signing the 1996 welfare legislation, over ten percent and seven percent respectively of his entire address directly concerned welfare reform. In 1993, he planned to put healthcare reform before welfare reform, so only two percent of his first address directly spoke to the welfare issue, although

numerous nuanced referrals to welfare including work, responsibility, and family were sprinkled liberally throughout the remaining content of the speech.

In his first few state of the union addresses, Clinton speaks to and for those on welfare continuing his sympathetic, Rogerian rhetorical style. In most of his speeches about welfare reform, Clinton shows his expertise on the subject from all sides, taking the view of the recipients, then discussing the economic ramifications, and finally acknowledging the raging political and ideological debate. Clinton often frames the paradox that women on welfare face—a choice between being good parents or being good workers—and acknowledges that in their world, being both is rarely possible (Remarks-Democratic Leadership Council, 3 Dec. 1993). He has interviewed recipients and had “personal conversations” with them (Address-Joint Session of Congress, 17 Feb. 1993; Remarks/Exchange with Reporters, 27 Jan. 1995). He knows them by name and knows their problems by heart. Clinton considers many of the people on welfare “trapped” in a cycle of dependency (1993 State of the Union; Address-Joint Session, 17 Feb. 1993; Remarks-Democratic Leadership Council, 3 Dec. 1993; Statement, 8 Dec. 1994; 1995 State of the Union; Statement, 27 July 1996; Remarks/Exchange with Reporters, 31 July 1996). Welfare, for them, has become “a way of life” (Address-Joint Session, 17 Feb. 1993; Remarks-Democratic Leadership Council, 3 Dec. 1993; 1994 State of the Union; 1995 State of the Union; Remarks/Exchange with Reporters, 31 July 1996). He understands the complexity of how people become trapped on welfare and why they are afraid to leave it.

Aristotle advises the rhetor to “inspire confidence” in his own character by demonstrating she/he has “good sense,” “good moral character,” and “good will” (Corbett 91). As mentioned earlier, this is the creation of *ethos*, what Hairston calls “strong ethical appeal,” and it has been identified as an important component of Rogerian argument (376). In order to build *ethos*, Aristotle believes the rhetor must have a thorough understanding of men’s and women’s emotions, because it is their emotions that “affect their judgments” and ultimately influence the acceptance or rejection of the rhetor’s arguments (Corbett 91). Aristotle’s rhetor is sensitive to the impact of words and behaviors that might cause certain emotions to take hold of his audience or be used by himself to characterize his rhetorical opponent.

Clinton establishes his “good sense,” indeed, his complete competency with respect to welfare reform by emphasizing his career-long efforts toward understanding welfare issues and developing public policy in numerous speeches (1994 State of the Union, 1995 State of the Union). Clinton is extremely confident that he is the right person to lead welfare reform. He builds his *ethos* and demonstrates his competency by citing his over fifteen years of experience dealing with welfare problems and by pointing to his work with Moynihan and others during the Reagan administration, where he helped lead the efforts to develop the 1988 Family Support Act (Remarks-National Governor’s Association 1 Feb. 1994; 1994 State of the Union).

Clinton uses empathy to establish “good will” with his audience. He plays with the emotion of “calmness” as he speaks about welfare reform. Aristotle notes that we are calm towards those “who admit their fault and are sorry”; consequently their punishment

is diminished (Corbett 97). Clinton characterizes welfare recipients as people who acknowledge their complicity in their situation and want it to change. In fact, recipients are the first to tell him they want the old system dismantled. Clinton uses a direct imperative to gain his audience's attention and emphasize the emotional nature of his words, as he states:

And I want to say something to everybody here who cares about this issue. The people who most want to change the system are the people who are dependent upon it. They want to get off welfare; they want to go back to work; they want to do right by their kids. (1994 State of the Union)

The subtext of this discourse is that good parents who “want to do right by their kids” also “want to get off welfare.”

In the spirit of “good will,” Clinton, throughout his speeches and statements concerning welfare reform, maintains a general motif of investment in people and the future. Indeed, throughout his first three State of the Union Addresses, those sections concerning welfare reform display a curious blend of paternalism and empathy, underscored by succinct anecdotes about specific welfare mothers who found a way to leave the welfare rolls. Paternally, as a father to a child, Clinton warns teenagers who have a child out of wedlock, “we’ll no longer give you a check to set up a separate household, we want families to stay together,” and to absent parents who are not paying child support, “we’ll garnish your wages, suspend your license, track you across state lines, and if necessary make some of you work off what you owe” (1994 State of the Union).

He uses second and third person personal pronouns “you” and “we” making his remarks personal, direct, almost scolding, and mildly threatening. At the same time, Clinton continues to empathize with those in poverty and adopts the role of spokesman for the poor:

I want to work with you, with all of you, to pass welfare reform. But our goal must be to liberate people and lift them from dependence to independence, from welfare to work, from mere childbearing to responsible parenting. Our goal should not be to punish them because they happen to be poor.

(1995 State of the Union)

Likewise, Clinton incorporates *pathos* in his remarks about welfare recipients, and these remarks can be directly linked with the idea of the undeserving poor. In his First Inaugural Address he notes, “but for fate, we—the fortunate and the unfortunate—might have been each other” (par. 40). The phrase “but for fate” evokes a figure of speech, specifically a maxim (*sentential*): “there but for the grace of God, go I”—and operates to enhance *ethos* by supporting his argument on moral grounds (James J. Murphy 50, 11). In other words anyone could be poor—reminding his audience that fate could bring any person low, and encouraging others to extend themselves and empathize with those in poverty.

Clinton’s 1994 and 1995 State of the Union Addresses contain the longest sections concerning welfare reform. These are the years he is battling with Congress and other interested parties to see his welfare agenda formed without what he considers the punitive measures the conservatives wished to impose. A close examination of these

sections finds, as in his Memphis speech, that Clinton adopts a Rogerian framework for presenting his welfare reform argument. Clinton, ever observant of the debate, is conciliatory in his remarks, yet firm in purpose while trying to legislate reform amongst disparate parties.

In his 1994 State of the Union Address, Clinton begins his discussion of welfare reform by restating the problems: “It doesn’t work; it defies our values as a nation. If we value work, we can’t justify a system that makes welfare more attractive than work (par. 28) . . . If we value responsibility we can’t ignore the \$34 billion in child support absent parents ought to be paying to millions of parents who are taking care of their children” (par. 29). Embedded in his statement of the problem is empathy and respect for the “millions of parents” who are, without child support, taking care of their children.

Clinton continues by engaging the audience using a rhetorical question about one of the most sensitive issues concerning welfare reform, “illegitimacy,” but never, in any of the speeches I reviewed, does Clinton name or label children as illegitimate; in fact, I did not find him using the word in any context. Clinton asks his audience, “Can you believe that a child who has a child gets more money from the government for leaving home than for staying home with a parent or a grandparent? That’s not just bad policy, it’s wrong and we ought to change it” (par. 29). As he continues to describe the problems, he begins to integrate development of his *ethos*, describing his years of experience dealing with welfare issues (par. 30) and then incorporating a personal anecdote to exemplify his point:

I once had a hearing when I was a governor and I brought in people on welfare from all over America who had found their way to work and a woman from my state who testified was asked this question. What's the best thing about being off welfare and in a job? And without blinking an eye, she looked at 40 governors and she said, when my boy goes to school and they say "What does your mother do for a living?" he can give an answer. These people want a better system and we ought to give it to them (par. 31).

Clinton masterfully blends development of *ethos* and *pathos* with description of the problem. As governor he "brought people on welfare from all over America" to his state to learn more about their problems and why they were receiving welfare services. He knows the problems they face—he heard them first-hand. He asks his audience to trust that he knows what the problems are and how to solve them.

After describing the problem and outlining recent accomplishments, after showing respect for the audience, including those in poverty, and after cementing his *ethos* through examples of his experience and competency, Clinton then transitions to his promise to help transform the system. His format is classic Rogerian, and at this point in the speech, he must transition with care if he wants to be considered sincere and not sophistic. Clinton transitions smoothly with, "But there is more to be done," and then briefly outlines the key components of the legislation he will send to Congress (par. 33). He then moves into his promise:

But to all those who depend on welfare, we should offer ultimately a simple compact. We will provide the support, the job training, the child care you need

for up to two years, but after that anyone who can work, must, in the private sector wherever possible, in community service if necessary.

(par. 35)

Throughout his discourse on welfare, Clinton's overarching concept is "work." In this section of his 1994 State of the Union Address concerning welfare, Clinton refers to "work" fourteen times and "jobs" twice, using numerous noun and verb phrases incorporating "work" such as, "we helped them to work their way out of poverty," "rewarding work over welfare," "anyone who can work, must" to reinforce his message of moving those on welfare to the workforce (1994 State of the Union). For Clinton, welfare is "a second chance, not a way of life" (1994 State of the Union). There is an underlying philosophy about work that infiltrates Clinton's discourse on welfare reform that was most clearly articulated in his November 1993 Memphis speech to black ministers examined earlier. According to Clinton, work "repairs," "restores," and "rewards" those who do it—and without work for those willing to work, the poor community is doomed to its current predicament.

In his 1995 State of the Union Address, Clinton continues to use the Rogerian framework as he argues for welfare reform. He spends less time defining the welfare problem, basically winnowing it down succinctly to failed past policies that "reward welfare over work" (par. 74). Some of the reasons why he might have felt it unnecessary to detail the problems with welfare reform lay outside the welfare portion of the speech. The 1995 State of the Union Address is the moment when Clinton tells the country he is going to "forge a new social compact to meet the challenges of this time" (par. 21), his

New Covenant—a covenant of “opportunity and responsibility” (par. 22-23). When discussing his *New Covenant*, Clinton outlines those problems in the country that need to be “repaired,” admonishes Congress and lobbyists for “doing business as usual,” and lets the Congress and country know he will proceed to implement change outside the purview of legislation if necessary. So when he arrives at the section of his speech addressing welfare, he does not feel the need to focus on problems; but rather, he focuses on integrating empathy for those in poverty with promises about how the system will be changed. Throughout most of this section of the speech, the two, empathy and promise of reform, are tightly coupled:

We should—we should require work and mutual responsibility. But we shouldn’t cut people off just because they’re poor, they’re young or even because they’re unmarried. We should promote responsibility by requiring young mothers to live at home with their parents or in other supervised settings, by requiring them to finish school. But we shouldn’t put them and their children out on the street.
(par. 82)

He integrates his solutions for welfare reform with sympathy for those on welfare. He closes his speech with inclusion. He wants all involved parties to help to solve the problem of welfare reform:

So, we can promote, together, education and work and good parenting. I have no problem with punishing bad behavior or the refusal to be a worker or a student or a responsible parent. I just don’t want to punish poverty and past mistakes. All of

us have made our mistakes and none of us can change our yesterdays, but every one of us can change our tomorrows. (par. 88).

Clinton effectively integrates Rogerian argument in his 1994 and 1995 State of the Union Addresses. In the face of highly controversial issues and sometimes venomous debate, he maintains the role of calm negotiator, a rhetor with “good sense” towards his subject and “good will” towards his audience. Throughout his various speeches and discussions of welfare problems and solutions there is an interwoven subtext of understanding. He conveys an understanding for the welfare recipient, an understanding for the contempt average Americans feel toward the system itself, and an understanding of the overwhelming task that policy makers face in trying to reform it.

Following the signing of PRWORA on August 22, 1996, Clinton no longer presents complex arguments for welfare reform. Just prior to signing welfare reform, Clinton’s 1996 State of the Union Address includes the subject of welfare reform, but it is obscurely referenced in the section of his speech addressing “stronger families.” In his 1997 State of the Union Address, Clinton challenges employers to help make welfare reform work by providing jobs to those trying to exit the system. The subject of welfare is now mostly one of jobs and work, and he includes it as one of six actions needed to keep the country strong. In his 1998, 1999, and 2000 State of the Union Addresses, Clinton briefly notes the accomplishments of welfare reform, stating there is more to do, but citing personal anecdotes of individual welfare leavers and providing statistics about those hired and those leaving the system.

Implications and Conclusions

After the publication of the *Republican Contract with America* on September 27, 1994, the public signing of the *Contract* by 367 legislators in front of the U. S. Capital building (Gayner 4), and the humiliating defeat of healthcare reform, Clinton felt that he must act quickly on the welfare and crime prevention promises of his campaign by signing legislation that could pass before he came up for reelection in 1996. He co-opted welfare reform from the Republicans and took other traditionally conservative issues and made them his own (Greenstein 181). And though in the case of welfare reform the legislation was less than perfect from a liberal perspective, he believed that later he could get other, smaller programs passed that would help assist the working poor, which, in fact, he did (Klein 55).

Clinton accomplished this masterful maneuvering through the use of Rogerian rhetorical strategies. He carefully uses *pathos* to connect with his audience, assuring them that he understands their problems and emphasizes with their circumstances. Additionally, he establishes his *ethos* or capacity and capability to solve their problems by providing his extensive background in welfare reform legislation as well as citing his many interviews with individuals and groups who are currently receiving welfare support. Then he carefully and craftily transitions, to his own agenda for reform. He often makes this transition with the term *but*; indeed, John M. Murphy notes “there is always a “but” in Clinton’s rhetoric (246). As Clinton outlines his remedies, he continues to connect with and reassure his audience.

Clinton was criticized by many political analysts for being too abstract and philosophical in his language. This is why, many believe, the general public did not always understand the breadth of his accomplishments. Often, Clinton fills his speeches with abstract concepts (many of which clearly connect with welfare reform) such as “opportunity,” “empowerment,” “faith,” and “community,” and then builds his welfare argument on specific values such as “individual responsibility,” “work,” and “family.” For many these concepts obscured the already complex grid of entitlement systems and contributed to people focusing on the recipients—a subject more easily understood and more personal.

Clinton attempts throughout his time in office to change the “parameters” of the welfare debate (Remarks Signing PRWORA, 22 Aug. 1996). Using techniques of overwording, repetition, and synonymy throughout the whole of his state of the union messages and other speeches and statements, Clinton defines what he means by changing “welfare as we know it”—from persons trapped in a “cycle of dependency” to people focused on “work,” “family,” “independence,” and “responsibility.” These terms became the new catchwords of welfare reform; for eight years these words were co-located and reiterated throughout Clinton’s speeches, radio addresses, and statements. For many, these terms became the language of welfare reform in the 1990s.

Unlike Reagan, who characterized welfare recipients in derogatory terms, such as “welfare queens,” “greedy,” “cheating,” and “paper people,” Clinton characterizes recipients in human terms, such as “women,” “people,” “parents,” and “new-born child.” He avoids the use of pejorative depictions of people when speaking about welfare

recipients or people in poverty. And Clinton almost always couples discussions of welfare recipients with the concepts of work preparation, job opportunity, and family responsibility. By signing the 1996 welfare reform legislation, Clinton made a step in moving the terms of the welfare debate from attacks on poor people to a debate about job opportunities for welfare leavers (Remarks Signing PRWORA 22 Aug. 1996). The debate was shifted from one of *character* (of individuals and communities) to one of *economics* (jobs). Clinton states, that if the system does not work, the fault is ours: “If it doesn’t work now, it’s everybody’s fault: mine, yours, and everybody else. There is no longer a system in the way” (Remarks Signing PRWORA 22 Aug. 1996). But, this is just the reason many social scientists are concerned about PRWORA—“There is no longer a system in the way,” not just to blame, but to provide a safety net for desperately poor families who have been kicked off the welfare rolls after their time limits have run out and no jobs are to be found.

Notes

ⁱ Richard E. Young notes in “Rogerian Argument and the Context of Situation: Taking a Closer Look,” in *Rogsonian Perspectives: Collaborative Rhetoric for Oral and Written Communication*, that Young, Becker, and Pike’s concerned interest in value-laden dyadic arguments prompted them to develop Carl Roger’s suggestion in “Communication: Its Blocking and Its Facilitation” (1951). In Young’s notes, he quotes Roger’s suggestion: “Can we take this small scale answer [to conflict and breakdowns in communication], investigate it further, refine it, develop it, and apply it to the tragic and well-nigh fatal failures of communication which threaten the very existence of our modern world” (337 as quoted in Young 119). Young, Becker, and Pike began developing Rogerian rhetorical theory in *Rhetoric, Discovery, and Change* (1970).

Richard M. Coe in “Classical and Rogerian Persuasion: An Archaeological/Ecological Explication,” also in *Rogsonian Perspectives*, remarks that Young, Becker, and Pike created Rogerian rhetoric “in response to Anatol Rapoport’s interpretation of concepts from Rogers’ work (cf. Zappen, J. P., “Carl Rogers and Political Rhetoric,” in *PRE/TEXT*, 1, 95-113).

ⁱⁱ James Kinneavy gives an insightful rhetorical analysis of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s First Inaugural Address in *A Theory of Discourse* in the fourth chapter, which explores persuasive discourse.

ⁱⁱⁱ For a detailed (if somewhat controversial) discussion of the politics associated with this legislation see Daniel P. Moynihan's *The Politics of a Guaranteed Income: The Nixon Administration and the Family Assistance Plan*.

CHAPTER IV

NEWSPAPER DISCOURSE ABOUT WELFARE REFORM: THE CONSTRUCTION AND CHARACTERIZATION OF WOMEN IN THE WELFARE DEBATE

"Newspapers made democracy possible; press freedom was the primary and central innovation of the new American nation; Zenger and Franklin and Jefferson and Paine, all journalists at heart, built this country. Crusading journalists ended slavery, urban graft, official indifference to Depression poverty, McCarthyism, the Vietnam War, and the Nixon Administration."

Nicholas Lemann, The New Yorker, April 2, 2004

"Rabble vomit their bile and call it a newspaper."

Nietzsche (qtd. in Williams, Understanding Media Theory, 169)

Introduction

Media coverage of the welfare debate during the 1990s, especially in news print, was extensive, if not exhaustive, particularly during the early years of the Clinton presidency leading up to the signing of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA). This proliferation of news coverage can be attributed in part to the rancorous debate between the Clintonian "New Democrats" and the Gingrich *Contract with America* (1994) Republicans. Further, rather than a single federal welfare program, states were experimenting with new constructions of welfare reform providing a plethora of programs and approaches to be examined and analyzed. National coverage of welfare reform meant journalists traveled to New York, Wisconsin, New Jersey, Oregon, Mississippi, California, Texas, and other states to examine how they were experimenting with welfare reform and how these changes were impacting welfare recipients.

As part of this news coverage, journalists focused on several aspects of welfare discourse. A review of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* articles concerning welfare during the 1990s found that most newspaper articles covered one or more of the following topics: policy, politics, and economic impact; work and job related issues such as housing, food subsidies, medical care, child-care and transportation; children and child-support, and/or depiction of welfare mothers and children, their lives, characters, and reproductive concerns. This examination is primarily concerned with the last category as well as the depiction of welfare mothers in newsprint and how they are characterized, who speaks for them, and whether or how their discourse is represented. Therefore, examination of newspaper discourse and the depiction and construction of welfare women's identities will include a close analysis of specific representative articles from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. Articles were selected from 1993 to 1997 and chosen based on "best match" to the search term "welfare mothers." These articles evidenced a concern with individual women's stories, though some extrapolate or infer conclusions about welfare women as a group, or occasionally include information about other aspects of welfare reform.

Recognizing the uniqueness of media discourse, this analysis draws on several theoretical approaches common to this genre, including those of Michel Foucault, Teun A. van Dijk, Robin Tolmach Lakoff, and Allan Bell. All four theorists acknowledge the power of news reporting to influence public opinion and offer unique approaches to uncovering how and what makes this influence possible. For example, Foucault named newspapers along with television, schools, and other institutions as "hidden mechanisms"

used by society to “convey its knowledge and ensure its survival” (*Language, Counter-Memory* 225). He saw news reporting as an insidious vehicle for maintaining the status quo. And when examining discourse, Foucault was particularly focused on the lowest levels at which power played out. In the case of newspaper stories, the lowest level occurs between the reporter and the newsmaker (those about whom he is reporting).

Lakoff’s analysis of media reporting in *The Language War* assists in identifying the multiple frames from which a story is told. Also, her approach opens to question, and even rejection by both individuals and groups, many cultural and ideological assumptions inherent in much of news reporting. Attribution, the journalist’s tool for controlling the framing of their news stories, plays a key role in the power relationship between the reporter and the interviewee. Hence, this chapter focuses on how the news story frames the welfare receiver, how her words are quoted by the journalist, and how she is characterized in moral, physical, intellectual, and emotional terms.

Many scholars acknowledge that using discourse analysis to examine mass media is a recent development. Van Dijk notes the uniqueness of news discourse and provides methods for examining its structure and the sociological and ideological factors that influence news production and consumption. Like van Dijk, Bell’s research is important to this study because of his synthesis of foundation studies on news values (semantic elements containing linguistic import) and how they infiltrate news content. Moreover, Bell comprehensively examines how news language is constructed and offers approaches to categorizing and examining the content, factors, and elements of news stories, which will be explored later.

A number of other linguists, discourse analysts, and rhetoricians have examined the language of news media. Their research may be categorized in terms of interviews, audience, the production of news media content, and the politics of content including propaganda, stereotyping, and linguistics (Allan Bell, Moira P. F. Chimombo and Robert L. Roseberry, Noam Chomsky, John Heritage, Ron Scollon, Deborah Tannen, Teun A. van Dijk, Kevin Williams). Actually, the scholarship concerning news production, news content, and news audiences is voluminous and will not be recounted here. For those interested in a thorough literature review of scholarship concerning news media see van Dijk's *News as Discourse*, particularly chapter one, and Bell's *The Language of News Media*, a comprehensive account of news media and language.

Drawing on the work of these and other scholars, I will examine: how the newspaper/journalists limit the terms or framework of the debate (Chomsky, Lakoff, Chimombo and Roseberry, Scollon); who the reporters go to for information including characterization through attribution and quotation (Bell, Chomsky, van Dijk, Scollon); what the exnominated positions are (Lakoff); whether or how demonization occurs and how "person" is socially constructed (Scollon, Johnstone, Lakoff, van Dijk); and how welfare receivers' ways of speaking may contribute to their representation in news print media.

Media Theory

This section offers a brief overview of media theory to assist in understanding the uniqueness of the genre and to recommend further sources of information for those interested in this subject. Media theory and mass communication theory trace their

modern roots to the 1950s. The research of many scholars of media and communication theory can generally be divided into three categories of scholarship: news production, media content, and media audience (Bell, Inglis, Iyengar and Reeves, McCombs and Estrada, Stevenson, Williams). Early on, journalists were merely re-recorders of data, passing on information from Europe or recording local events, generally offering no interpretation of their own. By the twentieth century, journalists became “independent interpreters of politics” providing their readers with insights and analysis of public policy, political speeches, and pending legislation (Starr 386). This transition from repeater of news to interpreter of news gave journalists a powerful place from which to select what is reported, how it is reported, and subsequently the opportunity to characterize people and events through the “objective” filter of the press.

Readily available in scholarly literature are critical analysis of how media theory and mass communication discourse impact society. Media theory concerns a number of disciplines, including social theory, cultural anthropology, political theory, literary theory, and discourse analysis (Chimombo and Roseberry, Chomsky, van Dijk, Lakoff, Scollon, Iyengar and Reeves, Stevenson, Whale, Williams). Media theory scholars take as their subjects the social construction of individuals and groups examining discourse apparatuses such as propaganda, bias, and stereotyping by editors, journalists, and media management. Ron Scollon, for example, examines the discourse “transaction” between the producer (journalist, media owners) and the receiver. He is interested in how the producer and receiver co-construct events and, in the process of construction, define reality. He also questions whether the audience for journalists is actually other journalists

rather than the general public. And like Bell and van Dijk, Scollon examines the complex processes of media production analyzing how news stories reflect the work of many writers and editors with differing foci and various agendas, but are primarily, if not directly, influenced by the ideological underpinnings of the media owners themselves.

Another important recent resource of media scholarship is Paul Starr's comprehensive history of the origins and development of modern communication systems in the United States, *The Creation of the Media*, which he juxtaposes against those in Great Britain and Europe. Included in this history are the social, political, and moral influences that contributed to the beginnings of newspapers and subsequently other media.

Analysis of Data

It is generally acknowledged by researchers that newspaper content falls into four categories: service information, opinion pieces, news, and advertising. This study selected news stories which fall into the category of news, both hard news and feature stories, and will closely focus on their components, including leads, headlines, subheadings, and attribution.

Gathering news samples for analysis from media sources can be problematic. Some linguistic and discourse studies gather random samplings of articles by various algorithms that select different days over the course of a month or other specific periods of time and limit their analysis to particular categories of news stories, such as leads, headlines, narrative, specific subject matter, or individual linguistic elements. As stated earlier, the news articles examined here come from *The New York Times* and *The*

Washington Post archives. *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* were selected as sources for this research because of their vast circulation and broad readership. The Audit Bureau of Circulations reported in June 2003 that *The New York Times* circulation ran over 1,672,965 daily with a readership on Sundays at nearly 1,700,000 (“Newspapers”). And in July 2004, the *Times* reported an average of 1,187,303 visits to their news website daily and over ten million visits monthly (“NYTDigital”). Similar to the *Times*, *The Washington Post*’s daily circulation was at 1,049,322 in June 2003 with a Sunday distribution of over 1,000,000 (“Newspapers”). Both newspapers’ articles and leads are often picked up by smaller local and regional outlets, which distribute them to an even wider audience. Using two of the major newspapers in the country allows examination of representative samples of news reports that were likely re-reported in other forms or in local newspapers, posted online, or available in local venues such as libraries and bookstores around the nation.

Research from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* online archives found interesting trends in relation to numbers of articles in the archives with “closest match” to the search term “welfare mothers” (conducted on March 22, 2004 and verified again on July 31, 2004). *The New York Times* changed their archive format from 1996 forward. Instead of automatically searching all sections, beginning in 1996, the researcher must select which sections to search. For this purpose and based on where the prior archive’s articles were found, the following sections were selected for searching the archive from 1996 forward: Business, Editorials, Education, Magazine, National, New York Regional, Job Markets, Technology, Washington, and Week in Review.

News Stories Related to “Welfare Mothers”

<u>Year</u>	<u>The New York Times Number of News Stories</u>	<u>The Washington Post Number of News Stories</u>
1987	36	53
1988	45	52
1989	21	34
1990	22	34
1991	36	25
1992	66	40
1993	28	40
1994	48	89
1995	81	111
1996	52	38
1997	34	32
1998	28	21

A significant escalation of news stories occurs as part of the welfare reform debate in 1994 and 1995 at *The New York Times* and at *The Washington Post* (and also at *The Los Angeles Times*,ⁱ even though we do not include *The Los Angeles Times* news stories in this study). Similarly, from 1987 to 1988, there is a predictable escalation of stories related to welfare, which can be attributed to the revision in welfare law from the 1988 Family Support Act under the Reagan administration and the fact that it was a national election year. Also, 1992 saw a rise in welfare reporting as a result of national elections with welfare reform as a prominent platform issue. After 1992, there is a dip and then a steady progression of articles on welfare reform up to the signing of the 1996 PRWORA. Subsequently, a significant decrease in articles appeared between 1996 and 1997, from 52 to 34. *The Washington Post* experienced a similar escalation in news stories prior to 1996, then a reduction in the years after the signing of the new reform law. The rise and fall of number of articles concerning welfare mothers in relation to welfare reform

evidences both the need of politicians to get their messages out to the public and the veracity of the subject as a public issue.

Headlines

An examination of the first twenty headlines retrieved from *The New York Times* archive was conducted for the years 1988 to 1995, the years prior to the signing of PROWRA. The headlines were first divided by news type: news stories or articles, editorials and editorial articles, letters to the editor, reviews, political articles that briefly mention welfare mothers, unrelated articles, and articles with no titles.

First Twenty Headlines Retrieved by Type

<u>Year</u>	<u>Articles</u>	<u>Editorials & Editorial Articles</u>	<u>Letters to Editor</u>	<u>Arts & Book Reviews</u>	<u>Political, Unrelated, or No Title</u>
1988	9	5	1	3	2
1989	7	1	2	6	4
1990	8	0	1	2	9
1991	9	1	0	1	9
1992	15	1	2	1	1
1993	10	0	1	1	8
1994	6	6	3	0	5
1995	10	4	1	0	5

The headlines revealed a sharp rise in political articles dealing with budgets including remarks about welfare mothers during 1990 and 1991 prior to the election. Notably, there were consistent numbers of headlines for news stories about welfare mothers

through 1991 and a significant spike in these stories during the election year of 1992 with a fairly consistent trend following the election from 1993 to 1995.

From the data examined, a sharp rise in editorial articles in 1994 and 1995 was noted. Many of these headlines signaled concern over the possibility of child welfare caps, lack of job opportunities, and welfare time limits. Strong verbs such as “*Despising Welfare*,” “*Pitying Its Young*,” and “*Beats Welfare*” appear in these headlines. Emphatic adjectives and adverbs such as “*Real Truth*” and “*Every Time*” signal the frustration felt in the political debates surrounding welfare reform.

Editorial-Articles

1994-NYT-The Nation: Despising Welfare, Pitying Its Young

1994-NYT-Wanted Job Readiness

1994-NYT-The Harm in Family Welfare Caps

1994-NYT-The Real Truth of Poverty

1994-NYT-Employment Beats Welfare Every Time

1994-NYT-Self-Deportation?

1995-NYT-What Inner-City Jobs for Welfare Moms?

1995-NYT-Advice from Welfare Mothers

1995-NYT-Welfare Unreformed

1995-NYT-Mayor Giuliani’s Hall Monitors

Of the ten editorial-article headlines retrieved from 1994/1995 addressing welfare mothers, less than half mentioned employment or jobs, while more than half concerned themselves with families, (unwed) mothers, the young, poverty, immigration, and the

question of successful reform. So, while the focus of welfare reform was on work, the news reporting about welfare mothers continued to press the issues of mothers, children, and poverty.

From the first twenty headlines retrieved per year, up to ten articles about welfare mothers were selected. Excluded were editorials, book reviews, play reviews, and letters to the editor which sometimes appeared sprinkled throughout the retrieval data (as shown in the previous table). Therefore, during some years only six to nine actual news articles about welfare mothers were found in the first twenty headlines retrieved. This examination found that these headlines could be loosely divided into five broad categories: 1) general welfare information, policy, and economic impact; 2) work and related issues, wages, and education; 3) housing, food stamps, and medical expenses; 4) children and child support; and 5) stories about welfare mothers' lives, character, morality, reproductive activities, fraud, and so forth. The following table reports article headlines by category and year.

Headlines for First Ten “Welfare Mothers” Articles Retrieved by Subject Category

<u>Year</u>	<u>Policy, Politics, Economic Impact</u>	<u>Jobs, Work, Wages, Education & Training</u>	<u>Housing, Food Subsidies, Medical</u>	<u>Children, Child Support</u>	<u>Mothers, Teen Mothers, Fraud, Reproduction</u>
1988	4	3	0	1	2
1989	2	1	2	1	2
1990	2	0	1	0	5
1991	2	2	0	0	5
1992	3	2	0	0	5
1993	3	1	0	1	5
1994	2	2	0	2	0
1995	4	0	0	1	5

Although a number of headlines addressed work, children, housing, and other important welfare issues, overwhelmingly the number of newspaper headlines (and articles) retrieved concerning welfare mothers focused on issues related to their behaviors, character, dependency, and reproductive habits. Interestingly, these headlines include a number of terms related to quantity, such as “Reducing,” “Adding,” “Degrees,” “Cut,” “Less,” “More,” and “Capped.” Terms of quantity often appear in welfare receivers’ language as noted in the next chapter. In news discourse, quantity is important because welfare discourse concerns itself with numbers of people on welfare and other statistics as well as the amounts of monies dispersed in welfare budgets. Also, terms about personal behavior and characteristics often infiltrate these headlines, for example “Not

Telling . . . Truth,” “Life Reshaped,” and “Self-Esteem” are found in the headlines examined. And terms that address the need to control women’s behavior are also present, including “Anti-Abortion,” “Birth Control,” and “Contraceptive Implant.” These terms infiltrate welfare discourse and indicate a preoccupation of interest in controlling welfare receivers’ behaviors. Further, not only do these terms contribute to the substance of welfare discourse, but their associated concepts participate in the construction of welfare receivers for the general public.

Consequently, it is from this category of news stories that articles were selected. This category opened up the text to the personal aspects of mothers receiving welfare benefits. These stories depicted women receiving welfare in personal terms and quoted them directly, while at the same time were indicative of the way in which welfare receivers found themselves characterized in the news in general. Several articles selected were authored by Jason DeParleⁱⁱ of *The New York Times* because of the proliferation and richness of his news stories about welfare mothers, his obvious expertise and experience with the subject, and the representativeness of his stories to other news stories concerning the subject as a whole.

Social Construction of Welfare Receivers

Welfare receivers are the newsmakers in the following articles about welfare and women. They are socially constructed through the framing and attribution techniques used by the journalists who report on them. That is not to say the welfare receivers are fictions, but that they are social constructions made by the journalists by virtue of the information they chose to include and exclude, by the descriptions and characterizations

they chose to observe and to omit, and by the direct quotations (voices) they chose to recognize or ignore.

News values embedded in news stories are part of how social construction of welfare receivers occurs. Any number of factors are considered prior to selecting what news content will be reported, and news values are part of this selection process. Bell identifies three classes of news values: 1) content, nature of events, actors; 2) news process; and 3) quality of news text (156). Because this study's primary interest is in the characterization and representation of welfare receivers in news stories, its focus is on the first category, which is news content, the nature of events, how the story is told, and the actors in the story. The news value elements Bell identified (some of which he synthesized from other studies) for this category include: negativity (negative events), regency (recent, timely), proximity (geographic relevancy), consonance ("compatibility with preconceptions"), unambiguity (clear supporting facts), unexpectedness ("unpredictable" or "rare"), superlatives (the largest, greatest, expansive language), relevance (pertinence to audience's lives), personalization (personal story not just concepts), eliteness (high profile people and nations), attribution (profile/eliteness of sources), and facticity ("facts and figures" supporting story) (156-158). Of most interest are the categories of negativity, consonance, personalization, eliteness, attribution, and facticity, which are highly represented in news stories about welfare mothers.

The five news stories selected for this section were chosen because they closely represent the kinds of news reports commonly written about women receiving welfare. The first report examines a woman receiving welfare who prostitutes herself to

supplement the meager income she receives from the welfare system. The next report covers a mother, who not only lost her baby, but appears to be lost herself in a world that overwhelms her. The next two stories cover participants in work-related programs, a common activity for mothers receiving welfare. The last story in this section describes the reality of teen pregnancy for a teen's mother who has just recently found her own way out of the welfare system. All of these articles offer opportunities to explore how women receiving welfare are characterized and constructed through the medium of the news story.

The lead is the most important feature of the news story because it abstracts the content of the story to follow. Also, the lead is often packed full of overt news value. Many leads hold information about not one, but two events while at the same time embedding background information (Bell 180-81). The first news story examined has an excellent example of this kind of content-rich compacting of information in the lead. The headline states, "Woman Says Poverty Made Her Abandon Children for a Night of Prostitution," in *The New York Times*, August 17, 1993 (n.a.). The lead reports that a single mother abandoned her children overnight to work as a prostitute in New York City and provides background information that she felt destitute after being "cut off" welfare.

A 25-year-old *single mother* has told the authorities that she left her 7-month-old daughter and 2-year-old son alone overnight and went to work as a *prostitute* in New York City because she needed the money after being cut off from *welfare*. (emphasis mine)

Within the lead, there are three ideologically-charged terms with significant cultural connotative import, especially since they appear collocated: “single mother,” “prostitute,” and “welfare.” As soon as the woman is identified as a single mother on welfare, a host of cultural and ideological meanings become associated with the text—including in this case, the overtly stated abandonment of children and the act of prostitution. The term “prostitute,” for many, conjures up pictures of dark alley ways and forbidden, lascivious activities. Collectively, these terms confirm all the questionable behaviors associated with poor, single mothers, including sexual promiscuity, poor mothering skills, lack of foresight, and no self-discipline.

This news story contains twenty-two paragraphs. The majority of information about the incident itself is attributed to the investigating police officer. In fact, Officer Lennon speaks in seven of the twenty-two paragraphs, nearly one third of the story. Three of the seven paragraphs attributed to Officer Lennon describe his activities in relation to rescuing Ms. Koopman’s children. In the other four paragraphs, he is either indirectly quoting Ms. Koopman or directly characterizing her attitude and behavior, including the subheading “Justifying Her Actions.”

Ms. Koopman came to the precinct about 9:30 A.M. on Saturday “angry, crying and an emotional wreck,” Officer Lennon said.

“I wanted to know where she had been for the last 12 hours,” he said.

“She said she had gone into the city to prostitute herself because she was not getting enough money from social services.”

“She was justifying what she did because she needed the money for the children,” said the officer. “Her attitude was, what’s the problem?”

Officer Lennon said that the children did not appear malnourished or abused. He described the apartment in a three-story house, as very small but neatly kept.

Officer Lennon is given the majority of textual space in the news story. Through the voice of the police officer, Ms. Koopman appears to re-enforce a pejorative depiction of herself as a single welfare mother-prostitute since she displays, according to the officer, an “attitude” of “what’s the problem?” with this kind of behavior, behavior which the middle-classes would deem unacceptable, morally bereft, even criminal.

Additionally, Officer Lennon’s characterization of Ms. Koopman is loaded with evaluative language. He describes her emotional state saying, she was “angry, crying and an emotional wreck.” He interprets her attitude: “Her attitude was, what’s the problem?” He assesses her treatment of her children remarking, “the children did not appear malnourished or abused.” He even appraises her housekeeping skills saying, her apartment was “neatly kept.” Throughout this portion of the news story, Ms. Koopman is being characterized and evaluated through the eyes and voice of the officer.

Further, the journalist describes Ms. Koopman during her appearance in court in four different paragraphs; however, Ms. Koopman’s words were never quoted in complete sentences. They only appeared in brief sentence fragments and phrases.

During her brief appearance at a bail reduction hearing today, Ms.

Koopman stood trembling, twisting and turning her handcuffed hands as

her lawyer, Kirk Brandt of the Legal Aid Society of Suffolk County, told Judge Hertha C. Trotto of District Court that Ms. Koopman had no criminal record and should be released in her own custody.

Ms. Koopman sagged with visible relief when Judge Trotto ordered her released into a probation department program.

She tried twice to address the judge, speaking almost inaudibly in a quavering voice about her wish to recover “my children” and “my possessions,” but fell silent when Judge Trotto advised her to speak to her lawyer before saying more.

Ms. Koopman was wearing the same shirt and pants she wore when she arrived at the station house Saturday morning to claim her children. The names of the children were not released.

At her arraignment, Ms. Koopman told the court she knew she had done “a terrible thing.”

Ms. Koopman is depicted as “trembling, twisting and turning” her hands while handcuffed. She “inaudibly” speaks in a “quavering voice” trying to find a way to request the return of “my children” and “my possessions.” But her voice is silenced by the judge who tells her to “speak to her lawyer before saying more.”

In only one paragraph were Ms. Koopman’s own words completely quoted: “‘I love the kids,’ Ms. Koopman said today after spending the weekend in jail. ‘I didn’t do it for any other reasons than financial reasons.’” Of 617 words in this news story

describing Ms. Koopman's circumstances, her arraignment, and her court appearance, only twenty-two words were actually spoken by her, a mere 3%.

Ms. Koopman's story also brings into play a whole range of "subsidiary authorities" (Foucault, *Discipline* 21). The journalist makes attribution to authority figures other than Officer Lennon throughout this article, including the judge and attorney, the Suffolk County Child Protective Services authorities, and Dennis Nowak of the County Department of Social Services. Even Ms. Koopman's estranged husband is reported to have "asked for custody" of their children. These subsidiary authorities, though not primary sources for determining judgment on Ms. Koopman, contribute to what Foucault would call the "whole machinery" (*Discipline* 21) surrounding the welfare recipient, which hold the right and authority to comment on, categorize, and make decisions about her behavior, her children, and her benefits.

It is not uncommon for government sources, politicians, and other groups to provide information to the press in a slanted form, in an effort to spin the facts to suit their purposes. Journalists, too, participate in shaping a story for public consumption by how they report or frame the story. Outside her home, in the sophisticated world of the media and judicial system, Ms. Koopman is virtually silenced. At the precinct, Ms. Koopman's words and meanings are co-opted by the officer. In court, Ms. Koopman's voice is co-opted by the judge and her attorney. Furthermore, in the public spaces concerned with justice, where Ms. Koopman's voice is reinterpreted or silenced, her body is co-opted by the journalist who notes, "Ms. Koopman was wearing the same shirt and pants she wore when she arrived at the station house Saturday morning to claim her

children.” She is characterized by the judicial system as someone who sees no “problem” with prostituting herself for money, someone defiant, then, appropriately brought to heel by the judicial system through the threat of jail time and the loss of her children.

Foucault in *Discipline and Punishment* describes how, before the nineteenth century, the spectacle of punishment was used as a deterrent to those who thought to commit crimes (8-9). The idea of making visible the aberrant in an effort to make the public conform is common throughout history and underscored by Foucault’s research. The spectacle of Ms. Koopman’s experience is not just news in and of itself, but is information that by its very nature reminds the public of the shame of poverty and the repercussions to those who do not conform to the system. Hence, this story makes visible the anomaly of poverty and the welfare family, re-enforcing stereotypes and supporting the necessity of work for individuals who want to avoid the humiliating circumstances of unemployment and possible destitution.

As Robin Lakoff found in her research for *The Language War*, news stories and other narratives, such as trial narratives, contain “multi-narrativities” or “many stories one inside another . . . that enrich one another and together form a cohesive whole” (224). In the news story about Ms. Koopman we find the following multi-narrativities: 1) the story about Ms. Koopman’s poverty and the choices she makes in an effort to survive (headline and lead), 2) the story about the investigating Officer and his efforts to protect the children and arrest the criminal (the subhead and majority of news text), and 3) the story about the court’s authority to incarcerate or release Ms. Koopman as well as to keep or return her children to her (the news text). In this news story, the officer’s story is

given the most space and authority and attributed *directly* to the officer while Ms. Koopman's story, though it appears in the headline and lead, is presented in the journalist's terms and *indirectly* attributed to Ms. Koopman.

Who is allowed to speak and how their speech is structured is the power held by the journalist and editors (Goffman qtd. in Scollon 231-232). This power translates into discourse that defines individuals, their lives, and their behaviors. It can make those quoted appear ridiculous or credible. As Lakoff notes, the act of defining someone or something is not a neutral one. Did this journalist deliberately use the frame of the officer to negatively construct Ms. Koopman? Did the journalist deliberately compress Ms. Koopman's remarks from sentences to phrases—reducing Ms. Koopman's voice—for negative effect? These are interesting questions, and ones not easily answered. Perhaps, in an effort to provide a story for release, the journalist finds herself forced to give priority to the authoritative voice of the officer who could provide her accurate, verifiable, and cohesive information rather than the voice of Ms. Koopman.

A number of reporters have tracked welfare and poverty issues for years. One of those reporters, Jason DeParle, has written numerous thoughtful, objective, yet sympathetic, stories about people and poverty—and his gift for description is captivating. In his news story, "Those People," in *The New York Times*, December 26, 1993, DeParle describes the complexities and ambiguities of poverty. DeParle's story includes numerous personal anecdotes from welfare recipients as well as social service employees or others in contact with people in poverty—all in some way characterizing those who are poor. His heading "Those People" signals that he is speaking about the "other" in the

same way that Carol Joyce Oates' novel, *Them*, told the story of those who were at the "bottom" of society. DeParle ironically juxtaposes the title "Those People" with the more truthful subhead, "An Unfinished Portrait of the Poor," implying that the portrait of *those people* cannot be complete because their issues are so varied and complex and their remedies remain continually in flux.

Why the complexity in defining the poor? DeParle summarizes the differing depictions of the poor as characterized by those in positions of power and influence, especially politicians and political pundits:

They are oppressed (Jesse Jackson), lazy (Ronald Reagan), and seduced by the welfare state (Charles Murray). They have too many babies, and they have them too soon (Daniel Patrick Moynihan). They need tax relief (Jack Kemp). They need our help (Bill Clinton). They need to help themselves (Bill Clinton again). (Jason DeParle, "Those People")

The news value of eliteness infiltrates this portion of DeParle's news story. DeParle cleverly compresses the complex ideological underpinnings of each high-profile person's position on welfare reform into a cogent sound bite and then attributes it to them. Their differing opinions of the poor and the problems the poor face are then echoed in the opinions of intellectuals, social workers, and the general population. DeParle writes, "Intellectuals sometimes yearn for the moment when people stop making moral judgments about the poor. The issue is poverty, they argue, not morality." When writing about what "most people say," even "if only to themselves," DeParle notes their words come with judgments, "Get a Job! Go to work! Stop having babies!"

One frame constructed by politicians and journalists to characterize welfare reform during the 1990s was work and jobs. According to van Dijk, “[n]ews is not characterized as a picture of reality, which may be correct or biased, but as a frame through which the social world is routinely constructed” (*News as Discourse* 7-8). During the 1990s, the concept of work and jobs permeated welfare reform discourse concerning welfare mothers. In fact, a 1993 headline states, “Counter to a Trend, a Welfare Program in California Has One Idea: Get a Job!” (DeParle). Headlines such as this send political messages to different segments of the public. Moreover, the news values of negativity and consonance infiltrate this statement. The subtext of this headline is that middle-class taxes are going to be lowered and that the poor will be taken off the dole. Indeed, the message to the unemployed is clear. Go to work, with an exclamation point, which emphasizes the anger and frustration felt towards welfare recipients. The discourse import resonates with some readers through the direct imperatives chosen by the journalist. Subsequently, the preconceptions of some segments of the audience who think, “We work. Why don’t you?” find consonance in this headline.

Indeed, consonance is an important feature of news stories. It is the attribute that validates what the reader already believes to be true but may not wish to say. And, even if the average person keeps her opinion to herself, as DeParle says, professionals do not. The journalist reports what a social worker in Indianola, Mississippi said aloud after visiting a client named Betty Briggs. “‘She’s ignorant,’ her caseworker said.” The journalist then characterizes Ms. Briggs himself through first-hand observations:

She had five children, a sixth-grade education, no job, few teeth, a crossed eye, and a boyfriend named T. L. Truitt who boasts of his opposition to birth control. Her five-month-old son, C. L., had just died.

The boyfriend said it was her own fault, for smoking and fighting while pregnant. "This girl can't think," he said.

Betty Briggs smiled passively through two visits, said little, shouldered the blame. Then shared her secret treasure: five dim Polaroids of her son's crib-sized coffin. "I feel like dying myself," she said.

("Those People")

Negativity and consonance dominate this story about a welfare receiver. Ms. Briggs "can't think," she is passive, she smokes and fights, and she feels like "dying." Here is a characterization of a welfare mother that easily resonates with the audience: she has a boyfriend who abuses her, and she failed to take care of herself and lost her baby. These constant portraits of ineptitude, neglect, and abuse re-enforce the negative stereotypes of welfare receivers. Are "those people" indicative of most welfare receivers?

Even poor people criticize other poor people DeParle notes, as he includes Jose Palacio, the night janitor at Penn Station in New York, in his "Those People" story.

Writing that Palacio "does not like the homeless who live there," DeParle reports:

They do not like him either. They mock his earnest, broom-pushing ways.

He holds his nose and wipes the wastes they leave on the bathroom floor.

"Those people live like animals," he said one night. "You can't help them."

Unlike his depiction of Ms. Biggs, the journalist does not provide a physical description of the night janitor, but the journalist does note his “earnest broom-pushing ways,” which sketch a quick picture of the working poor. The story’s frame provides inherent approval of the janitor’s behavior, which applauds the ideology of work, just as it embeds intrinsic disapproval in the depiction of Betty Biggs, whose appearance and behavior appears abnormal.

Continuing his report in “Those People,” DeParle observes, “Some poor people suffer from a lack of jobs and some from a lack of fathers. Some suffer from the color of their skin and some from the constraints on their imagination.” Through the word choices made in his news story, representative of other news stories with similar content, a picture of the poor emerges. Words conveyed or attributed by the elite, such as politicians and academics as well as those who are knowledgeable and professional, objectively describe poor individuals and their circumstances in real terms; words such as “lack,” “color,” “constraints,” “animals,” “ignorant,” “lazy,” “seduced,” and “oppressed,” socially construct the welfare person—and these terms pervade the discussions about welfare recipients, from the White House to academia, from urban dinner parties to suburban barbeques, from journalists on the beat to night workers in railway stations — these terms are part of the vocabulary for describing the poor and, in turn, part of the discourse of welfare reform.

Lakoff in her discussion of discourse describes how repetition begins to equal truth invoking the “Snark Rule,” which she takes from Lewis Carroll’s *The Hunting of the Snark* (61, 101). The Bellman says, “Just the place for a Snark! I have said it thrice:

What I tell you three times is true” (Lakoff 101). Through the repetitive, negative language used to describe people receiving welfare and used as part of welfare discourse in general, the image of the welfare recipient becomes an amalgam of meanings, all coalescing to define her as the other, someone outside, deviant, unnatural, and obdurate.

A number of news stories describe government or privately funded work programs that assist welfare receivers in finding and keeping jobs. Most of these stories attempt to describe work and life from the welfare mothers’ perspective. In these news stories women rarely or only briefly speak for themselves, although thoughts and actions are attributed to them throughout the story narratives. Scollon, drawing on the work of Goffman (1981), Bell (1991), and Fairclough (1992, 1995), examines what he calls the “stakes” in how a news story is written. Scollon notes the “stakes” rest between authorship and principalship in the news story (231-2). Authorship is “the role of giving the actual wordings to the thoughts expressed” or the “how” the words or thoughts are conveyed, while principalship is “what” is said, which is attributed to the newsmaker but characterize by the journalist and gives the journalist their particular style of story writing (Goffman qtd. in Scollon 231-2).

In the first story about work-related programs for welfare recipients, “Taste of Middle-Class Pay,” *The New York Times*, February 10, 1994, Isabel Wilkerson, reports on the Step Up program developed to teach welfare recipients how to work in the construction trades. While the lead and following three paragraphs discuss Charlene Franklin’s new role as breadwinner, it also describes her neighborhood. The one time Mrs. Franklin is directly quoted in this news story, it is a pithy all-American slogan, “The

more you make the more you need.” The characterization of Mrs. Franklin’s life, her neighborhood, and her feelings are all products of indirect voicing by Wilkerson:

At 4:30 in the morning, when no one is up but the drug dealers, Charlene Franklin is pulling herself out of bed. In the darkness of her South Side housing project, she puts on her grimy brogans and yellow hard hat, kisses her six sleeping children goodbye and braves bullets and envy to earn a paycheck beyond a welfare mother’s wildest dreams.

For \$13.52 an hour, Mrs. Franklin paints, plumbs, plasters, scrapes, scrubs, sweeps, hangs doors and lays tile to make abandoned public housing units, stripped by vandals and gang members, habitable again. It is the first real job she has ever had.

She works with a team of other former welfare recipients in a pilot project, Step Up, which uses Federal housing rehabilitation money to train poor residents in construction jobs.

Through the use of adverbial phrases Wilkerson adds background information: “when no one is up but the drug dealers” and “which uses Federal housing rehabilitation money.” Principalship is delegated to Mrs. Franklin, but authorship and the narrative is tightly held by the news writer. According to the journalist, here is a success story of the Step Up program. Indeed, a former welfare recipient, a woman with six children is going to work at a construction site, making a living wage, and becoming the envy of others in the dangerous housing project where she lives. Now, as the subheading that divides this narrative states, Mrs. Franklin has the “Power of a Consumer.” The ideologies of

capitalism, materialism, and consumerism pervade this subheading. Mrs. Franklin's success is that she has become one of the many working consumers. But even with her newly earned power, her voice is barely audible in the text. In fact, a maxim is the only quote directly attributed to her; in the end, Mrs. Franklin's voice is never truly heard.

In the second news story about welfare receivers and a local work program, "Welfare Mothers Find Jobs Are Easier to Get Than Hold," *The New York Times*, February 20, 2004, DeParle reports on the problem of welfare "cycling." This article contains thirty-two paragraphs and characterizes women working through an employment program near Cabrini-Green, a "vast housing project," in Chicago. It also reports about findings by three well-known welfare researchers. In the first six paragraphs the author uses an "ambiguous voice" (Scollon 233) attributing principalship to the poor women he is writing about. For example, the journalist reports that "at the employment program near Cabrini-Green, . . . *many women cite* a complication rarely noted in official debate: jealous interference or even physical assault by boyfriends who felt threatened by the prospect of their independence." Speaking about the women at Project Match, an employment program, the journalist writes, "*Most of the women* complained that the low-paying jobs left them nearly as poor as they had been on welfare But *many* also faulted themselves, lamenting *what they called* their bad attitudes or insufficient drive [emphasis mine]." The journalist retains authorship by using indirect quotation and ambiguously voiced sourcing, such as "most," "many," and "they." And he indirectly characterizes the women through the use of verbs which inherently hold negative connotations such as "complained," "faulted," and "lamenting."

The following segment of this same article finds the journalist interpreting the words of the newsmaker before he quotes her. Part of this style reflects the need he feels to appropriately characterize what the woman is saying, while at the same time, his interpretation becomes the frame from which the newsmaker is socially constructed. Reporting on the personal experiences of three Project Match participants, Roslyn Hale, Vanessa Williams, and Alesia Waits, the journalist devotes four paragraphs to Ms. Hale's story. Ms. Hale's story begins with two long paragraphs of narrative where the journalist describes Ms. Hale's recent difficult work experiences. These are followed by two short paragraphs, which include three short direct quotations from the newsmaker herself. The indirect voice of authorship is heard throughout DeParle's story. The journalist reports:

Sometimes Ms. Hale blames economics for her problems, "All the low-class jobs mostly start for you at minimum wage," she said. And sometimes she blames herself, "I have an attitude," she admitted. But most of all, she stresses that simply landing a job is no guarantee of gaining a foothold on a middle-class life, "I have worked, gotten on aid, worked, gotten off aid," she said, describing the pattern that prevails throughout her neighborhood.

The terms "blame" (used twice) and "pattern" are typical words used in welfare discourse. Welfare receivers are often blamed for their own circumstances, even when economics and opportunity clearly play a role in their lives. And welfare researchers regularly report on "patterns of behavior," including welfare dependency, within poor communities. The claim is not that the journalist deliberately used words to negatively

frame Ms. Hale for his audience, but that the words he uses are loaded with pejorative connotations, especially when used to describe poor women, and therefore, indirectly reinforce stereotypical beliefs about welfare recipients. Also, by choosing the term “admitted” rather than “said” in one instance, the journalist emphasizes rather than neutralizes Ms. Hale responsibility for her attitude towards work.

The final news story in this section concerns a former welfare recipient and her pregnant teenage daughter. Welfare discourse concerning *cycles of dependency* and *patterns of behavior* infiltrate the characterization of the mother and her teen daughter in this story. Katherine Boo’s “Painful Choices: Denise Jordan Is Off Welfare and Loves Her Job. But What About Her Daughter?” *The Washington Post*, October 19, 1997, provides an insightful narrative of a mother, who worked hard to get off welfare, only to find out how precarious her life really was when her teenage daughter becomes pregnant.

“New Jersey prom mom held on suspicion of murder,” the newscaster is saying. “Plus, newborn found dead in Prince George’s County storeroom.” Denise Jordan snaps off the Channel O news. This sweltering supper evening, in the shades-drawn dark of a Benning Road apartment, such stories are best avoided. Tonight, 34-year-old Jordan understands too well the urge to make a baby disappear.

You desk-jockeyed by day, french-fried by night. You sprayed a “Money House Blessing” potion around the apartment, knelt on linoleum to pray. And finally you achieved what the federal government would consider a social policy triumph: You got off welfare, stayed off, and inched up the

socioeconomic ladder. Just in time to see your own teenage mistakes rematerialize in the convex silhouette of your child, to see your whole family—including your youngest, the bright 7-year-old girl now devouring this scene from under the dining room table—stumble back down the ladder.

Boo's use of the second person "you" strengthens the principalship of her attribution to the newsmaker, Ms. Jordan, effectively conveying the feelings of frustration and pain she is experiencing. In the first four paragraphs of this news story, Boo, without a direct quote from Ms. Jordan, characterizes her subject as hard-working and describes her life filled with obligations that are becoming overwhelming, especially since Ms. Jordan's monthly income means her 15 year old daughter's new baby, her second, will not qualify for social support. Throughout the story, Ms. Jordan is quoted, but sparingly, while most of the narration, though indirectly attributed to Ms. Jordan, is indirectly voiced by the journalist. Scollon says that through attribution the journalist not only tells us "that someone said something, but how we are expected to respond" to what is said (223). Boo characterizes Ms. Jordan in such a way that the reader sympathizes with her predicament and sees the complexity in her situation. But the journalist cleverly embeds news value judgment about Ms. Jordan in her description of the problem by embedding background information about Ms. Jordan when describing her daughter: "Just in time to see your own teenage mistakes rematerialize in the convex silhouette of your daughter." Boo's framing of Ms. Jordan once again reinforces the concept of "patterns" of behavior occurring amongst those in the poor community. Embedded in this description, then, is

the news value of negativity, particularly the ideology of dependency that typifies welfare discourse.

Although the newsmakers in the above news reports are women receiving welfare, they are undoubtedly “figure[s] crafted out of the words and characterizations of the journalists” who write about them (Scollon 245). Though their voices are heard, either directly or indirectly, their behaviors, their appearance, and their values are characterized by the journalist who creates the news discourse about their lives. The journalists represent the newsmakers to their audiences in ways that find consonance with the audience’s values and understandings by embedding specific news values in their narratives. When the subject of the story is welfare mothers, their characters are constructed out of the lexicon used by journalists to describe their behaviors, appearances, activities, and surroundings as well as how their own and others’ words are attributed in the text of the story.

News Stories About Welfare Mothers, Families, and Reproduction

Welfare discourse in newspapers is much concerned about illegitimacy, teen mothers, single mothers, absent fathers, and reproductive controls, such as abstinence, birth control, and abortion. Representative news stories proliferate with words and phrases now so much a part of welfare discourse they almost go unnoticed, terms such as those used in “Ideas & Trends; Single Motherhood: Stereotypes vs. Statistics,” by Margaret L. Usdansky, *The New York Times*, February 11, 1996. They include terms such as “traditional family values,” “traditional mores,” and “moral issues,” as well as “out-of-wedlock,” “illegitimacy,” and “unwed women” or “unwed mothers.”

Another feature of stories about single mothers and reproduction is the proliferation of statistics, or what Bell referred to as the news value of “facticity” (158). In Usdansky’s article, she reports “illegitimacy has increased—from 18 percent of births in 1980 to 31 percent today [1996].” The purpose of Usdansky’s article is to discredit those who contend that unwed women are “either affluent, white, college-educated and near the end of their childbearing years or poor, black, teen-age high-school dropouts” who “share a rejection of marriage as a goal” (par. 3). She uses statistics to support her argument. In her discussion she uses the news value category of superlatives to emphasize the size and scope of the data. For example, she writes “Yes, the *vast majority* of women having children outside of marriage are poor or working class and poorly educated”—several paragraphs later, she supports her assertion with more statistics:

Almost 50 percent of births to high-school dropouts occur out of wedlock; among college graduates, the proportion is just 6 percent. Only 1 in 7 unmarried mothers has a family income above \$25,000 the year her child is born; fully 4 in 10 report a family income below \$10,000.

Usdansky presents what she feels is the real picture of unwed mothers and identifies what she believes are the multiple sources of responsibility. She uses statistics, or facticity, to reveal, not only that most unwed mothers are poor and under-educated, but also that they are “diverse,” citing “nearly 40 percent are non-Hispanic white and 54 percent are in their 20’s” (par. 4). The journalist effectively uses facticity to prove that unwed motherhood is not a simple problem or a single issue as some reports have implied, but a complex social subject that crosses race, age, and economic boundaries.

Facticity often is a ready companion of welfare discourse and, as William Raspberry's article suggests, statistics can be used to support any number of related or opposing opinions. William Raspberry, reports in "Vanishing Families, Disposable Men," *The Washington Post*, March 29, 1996, that "statistics contain their own dissertations, providing ammunition to support virtually any theory that comes to mind" (par. 1). Actually, van Dijk notes that statistics are often used by newsmakers to create an "illusion of credibility" whose ultimate purpose is to "legitimize" the "status quo" (Tuchman qtd. in van Dijk, *News as Discourse* 8). Raspberry in his provocative style addresses the duplicity of numbers and addresses another facet of unwed women: unmarried, absent men. His provoking style challenges the audience to view the problem of "vanishing" family values through a different frame. Scollon and van Dijk examine the concept of framing, believing it is key to understanding how attribution works in news stories by allowing the journalist to "position the newsmaker" while at all times retaining power over the story (Scollon 217). Raspberry starts a *reframing* process by using an imperative followed by statistics:

Try this, "In 1975, nearly 77 percent of black women in their late 20s had been married at some time in their lives. By 1990, the corresponding figure was 45 percent—a drop of over 30 points in 15 years."

What can't you make of numbers like those? Or these: The percentage of at-least-once-married black women in their early thirties declined from 87 percent in 1975 to 61 percent in 1990—26 percentage points.

Raspberry challenges his audience to think beyond typical interpretations of the numbers—he challenges the consonance of these numbers, the preconceived notions these numbers would usually imply. “These statistics,” he says, “can be used as grist for virtually any social-policy mill: welfare reform, gender equity, criminal justice, job creation—profound, and not necessarily negative, changes in America’s economics and culture.” But Raspberry, using superlatives, calls them a “disaster—no a series of disasters.” And then he characterizes an outcome of the disaster in terms that he hopes will catch the attention of his audience:

To get one matter out of the way: The statistics on black women merely foreshadow a trend involving white women as well. As is so often the case, if you want to see how black problems would look wearing a white face, just wait a generation.

Raspberry cranks up the negativity factor in the story by warning his audience that this “disaster” is not just a black problem, it is not just a problem of the “other,” but that it is going to be a white problem, too. Raspberry’s assumption (frame) is that the whole country should be concerned about this problem. He continues to build his argument with superlatives and personalization. He states:

But as to the problem now at hand, why do I insist on seeing it in terms of *disaster*? To begin, I doubt that the majority of these never-married women are single entirely by choice. I can’t give you statistics here, but I can tell you from personal experience that an *enormous number* of

eminently eligible black women are single because they can't find comparably eligible black men [emphasis mine].

Using personalization, he directly infuses his opinions and experiences into his piece.

Using superlatives, he would have the reader believe he has met or knows of “an *enormous number* of eminently eligible black women” and also why they are single. His use of the news values of personalization and superlatives enhances his style and engages the reader, even without the facticity to support his assertions.

Raspberry then moves to the causes of the non-marriage problem. Again he begins by asking his audience a rhetorical question, “And where are the men?” Then Raspberry answers his own question, without statistics, presuming audience consonance with his assertions:

In a depressing number of cases they are unemployed, undereducated, in the clutches of the criminal justice system, involved in criminal activity or dead—of violence or of disease, notably AIDS. Moreover, one need only look at the makeup of the college enrollments to see that the proportion of men that might reasonably be considered “eligible” for professional women continues to shrink.

Raspberry uses highly-charged words, such as “violence,” “disease,” and “AIDS” to describe the absence of men—mostly black men—who he assumes are commonly known to be decidedly more represented as a percentage of their racial group as at-risk students in the education system, recipients of communicative diseases, defendants in the criminal justice system, or victims of neighborhood violence. He continues his story by noting the

fact that many women no longer need men as “breadwinners.” He then moves to debunk the myth that out-of-wedlock births is a “predominantly . . . black problem” (Nicholas Eberstadt qtd. in Raspberry) by adding the force of facticity again, quoting from Eberstadt’s report:

‘In 1992, 37 percent of the country’s illegitimate births were black; 63 percent were not.’ Moreover, black teenagers accounted for fewer than one-eighth of the out-of-wedlock births of 1992.

Raspberry’s news story goes through an interdiscursive process. He questions the audience. He interjects his opinions. Attribution for some of his statistics remain ambiguous. He incorporates other texts, such as Eberstadt’s article in *Society* magazine, with direct statistical quotation—leaving the reader to wonder if the ambiguously attributed statistics were from Eberstadt’s article or somewhere else. This kind of dialogic discourse draws the reader into the process of socially constructing identity (Scollon 252). He asks them to recast the “unwed women” problem in new terms—not just in “black” or “white” terms, not just in “women” terms, but in *missing men* terms. Raspberry is not just reporting on the unwed women problem, he is reframing it, and he does so right down to the end of his piece by closing his news story with another rhetorical question, “I look at Eberstadt’s statistics and ask myself: How can we start to make marriage a big deal again?” The subtext to Raspberry’s article is infused with the ideology of marriage and the traditional family, without which disaster is his predicted result.

News Stories Shift Their Focus

By 1996, the year of welfare reform and after, many of the news stories shifted their focus from derogatory depictions of welfare mothers to how women, faced with reform, were adapting to the world of work; what kinds of jobs were they finding, if any, and how were they surviving. Nowhere was this shift clearer than in the headlines. Headlines work to get the readers attention while abstracting “the main event” in the story (Bell 188-9). Former President Clinton’s desire to shift the welfare debate from welfare mothers to jobs appeared to work. Some examples from 1996 and 1997 included headlines from *The New York Times*, such as:

1. “How to Survive Welfare Cuts: Really Trying” (28 April 1996)
2. “Work” (18 Aug. 1996)
3. “Mugged by Reality” (8 Dec. 1996)
4. “As Rules on Welfare Tighten, Its Recipients Gain in Stature” (11 Sept. 1997)

Additionally, from *The Washington Post*:

5. “Welfare: Making the Changes Count” (22 May 1996)
6. “Welfare’s Next Challenge: Sustained Employment” (22 Sept. 1996)
7. “Welfare Shifts Tax Child-Care Funds: As Mothers Seek Jobs, Less Aid Is

Available to Working Poor” (7 Oct. 1996)

8. “Measuring the Welfare Bill” (8 Nov. 1996)
9. “From Welfare to Work” (30 Dec. 1996)
10. “In Welfare Decisions, One Size No Longer Fits All” (30 Jun. 1997)

What are these headlines saying? Welfare women are working. They are “really trying.” But the changes are coming at a price—“making the changes count” means reform does not count if the women leaving the welfare roles cannot get or keep a job that supports them. “Welfare: Making the Changes Count” looks closely at the Wisconsin welfare plan and identifies the many holes in the system—a system that must serve “the average woman on welfare” with “a sixth-grade reading level” and multiple barriers to self sufficiency (Mann). One of those barriers is abuse; Judy Mann cites figures from the Taylor Institute of Chicago who found 51 to 88 percent of women on welfare have been abused or are currently in an abusive situation. For those leaving “an abusive partner,” welfare may be their only, if temporary, hope of survival until they can get on their feet.

Welfare mothers’ are still being examined in the media, but rather than labeling them “lazy” or “promiscuous,” the terms have shifted somewhat to the various barriers poor women face finding and keeping employment. Much is discussed in the news about the costs and problems associated with child care, transportation, and education as well as the availability of jobs. Diana Pearce, director of the Women and Poverty Project at Wider Opportunities for Women (also, according to Mann, the one “who coined the term ‘feminization of poverty’ in 1978”), is quoted as saying, “Women want to be both good mothers and good workers, and right now, they are having to choose between the two” (Mann). The real issues about welfare women gaining and keeping jobs have risen towards the top of the debate replacing many of the negative stories of mothers lacking the will or the incentive to leave their homes and work for their children.

After welfare reform, welfare discourse continued to include concerns about deception and fraud. A few headlines proved that monitoring of funds was still a focus of the new welfare system.

1. “‘Fraud’ for Survival” (15 Nov. 1997)
2. “Welfare Clients Already Work, Off the Books” (3 Nov. 1997)

Welfare fraud or cheating casts itself in a new light with the emergence of forced work requirements that do not always pay enough to support a family. Moral questions invariably emerge about the reporting of supplemental income, and as shown in the next chapter, the definition of truth becomes relative as the question of survival rises to the surface of the new welfare reform system.

Now that the majority of employable welfare receivers have been placed in jobs, new categories and characterizations of the remaining welfare recipients begin to emerge. These welfare recipients have been euphemistically known in the social service world for years as “the hardest to serve.” In “The Clinton Principle,” *The New York Times*, January 19, 1997, Gary Wills reviews the controversial history of Clinton’s welfare reform process. While doing so he references the “undesirables,” those who will be cut off of welfare at the end of their time limit, whether they have found a job or not. According to Wills, they will find themselves homeless and dependent on the kindness of charity organizations.

In another news story, a special report by DeParle, November 20, 1997, he headlines his story with “The ‘Drawer People’—Newest Challenge for Welfare: Helping the Hard-Core Jobless.” These “Drawer People,” characterized as such because they

used to be kept in the bottom of the drawer “while caseworkers focused on the more promising prospects,” are now coming to the surface. These “drawer people” and “hard-core jobless” are the welfare recipients who will not be able to get or keep jobs because of the multiple “barriers to employment” they face, including mental illness, physical illness, disability, addiction, abusive situations, chronically sick children, and any combination of the above or other debilitating factors. Now that the old welfare scapegoats (the “lazy,” “ignorant,” “unwed mothers”) are gone, the news media are finding new ways of characterizing those that remain on welfare rolls as well as uncovering terms that were formerly excluded from their lexicon and kept confined within the walls of the social services offices.

Inferences and Conclusions

Throughout this examination of welfare women’s representations in newsprint, this study found that the women themselves received little opportunity to express their points of view, and when they did speak, their words were often quoted in brief phrases and interpreted or characterized by the journalist or other people of authority acknowledged in the article. Other media studies have found a disproportionate amount of attribution concerning welfare news coming from males and government sources, which was again in evidence in the sample studied here (Laura Flanders). Government sources have long been a source of media content through press releases and their staff press offices. Many times government press reports are printed verbatim, especially interpretations of statistical studies and census data. For the media, status and authority

matter when it comes to attribution. Women receiving welfare are rarely quoted because they lack the moral authority to speak in the elite world of the media.

Many journalists who take welfare as a subject of study have devoted much time to investigating the problems of the poor and show an astute understanding of the overwhelming obstacles the poor face. Van Dijk notes that there is still much analysis needed concerning how journalists go about interpreting news events and “how such interpretations shape his or her reproduction of news events and news discourse” (*News as Discourse* 8). Portrayals of welfare women often reflect the frames of news journalists who are attempting to meet the preconceived expectations (consonance) of the news audience. Welfare reform is inextricably linked to negative characterizations of welfare receivers, which are ubiquitous in the media. Laura Flanders with Janine Jackson and Dan Shadoan in “Media Lies: Media, Public Opinion, and Welfare” in *For Crying Out Loud* explored what they call “the longest running and most beloved myths in the misogynist repertoire,” which are the welfare myths concerning morality, teen pregnancy, and “irresponsible” black recipients as the majority of women on welfare. Demonization of welfare receivers or at least negative depictions of them are so common that they have become the exominated position of many topics about welfare reform—it is a position often reinforced by news reporting and rarely challenged in the press or by politicians.

Ideologically charged language is pervasive in newspaper reporting of welfare receivers; indeed, the ideologies of work, of heterosexual two-parent families, and of care for children are found in many news stories examined as part of this research. Any deviation from these ideologies by the welfare receiver serves to silence her, even if her

behavior results from a direct need to provide for her children. When the welfare receiver is silenced, it is the journalist, the policeman, the social worker, or government agency that speaks on her behalf—all framed by the journalist.

Though there is a marked topic shift to the problems of low-wage work after the 1996 welfare reform law was passed, the concerns about fraud, dependency, and illegitimacy still remained topics of discussion and retained resonance with news audiences. It is commonly accepted that news stories thrive on negativity. Stories about the struggles of welfare receivers proliferate for cultural purposes as well. As we discovered in Chapter II's historical overview of social welfare discourse, the stories about welfare recipients' lives serve as a cultural and ideological warning to others. The subtext to welfare reform news stories is one that elicits fear in those who might consider staying at home rather than working at minimum wage. It serves to make poverty a non-viable option and attempts to force individuals to take any job at hand no matter how poorly it pays or how difficult or nasty the work. It is the voice of the government to the people. And it gives notice to all who read or hear the stories that there is no longer a social safety net for those who cannot find living-wage work.

Notes

ⁱ *The Los Angeles Times* archive retrieved the following number of news stories with the search term “welfare women”: 1990: 35; 1991: 49; 1992: 113; 1993: 61; 1994: 80; 1995: 97; 1996: 64; 1997: 63.

ⁱⁱ As this study was reaching completion, Jason DeParle published an insightful long-term study of three women on welfare and their family histories in *American Dream: Three Women, Ten Kids, and a Nation's Drive to End Welfare*, New York: Viking, 2004.

CHAPTER V

FOUCAULT AND FEMINIST STANDPOINT THEORY: WOMEN SPEAKING THROUGH THE VOICE OF POVERTY

*The language of democracy muffles the voices of poor women and their children that echo in the invisibility of the spaces **we** have constructed for **them**.*

Valerie Polako, Lives on the Edge

Introduction

A number of texts about women in poverty have recently found their way into the mainstream press, many of them describing the problems welfare receivers face when trying to join the workforce. Some of these texts attempt to educate the public about welfare reform in light of the 1990s rancorous debate over welfare time limits. Most describe the overwhelming obstacles mothers in poverty face when they move into low-wage work, leave their children in fragile domestic or public situations, and lose their benefits and social safety net.

In Katherine S. Newman's *No Shame In My Game*, Roberta, Natasha, and Ianna are a few of the women readers meet who are learning how to deal with angry Harlem customers as they work long, tedious hours at a local Burger Barn. In Diane Dujon and Ann Withorn's edited collection, *For Crying Out Loud: Women's Poverty in the United States*, readers learn about Laura, a mother of two out-of-control teenage boys. She is deserted by her husband and subsequently becomes a "good welfare recipient" while constantly struggling to contain the anger of her sons as well as her own growing sense of frustration. In *Hands to Work*, Lynnell Hancock tells the stories of Brenda, Alina, and

Christine, three women from the Bronx who are working their way into self-sufficiency—women who allowed Hancock to study their lives for three years sharing their burdens and triumphs. And there are more.

In *Making Ends Meet: How Single Mothers Survive Welfare and Low-Wage Work*, Kathryn Edin and Laura Lein study welfare families in Boston, Charleston, Chicago, and San Antonio, exploring the real economics of welfare—both reported and not reported—including numerous brief excerpts from welfare receivers describing their own lived experiences. Valerie Polakow, in *Lives on the Edge: Single Mothers and their Children in the Other America*, explores the Western origin of the concept of the “other” that stigmatizes poor mothers and attempts to negate the myths about “motherhood” which influence the welfare debate even today. In the *New York Times* bestseller, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*, Barbara Ehrenreich, a scholar with a Ph.D. in biology, joins the ranks of the working poor in an effort to find out just how difficult it really is to get by on minimum wage employment. She found the effort to be enormous. Virginia E. Schein, in *Working from the Margins: Voices of Mothers in Poverty*, includes the words of women on welfare as she explores their struggles with motherhood, work, and social support.

As these studies show, there is a growing concern by professionals, especially since the 1990s welfare reform legislation, to raise an interest in and investigate what poor women and women receiving welfare have to say about their own circumstances and to explore the possible remedies to their almost insurmountable problems. But my purpose here is not to identify the problems of women in poverty, nor is it to explore

solutions to the issues raised concerning women receiving welfare. Rather, this study seeks to rhetorically examine the discourse of women receiving welfare, and in the process, to identify how the discourse of the more powerful, such as the politicians and journalists we examined in other chapters, bleeds into welfare receivers' voices, their perceptions of themselves and their depictions of others in poverty. It also seeks to find whether women receiving welfare resist the pejorative depictions of themselves as a group, and if they do, how this resistance infiltrates their discourse about themselves and their peers.

To do this, I will use theoretical methods from feminist standpoint theory combined with Foucault's interpretation of *parrhesia* (self-revelatory speech). I believe the combination of these approaches works effectively to evaluate women's discourse, unveiling those hidden meanings, intentions, and subversions in language and experience that sometimes go unnoticed. Discourse is the means by which various ideologies form and perpetuate themselves in our institutional and sociopolitical realms (van Dijk, "Introduction" 7). Foucault's concept of *parrhesia*, especially the facet concerning self disclosure, offers a new way to think about what is confessed and a different perspective for examining relationships of power and their underlying levels of meaning in discourse. At the same time, feminist standpoint theory seeks to uncover that which is not always clearly present by searching for the common place(s) in the discourse of those who are speaking. Together, these theoretical concepts offer a unique way of uncovering what is occurring in welfare receivers' discourses with a focus on the idea that self-disclosure/confession may be a form of resistance.

Consequently, this chapter will examine the discourse of poor women searching for commonalities of experience, acknowledging that the expression of experience, their acts of confession and self-disclosure, the actual discourse choices they make, particularly those related to agency, will be integrally connected to and indicative of their standpoint. Further, this chapter will explore the extent to which the characterizations of welfare receivers in political speeches or newspaper stories infiltrates the women's individual language choices for describing themselves and their group.

Overview of Foucault's Approach to *Parrhesia*

Foucault's lesser known work, *Fearless Speech*, is a compilation of notes from his lectures on *parrhesia*, a word that first appears in Western texts, according to Foucault, in the fifth century B.C during the time of the ancient Greeks. *Parrhesia*'s meaning in English is basically "speak[ing] the truth" (11). *Parrhesia* implies an environment of risk and a particular social situation. An example of *parrhesia* might be a king's counselor speaking to the king against a policy the king is supporting. Another example could be a person speaking to a friend against a wrongful act they have performed and thus risking the loss of the friendship. In both cases, the person speaking the truth has something of value to lose. In the former case, it may be the counselor's life; in the later case, it may be the loss of a valued friend.

In his research of Greek texts, Foucault reports that he finds the *parrhesiastes* always believes he is in complete "possession" of the whole truth. Foucault points out the difference in "truth-having" between the time of the Greeks and the period after Descartes. Cartesian logic requires empirical evidence before something is believed to be

true. For the Greeks, when a person possesses “certain moral qualities: then that is the proof that he has access to the truth—and vice versa” (15). Also, just the fact that someone displays the “*courage*” to speak out, for the Greeks, is considered “a kind of ‘proof’ of the sincerity of the *parrhesiastes*” (15).

In his lectures, Foucault identified other components essential to *parrhesia*. One is the component of frankness, in which the speaker publicly takes responsibility for his own words. By frankness, Foucault also means that the speaker tells the whole truth, withholds nothing, and maintains no hidden agendas. Additionally, there is an element of danger. The speaker has something at stake when speaking the truth, but his moral conviction is stronger than his fear of loss, even the loss of his life.

Another component of *parrhesia* is criticism. This criticism can be aimed at an interlocutor or at the speaker himself (17). When aimed at the interlocutor, it is a kind of judgment of the actions or thinking of the interlocutor. When aimed at the speaker himself, it is a type of confession given to someone who is in a position of authority over that of the speaker. Finally, there is a component of duty to *parrhesia*, whereby the speaker feels it his duty to tell the truth, whether it be to admonish the behavior of someone in authority, or confess a crime “out of a sense of moral obligation” (19).

According to Foucault, these components infiltrate the concepts and embodiment of the *parrhesiastes* in Greece and are represented in Greek culture in the following ways:

- (1) the philosopher had to discover and . . . teach certain truths about the world . . .
- (2) [the *parrhesiastes*] tak[es] a stand towards . . . political institutions . . . [which] required a political role . . . [and]
- (3) *parrhesiastic*

activity also endeavor[s] to elaborate the nature of the relationship between truth and one's style of life. (106)

As Foucault points out, the concept of *parrhesia* infiltrated the language of Christianity from its inception and is especially evident in the notions of “conversion,” confession, and rebirth (106). For Foucault, there is little difference between the personal conversion of an individual and the call to change voiced by a *parrhesiastes* (106). What is important to Foucault is the “complex set of connections between the self and truth” which result from the practice of *parrhesia* (107). Foucault states, “For not only are these practices supposed to endow the individual with self-knowledge, this self-knowledge in turn is supposed to grant access to truth and further knowledge” (107). The idea of self-knowledge as a prerequisite for enlightenment—or “the truth”—according to Foucault, “has been one of the problematic enigmas of Western Thought,” handed down to us across the centuries (107). As the concept of *parrhesia* becomes more philosophical, Foucault finds it involves a close connection with human relationships concerning “small groups” and formal/informal relationships in public life as well as “individual personal relationships” (107).

Foucault explores the connection of *parrhesia* to rhetoric, tracing their opposition to each other in the *Gorgias* of Plato, noting that the “dialogue is a major technique for playing the *parrhesiastic* game” (20). Rather than speeches, “personal conversations are the best vehicle for frank speaking and truth-telling” (21). In personal conversations, rhetorical devices can, to varying degrees, be discarded, pretensions lessened, and the truth somewhat more freely told.

In the end, Foucault's exploration of *parrhesia* led him to what he calls the two sides of the "problematization of the truth": first, how we go about gaining access to the truth and second, "[w]hat is the importance for the individual and for the society of telling the truth, of knowing the truth, of having people who tell the truth, as well as knowing how to recognize them?" (170).

As Foucault traces the evolution of the term *parrhesia*, he identifies its use in Philodemus' text, where Philodemus remarks about community meetings where "mutual confessions" occur:

Some of the fragments [of Philodemus' text] indicate that there were group sessions or meetings where each of the community members in turn would disclose their thoughts, faults, misbehavior, and so on. (114)

This interpretation of *parrhesia* brings to mind the early feminist's consciousness raising groups, where well-educated women seeking to find and explore the restraints on their lives met to explore their shared experiences. Much of their self-exploration was aimed at examining their own concepts concerning gender, motherhood, and patriarchy in an effort to break the limitations of choice they were experiencing in their lives, homes, communities, and professional environments.

What I would like to explore with the following narratives from the personal conversations (informal interviews) between social service workers and women receiving welfare is *parrhesia* in the form of confessional truth telling by women receiving welfare. This *parrhesia* is not just a confession that attempts to reveal the truth, but also one that explores truth's many facets in an effort to provide insight for the speaker about herself

or others in her community. In these interviews, the speaker could feel she has much to lose in self disclosure—should she tell too much or perhaps even offend, her family benefits could be at risk, for she is speaking to a social worker who helps to determine the validity of her case, hence her eligibility for welfare benefits.

In this study, I am seeking to expand or shift the definition of who legitimately claims the floor to speak as a *parrhesiastes* to one beyond that of the Greeks' moral man. This exploration seeks to legitimate the voice of those on the margins, the voice of the "other," the voice of poor women as *parrhesiastes*. To help extend *parrhesiastic* authority to these women I will draw on some assumptions inherent to feminist standpoint theory.

Feminist Standpoint Theory

As Sally J. Kenney points out in her introduction to *Politics and Feminist Standpoint Theory*, negotiating the labyrinth of schools of feminism and views of standpoint theory is sometimes "a tricky business" for feminist scholars, teachers, and students resulting in "disagreement about interpretation and meaning" (1). Standpoint theory was first named by Nancy C. M. Hartsock in her seminal 1983 essay, "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism," drawn from the Hegelian or Marxist-feminist tradition (Cole 87; Hundleby 27). Since Hartsock's essay much redefinition and theoretical expansion of feminist standpoint theory has occurred. Thorough reviews, explications, and/or application of feminist standpoint theory can be found in the research of scholars such as Eve Browning Cole, Patricia Hill Collins, Nancy C. M. Hartsock, Sandra Harding, Nancy J. Hirshmann,

bell hooks, Catherine Hundleby, Sally J. Kenney, Glen McClish and Jacqueline Bacon, Dorothy E. Smith, and Katherine Welton to name a few. This study borrows heavily from this prior scholarship and wishes to acknowledge its indebtedness to the groundbreaking work of these scholars. In recent scholarship, I found Cole's definition of feminist standpoint theory captures the essence of its import to this study:

The basic assumption [of standpoint theory], originating in a Hegelian or Marxian view that the human self is essentially shaped by its material activities and situation, is that women's lives have differed from men's lives in ways that would construct clear differences in their respective world views and self-concepts. . . . women's 'ways of knowing' may be expected to be no less real than men's, but they are also quite likely to be very different from what traditional epistemology has supplied from the white men's standpoint.

Feminist-standpoint epistemologies seek to uncover and describe women's knowledge-making activities as these have originated in and been shaped by women's daily work and women's values. This project is in part discovery and in part creation, for while some aspects of women's experience readily yield epistemic material, in many dimensions women's activities have been so thoroughly relegated to the unscientific, the nonintellectual, the natural, and so forth that the epistemological scheme or belief and value structure into which they fit must be constructed. (86-7).

It is also helpful to recall Cole's four "ground rules" of feminist philosophy as one explores the various strands of standpoint theories and feminist epistemologies. Cole, not

intending to homogenize or essentialize feminist theory, gives feminists four ground rules concerning feminist philosophizing:

Rule 1: All our thought processes must be grounded in social and historical reality . . . [with an] aware[ness] of the ways in which certain individuals or groups are implicitly excluded from the discourse. . . .

Rule 2: Take experience seriously, including the experience of feeling, emotions, and perceptions.

Rule 3: Look carefully for nontraditional sources of philosophical insight, for cultural artifacts created . . . [by individuals without access to academia and other] institutionalized modes of philosophical expression . . .

Rule 4: Always bear in mind the social and political implications of your theories and other philosophical activities; these will be . . . truest to the over-arching goals of feminism when they are geared toward social reform or liberatory change for all peoples. (14-17)

This study's use of feminist standpoint theory to analyze welfare receiver's language incorporates these ground rules by seeking ways in which women receiving welfare are historically situated and excluded from the discourse that shapes their lives, by examining the linguistic artifacts of welfare receiver's language, legitimizing their feelings and perceptions, recognizing the value of their individual and collective knowledge of the world in which they live, and by contributing to the body of scholarship concerning women in poverty which seeks to reform the position of women in poverty within our society.

Introduction to Data Examination

The data analyzed consists of interviews conducted with 209 people in 50 communities in 19 states across the country between April and June 2000. These interviews were conducted by affiliates of the national network of the Alliance for Children and Families. The interviews consisted of questions by social worker staff soliciting open-ended responses (narratives) by women clients who were impacted by the 1995/96 welfare reform rules. The Alliance for Children and Families identify their clients as “authors,” a label indicative of their respect for the people they serve and interviewed. Others identify women receiving welfare as “welfare-reliant” (Edin and Lein) or “welfare receivers.” These are deliberate semantic choices made by social welfare scholars to ameliorate the language used to name welfare recipients. Women receiving welfare are in fact not “welfare women,” but women who qualify for support from the public welfare system.

For the *Faces of Change: Personal Experiences of Welfare Reform in America* publication, the Alliance selected 100 narratives from their database of 209 interviews conducted between March and June 2000 and believed their interviewed authors are representative in “overall social and economic profile” to those people studied in other quantitative studies concerning welfare reform (Lengyel 16). The Alliance noted that transcription of interviews by social workers was conducted “without editing, corrections, or polishing” in an effort to factually represent the “color and context” of the discourse (16). The editors did add commas, periods, dashes, and ellipses to clarify what they

identify as midstream changes in direction, phrasing, and pausing by authors and interviewers (17).

Subsequent to publishing *Faces of Change*, the Alliance published *Faces of Change Analysis: Welfare Policy Through the Lens of Personal Experience*. As noted by the Alliance, much of the welfare research conducted since 1995 has been quantitative and performed by organizations such as the Brookings Institution, the Urban Institute, the Manpower Development Research Corporation, and the Children's Defense Fund (Lengyel and Campbell 3-4). The Alliance chose to conduct their original study in narrative form believing that they would gain important insights into the lives of the women interviewed more directly through the women's own words (*Analysis* 4). In their analysis of the narratives, the Alliance team used standard practices for qualitative research and systematically identified "naturally recurring conceptual categories" through a process call "open coding" (Lofland and Lofland qtd. in Lengyel and Campbell, *Analysis* 6). The result is the *Analysis* text, which identifies and discusses certain shared experiences and concerns recurring throughout numerous women's narratives, including such items as: the on-going and tenuous conflict between work and family, the paucity and inadequacy of most training programs, transportation obstacles and barriers, as well as health and mental health problems of both women and their children.

The Alliance *Analysis* is crucial to a clearer understanding of the comprehensiveness and complexity of the barriers women face when trying to raise themselves out of poverty as are other studies such as the recent work by Sharon Hays, *Flat Broke with Children: Women in the Age of Welfare Reform* (2003). As these studies

prove, there are some welfare receivers who will need overwhelming support to enter the workforce or may never be able to sustain employment because of multiple significant barriers. As the Alliance *Analysis* points out, one third of the welfare population has health or mental health problems that significantly impair their ability to join the workforce (Zedlewski qtd. in Lengyel and Campbell). Other government and local-level studies report from 4 to 59 percent of welfare mothers experience mental illness that interferes with their ability to work (Hays 156). Even those who do find work experience difficulty earning a wage that puts them above the poverty line and have little to no safety net to assist them with sick children, childcare, transportation, healthcare, or economic fluctuations.

The impetus behind the 1996 welfare legislation was to incite new behaviors in the welfare population, as a “corrective to who they are—or, more accurately, who we think they are” (Lengyel and Campbell 114). Many believe it focused not on finding solutions to social inequities and economic issues that result in poverty, but rather on blaming the morals and ineptitude of individual women for their dependence on welfare (Hays 125). This is nothing new. As we saw in Chapter II, there is historical precedence for blaming and shaming individual poor people for their misfortune and mistakes.

In this chapter, the interest is not in who we (media, politicians, public) think welfare mothers are, but in *who they think they are*, especially after the onslaught of the 1996 corrective action, and how they define themselves and their lives in relation to the dominant culture. Again this study’s purpose is not to examine the narratives of the authors to present social policy recommendations or draw conclusions about the needs of

women in poverty as a result of changes to welfare reform laws (Lengyel and Campbell), nor is it to explore cultural norms and values rooted in welfare law (Hays); rather, this study searches the discourse components of the women's narratives to discover how they retain or relinquish personal agency and meaning-making rights within the defining narratives of their lives. Also, this examination seeks to uncover how welfare women have appropriated or relinquished power from the system through language: how they described their conflicts with the system, whether they blame the system or themselves for their circumstances of poverty, and whether their language remains defiant or they reluctantly acquiesce control to the system.

Analysis of Data

Interview Questions

Some social workers "used the story collection form" for their interviews. In these cases the data collection results in an interview "turn taking" format. In a few instances, social workers discard this format and the authors' answers appear in a narrative, "unsegmented" form (Lengyel 17).

Authors were free to answer general questions as presented by their interviewers verbally or in written form. For this study, after reviewing all the narratives in the Alliance database, I selected ten narratives from four states in different regions of the country for examination. All selections were tape recorded and transcribed. Also, they offered examples of both self-disclosure and resistance. Although some men and couple interviews were included in the Alliance data, for this study, only women's narratives were used. The women's races varied as did their ages. During the Alliance interviews,

questions were read or paraphrased by the field social worker and related to experiences concerning pertinent facets of the women's lives including: job training, employment, child care, transportation, health, healthcare, and expectations for the future (Lengyel 16-17).

Analysis of the Responses

Self-Disclosure Discourse

Carol Gilligan, in her well known work, *In a Different Voice*, notes “that the way people talk about their lives is of significance, that the language they use and the connections they make reveal the world that they see and in which they act” (2). The question that seems to offer the greatest opening for the interviewed women to disclose personal information about themselves usually comes toward the end of the interview and asks them about their own emotional well-being or how they have been feeling recently. For an example of self-disclosure, I have selected an author, WA-11, who opens up her life and discloses very personal information that helps the interviewer (and reader) to understand why she suffers from chronic migraine headaches and finds it difficult to handle any level of work-related stress. As shown in WA-11's discourse, the world she lives in is violent, abusive, and frightening. It is a world beyond her control. Her response to it is one of repression and anger—and it infiltrates her discourse. But her discourse also reveals an effort at self-examination and in the interview segments we analyze, there is evidence of her desire for self-disclosure and a possibility of self-realization.

When WA-11 was asked about her current state of emotional well-being, her response begins with laughing, signaling her struggle to speak:

WA-11: [laughs] Okay, well, are you ready for bitching and griping—which is what mostly I been doing is bitching and griping about things.

Um—my emotional well-being sucks at the moment [laughs].

Laughing is used by WA-11 to disguise nervousness or discomfort with the question about her emotional well-being. She also hedges with “Okay, well,” and “Um.” Maybe the author does not believe the interviewer really wants to know her problems. In fact, she labels her own “feelings” as “bitching and griping,” de-legitimizing her own thoughts and feelings. The interviewer attempts to show real interest in her answer, asking her to clarify what she means by her response and then says, “Tell me what ‘sucks’ means.” By reiterating the author’s word “sucks,” the interviewer creates an inter-speaker cohesive tie with the author, which is indicative of “cooperativeness” and “contributes to a sense of engagement” encouraging the author to continue her revelatory discourse (Johnstone, *Discourse* 103). The interviewer’s cohesive tie facilitates self-disclosure in the author’s discourse.

Meredith L. Ralston in “*Nobody Wants to Hear Our Truth*”: *Homeless Women and Theories of the Welfare State* interviews addicted homeless women. She notes that the homeless women she interviewed were trying “to gather their thoughts and relate their painful experiences” for the first time in their lives (xii). They struggled to find the words to express their thoughts and experiences in what Ralston calls a “disturbing discovery process” (xii). This same kind of process is occurring in WA-11’s response.

She begins with hedging and pauses, a sign of powerlessness and uncertainty, but she eventually speaks, and she tells a story that begins to unravel the extent of the struggle she faces in managing her life:

WA-11: Yeah, um—I mean, certainly—having to move like this, I’m, it, I am so angry and I’m really upset. I’m very, very, very upset about it, so that, you know, it’s been stressing me out. Um—[sigh], I’ve also um—I ended up, last—was it last—? I guess it was last year, late December, January, was when I finally ended up in Seaside Psych and um—in my family, um—you deal with things; you handle it, you don’t talk about it—you just, take, you know—somethin’ bad happens, you take it, you forget about it, you put it away, okay.

Besides hedges and pauses, “um—I mean” and “Um—[sigh], I’ve also um—I ended up, last—was it last—,” the author uses other discourse often associated with disempowered individuals (often women) such as repetition and intensifiers, “very, very, very upset” and “really upset” as well as tags, such as “okay.” The author begins her response in the first person, but when she approaches the point in her narrative where the content moves toward a traumatic, personal experience, she shifts to second person plural, describing how her family handles personal problems—she depersonalizes the experience by switching from first person to second person as she describes the credo her family lives by: “you take it, you forget about it, you put it away.”

As the author continues her response, she returns to the first person to describe what happened to her. Note the continued use of the repetitive intensifier “reeeeeely.”

Also, she includes tags such as “you know” as an attempt to connect and gain acknowledgement from her interviewer, plus she repeats the tag “I mean” in an effort to constantly clarify her meanings, connoting lack of confidence and insecurity.

WA-11: I got reeeeeely, reeeeeely, reeeely good at that, really good at that.

And um—then I started like shaking uncontrollably and um—having black outs again. I’d been molested as a child and raped several times—. Last time I was raped, was um—Alex’s 11, so 12, maybe 12 years, 12—and the guy bashed my head in and um—I had black outs a lot, and um—a lot’ta times I um—there’s, I mean I had ta relearn things, like what color light to cross the street at, um—. I have a hard time reading clocks—digital clocks—I have a really hard time, you know, figuring out spatially, you know, if it says 5:16, I hav’ta like [squints eyes, cocks head], you know [laughs]. It’s, so there’s, there’s things like that that I do. I do have problems with—every, once in a while something will crop up and I’ll just have like a total blank.

In this segment, WA-11 struggles with speech and clarity. When someone is abused, accosted, or oppressed, they may struggle to name the person or entity that has oppressed them, often because of conflicting feelings about their own culpability in the oppression (Wood and Kroger). Linda A. Wood and Rolf O. Kroger’s analysis of rape victims found that women victims of date rape often struggled to actually name what has happened to them. In their study, many times date rape victims appeared conflicted in their efforts to construct their sexual experience, especially wrestling with how to frame their experience

as either “date” or “rape” (123-125). In WA-11’s case, even though the ellipses and hedges in her discourse evidence her difficulty in describing her experiences leading up to her current condition, the author overcomes them and discloses the truth about her life. She discloses she has experienced multiple rapes, including one which was so violent it left her with black outs and spatial difficulties. There are six ellipses alone during the section about the rapes. She says she has been raped several times and then fails to elaborate, giving us no knowledge of the number of times, how old she was each time, or the relationship to her of the rapists. Instead, she moves directly to the last rape which left her disabled. Here, too, she leaves gaps in time, and she leaves out details of what happened to her. According to Wood and Kroger, this kind of omission is not uncommon for victims of sexual assault. The important thing to note is that WA-11 actually discloses the rapes—an act that takes courage—an act of truth-telling and self revelation.

The author continues her story describing her problems cooking, filling out paperwork, and other everyday activities most people commonly perform. But these problems, though disabling, are not what landed her at the Seaside Psychiatric facility:

WA-11: So, when I finally ended up in Seaside Psych because I started, I was shaking so bad I couldn’t, I just couldn’t control the, the trembling, um—and basically what it was was a wake up call, saying you can no longer repress things, you know—. I’d, I’d gone to see a shrink and it was like, you know, I’d pretty, like skirt issues and I got really good at doing that.

She continues with her discussion of her experience with her therapists outside and inside the Seaside Psychiatric facility. Then she returns to her concern about having to move from her residence at the request of the new landlord, and her problems controlling anger. Again she uses repetitive intensifiers such as “reeeeely, reeeely, reeeely,” “very,” and “extreme” as well as tags such as “you know” and “I mean.” She also uses popular vernacular such as “totally” and “it’s like”:

WA-11: And I don’t deal with stress very well, I’m just, I just don’t deal with stress very well. So, um, you know, I’m trying really hard to maintain control and it’s an extreme struggle, it’s a reeeely, reeeely, reeeely hard struggle for me. And especially being angry, I mean I, it’s like, when I move man, I’m takin’ the lights, takin’ the light sockets, I’m takin’ the shower knobs and if he [new landlord who’s making her move] wants this place—if he thinks I’m cleaning this place up, he’s outta his mind, I’m not doing it, you know. And it’s like totally ghetto and totally you know, um—vengeful, you know, I’m a vengeful bitch [laughs]; I admit it, I am a vengeful bitch, you know. And I, and I keep saying, well, you know a politely, I really, you know, shouldn’t feel like that and I should—you know, I really should clean up and do all that kinda shit, but you know, fuck ‘em, you know—he doesn’t give a shit about me, so why should I; you know, he can, he can clean up himself. . . . I can be such a such a hard nosed bitch about about things like that, you know, but I, I

think what it is, is he's, he's uprooting my family and I really resent that, um—.

The author lives in a paradoxical world of contradiction where agency is continually vying with uncertainty. On the one hand, when she was raped, she believed she should “take it” and “move on.” On the other hand, when the landlord says he is making her move out, she threatens to trash the apartment after she leaves, a kind of “ghetto” quid pro quo. In this segment, the author uses declaratives and commissives (Searle qtd. in Chimombo and Roseberry) in which she both warns about and commits herself to future actions, showing *her* agency and *his* powerlessness to stop her: she is taking lights, light sockets, and not cleaning up after she moves. Although, she indicates her personal power in labeling herself a “vengeful bitch,” she also pauses, hedges, and makes use of repetition, common discourse markers associated with powerlessness. She feels powerless against the landlord’s eviction, but she is not silenced. Her self-deprecating language acknowledges another world where her way of behaving would not be acceptable, but that is not her world. Further, the author uses the modal “should” numerous times as part of her rationale of resistance, as she struggles with a dilemma of vengeance: trashing her rented apartment or leaving it in presentable condition after she moves. The modals (“should”) and conjunctions (“but”) additionally show covert agency and resistance to ideology—the ideology of care and respect for other’s property—an ideological component of capitalism. In other words, for WA-11, the landlord becomes a stand-in for the *system*, a system that she deliberately tries to resist.

Based on WA-11's language, Mary Field Belenky et. al. would categorize the author as a "received knower"—an individual who lives in a world of "sharp dichotomies and intolerance of ambiguities" (46). Others might discard her discourse finding it lacks the moral high ground necessary to identify it with *parrhesia*. But I believe the author is performing *parrhesia*—a *parrhesia* of the "other." As Ralston notes, the process of speaking about one's self for the first time, is a discovery process of searching for the right language to describe painful experiences. Self-disclosure requires courage. In the case of WA-11, I believe her discourse reveals she is exploring her life, her thoughts, and her behavior through "truth telling" discourse in an effort to understand herself, her feelings, and her future. When it comes to protecting her family, she recognizes some of her behavior might make her appear to be a "vengeful bitch" or a "hard nosed bitch." She knows she "shouldn't feel like that . . . [and] should clean up" the apartment when she leaves—she is switching frames in this section of the discourse, viewing herself through the eyes of the dominant culture. Then she returns to her frame, the indignant poor mother, fighting back, striking out, in an effort to defend her family. She is discovering and disclosing herself to the interviewer through her *parrhesiastic* discourse, recognizing and discoursing about her faults and weaknesses. Though she recognizes her behavior may be outside the norm, she is unable or unready to ameliorate it.

When lecturing on "solitary self-examination," Foucault analyzes Seneca's work, *De ira* ["On Anger"]—(an interesting and ironic coincidence considering the text we have just examined and the issues with anger that WA-11 has experienced). Foucault quotes from *De ira* as Seneca describes Sextius' habit of examining his daily behavior

every evening. Sextius says, “I conceal nothing from myself, I omit nothing. For why should I shrink from any of my mistakes, when I may commune thus with my self?”—Sextius performs this daily ritual in an effort to “purify his soul” (*Fearless Speech* 145-6). When WA-11 speaks to her interviewer she also attempts to conceal nothing, and she does not shrink from her mistakes. The author speaks in the discourse of poverty, flecked with profanity, hedges, ellipses, repetitions, and an overt subtext of repressed anger, rather than Seneca’s erudite discourse of the elite citizen. She speaks in the hesitant, exploratory, and discovery speech of women trying to relate painful childhood and adult life experiences. She speaks in the circular recidivistic discourse of women trying to make sense of their lives. She is examining and judging her own thoughts, labeling herself through the frame of the dominant culture, identifying what is right behavior and wrong behavior, concealing nothing, not her rapes, not her time at the psychiatric hospital, not her anger towards her landlord, not her condemnation of herself. Through this process of self-examination, self-disclosure, and truth-telling, she is attempting to discover and define herself and her life. The author is far from Sextius’ point of purifying his soul—for she lives on the outside margins of that kind of discovery. But she is attempting the process of self-disclosure even though her speech is halting, broken, and limited—and through self-disclosure she is beginning a process of self-discovery.

Resistance Discourse: Contradictory Realities, Oppression, and the System

Feministsⁱ have actively explored and explicated the “built in biases and assumptions” associated with women and the welfare system and the institutions that

carry out its work (Ralston 151). As Ralston notes, “feminists argue that welfare services reinforce the sexual division of labor in the home and in the workplace, and assume women’s economic dependence on men within a traditional nuclear family” (151). Feminists, according to Ralston, believe these assumptions are intricately woven into the fabric of the welfare system. Feminist empiricism seeks to expand and reform social science studies associated with women in an effort to confront social biases which distort assumptions and perpetuate “stereotypes” inherently influenced by patriarchal, capitalistic, and ethnocentric ideologies (Collins 253-56; Harding, *Whose Science* 109; Hundleby 35; Cole 84-86). To paraphrase Hundleby, the way feminist empiricism becomes a standpoint involves both the expansion of the subjects of study and the recognition that certain important insights can only be gained through “resistance to the conditions of marginalization” (35).

In this section, I seek to follow the lead of feminist standpoint theorists by examining welfare women’s discourse searching for ways in which women in poverty construct their own identity, represent solidarity with others in or outside their group, and categorize, define, or blame the system they depend upon for assistance. I will continue to use a Foucauldian lens, drawing on the work of Roland Bleiker, who, as Smith, Hartsock, and Harding, sees resistance in “seemingly mundane daily practices” (34). Daily practices offer sites of resistance, and rhetorical strategies used in these sites might include such actions as “speaking,” “laughing,” “gossiping,” and even deception (34). According to Bleiker, de Certeau cautions us to pay particular “attention” to how individuals try to “manipulate and evade the mechanism of discipline” (34). In the

interviews that follow, we find discursive clues that show how welfare receivers attempt to resist the “mechanisms of discipline” that oversee their everyday lives.

Women in poverty suffer oppression, certainly. For many there are multiple levels of oppression including race, gender, and class. As Patricia Hill Collins discusses in *Black Feminist Thought*, finding one’s voice, defining oneself, and resisting the systems of domination are difficult steps for oppressed people to take.ⁱⁱ Women in poverty are clearly an oppressed class, often facing numerous sources and multiple levels of oppression. These women find themselves immersed in a culture of poverty and deprivation; sometimes they are women of color or recent immigrants, and many live with mental illness or physical disabilities. However, even while facing oppression, a number of these women find their own voices, construct their own identities and realities as either victims or agents of change or both, and align themselves with others in their group to resist the dominant culture’s depiction of them as worthless, lazy, and promiscuous members of a “culture of poverty” (Danziger and Haveman, Ellwood, Gans, Hays, Katz, Lengyel and Campbell, Wilson).

The following discourse from WA-11 reveals the contradictions that govern the lives of poor women when dealing with the system:

WA-11: All the government agencies. You hav’ta lie; you hav’ta fudge; you hav’ta um—you know, it’s like technically, when my friend was staying here, I couldn’t, I wasn’t qualified for food—for a food card [food stamps]. So, I had to just say that, we had to say that she was homeless and that she wasn’t actually living here, that she was just using my place

as an address um—and, and so, therefore, that was the only way she could get a card [food stamps card], was saying that she was homeless and, and so she would hav'ta go through the same thing since, she couldn't use my address as a place for saying that she was living here, is she, 'cause if anybody found out that she was actually living here, then—even, apparently, even if you have somebody that stays, just comes to visit, technically, that means that you hav'ta report that to them and that they will reduce the amount of money that you get, okay.

WA-11 has taken control of her situation and circumvented the system to gain what she needs to make ends meet. As standpoint theory explains, the material reality of a person's life influences the construction of her world-view and self-concepts (Cole 86-7). Although WA-11 took the steps she felt were necessary to secure a food card, a closer examination of her language and her use of modals reveals she lives in a world where she feels little responsibility for the actions she thinks she is forced to make. She states:

1. You hav'ta lie; you hav'ta fudge; you hav'ta um—you know, it's like
technically . . . you hav'ta report that to them
2. you hav'ta go
3. So, I had to just say that
4. we had to say

The multiple modals of “hav'ta” and “had to” connote the elimination of personal agency. She lives in a world where she can only react to the system, not influence or change it. But she can subvert it. Robin Lakoff in *The Language War* examines how

jurors sometimes make decisions that seem to run counter to “the letter of the law” because they feel that in a particular case the law is unrealistic or unfair (210). Lakoff describes these kinds of decisions as “nullifications” (210). However, when a jury or person rejects the whole system (e.g. the whole legal apparatus as in the O. J. Simpson verdict), Lakoff calls it “metanullification” (211). Metanullification “denies” the idea that people share the same concepts of society resulting in questions about what words mean causing language to be unstable and therefore open to negotiation (211). In a similar vein, Henry Louis Gates Jr. identifies “counternarrativities” in the black community, whereby people reject the version of reality defined and perpetuated by the dominant community and instead create their own history and way to interpret the world (105-107). Along the same line, Roland Bleiker discusses how a Foucauldian approach to situations people encounter might include circumvention of “existing rules by engaging in ‘resourceful, albeit localized, resistance to the terms of daily life’” (Kotkin qtd. in Bleiker 36).

In WA-11’s case, the whole concept of truth becomes negotiable. Metanullification of the whole social service system infiltrates her narrative. As Foucault notes, truth in Cartesian logic is empirical and in Greek *ethos* truth was inherently a part of a man’s character. But in the world of welfare and from the perspective of some poor women, truth is relative. In the dominant culture WA-11’s failure to tell the truth would be considered fraud. But in WA-11’s world, where the system itself is illogical, deception is often necessary for survival and considered a legitimate choice. Therefore, it is not surprising that WA-11 concludes it is logical to “tell a lie and keep my benefits.” This

alternate conclusion presupposes an unspoken warrant: A person should not lose her benefits for helping a friend and when food books are needed, she does what she needs to in an effort to acquire them, and any system that supposes otherwise should be subverted. By lying to social services, she is not only fooling the food book administrators, she is also subverting the logical discourse and reality of bourgeois-capitalist society.

Her reality is not their reality. Her discourse describes her own lived reality where she contradicts the mainstream value of truth and creates a space where deception is the only right thing for her and her homeless friend to do—a space where others in her group would confirm and applaud her behavior. Two different worlds—two different lived realities. And as Hegel (master/slave) and Marx (bourgeoisie / proletariat) would observe, WA-11 sees both worlds clearly (as evidenced in her discourse) and chooses her actions accordingly, while those in power see only their world and would label her a liar and a fraud and would eliminate her benefits.

Western culture promotes the ideologies of individualism, capitalism, and patriarchy. While some of the welfare women have an intuitive understanding of these concepts in what they often pejoratively call “the system,” rather than embrace it, many choose to reject or subvert it. Lakoff notes that in the O. J. Simpson case, there were multiple stories produced for public consumption, including those of the district attorney’s office, those of the defense lawyers, those of the police witnesses, and so forth. Lakoff identifies these stories as “multinarrativities” or narratives about the same event told from different perspectives with different protagonists and antagonists and so forth (224). In the world of welfare, there are numerous narratives with different perspectives

for framing opinions and decisions related to social welfare: those of the politicians (both liberal and conservative), those of the media, those of the academics, those of the social service system, and those of the welfare client. The welfare receiver's narrative about her own experience living in poverty is often different from the narratives produced by newspaper reporters and politicians about her, her values, and her life. Indeed, while they describe her experience, she lives it.

On a daily basis, the welfare client faces situations that present limited, often black and white choices concerning her survival, leaving her with significantly fewer options for providing for her family, frequently forcing her to choose between economic security and family security. In the world of welfare, mothers believe their families, the single solid foothold in what for them is often a cruel and chaotic world, win or lose depending on what they choose. Often they are left bewildered by the choices they are forced to make.

WA-18: It's the same. 'Cause um, wow, at one point I wasn't getting anything from them. No, they had cut me off from everything. I was like, 'dang, what's going on here?' But it was something had to do with child-support. I'm like, I ain't got to pay no child-support. Then I have to comply with them, from their dads. Them people don't do nothing. But I don't know what happened, but I'm just now taking care of that. I was something. And the—so if you don't comply, they cut you off, then you're starving and they want you to go to this class and this class. They don't care. I mean, they don't care if you, like—see, 'cause I wanted to go finish

and get my GED, get some paper, you know, so I could get a job, a better job because I don't have to have them find me no job, you know, I'm gonna find my own job. But they don't want you to go to school, they just want you to go to work. I mean, just go to work and then they want you to just put your child here—just go and put your child in any place. You know, I'm not going to put my child in any day care center. I always check the day care center out. You know, they don't give you no time, they just want you to do this or they gonna cut you off this, cut you off that. I'm like, wow, so that has not changed.

WA-18's discourse demonstrates her struggle between her personal goals, which seem to fall in line with the dominant culture's "boot-strap" ideology, and the bewildering predicament of poverty which offers her little hope or resources for reaching her goals, a GED and a better job. WA-18's discourse, like WA-11's, shows her struggle with language, her inability to clearly articulate her thoughts. Though she struggles with the language to express it, her independence filters through her discourse: "I was something" and "I'm gonna find my own job" she says, and she is "not going to put [her] child in [just] any day care center." She refuses to relinquish authority over her life, even though her alternatives to welfare are limited. This mother wants to be heard and understood, reiterating the tags "I mean" and "you know." She establishes a strong dualism between the system represented by terms such as "them people" or "they" and herself, represented by "I" and "you" where the definite *you* equals *me* and, at the same time generalizes one's experience and argues that one's experience is representative of others in similar

situations. Throughout this segment, “them people” or the system acts upon the speaker as agent, and she constructs herself, the speaker, as a resisting victim:

WA-18: No, they had cut me off from everything.

And the—so if you don’t comply, they cut you off, then you’re starving...

You know, they don’t give you no time, they just want you to do this or they gonna cut you off this, cut you off that.

This mother’s feelings of oppression bleed through her discourse. Foucault, in *Discipline and Punishment*, discusses how the guillotine was invented “to apply the law not so much to a real body capable of feeling pain as to a juridical subject” (13). So, too, was the welfare system created not to apply its laws to a real loving mother and her children capable of starvation, as to an impersonal social service client. The words of WA-18 negate the idea of the impersonal. Over and over again she says, “they cut you off” and as a result “you’re starving.” And though agency resides primarily with the system, her discourse reflects her active resistance to its authority. Her rebellion is reflected in her determination to find her own job and an appropriate daycare situation for her children. She does not completely capitulate to the requirements of the system—even though she desperately needs the resources it has to offer her family.

Like the above example, TX-14 forthrightly confronts the problems she has experienced with the system. Unlike WA-18, she names the specific sources of her problems rather than nebulously using third person pronouns like “them” and “they.”

TX-14: Uh—I wish the president was more like Mexico’s president, then all these companies would not be leaving the United States to different

countries, especially since we're the border. [The] president doesn't work for the border. I wish companies would not leave the United States, or have them [the companies] pay something to the people, have them pay people who lose their jobs.

This speaker formulates a reason for her own unemployment and offers a solution to the unemployment problem resulting from companies leaving the United States to hire cheaper labor across the border. She “wishes” the U. S. companies would pay the difference from the savings they gain in wages to the people laid-off in border communities when these companies relocate to countries with cheaper labor—rather than paying increased dividends to their investors. She articulates these ideas to the best of her ability, but she does not expect her thoughts to be heard. She does not say “I think” (cognitive agency) but “I wish companies would” using modals that emphasize she lives in a world where she can only wish and hope something might happen to improve her situation—she does not feel she can directly impact these kinds of national or global events, she only knows she is their victim. On the other hand, she identifies world leaders (the president and Mexico's president), she notes economic regions and forces (the border, companies leaving the United States), and she formulates possible remedies to the unemployment left behind when border companies move (“have them [the companies] pay something to the people . . . who lose their jobs”). She firmly identifies herself within a group (“the people”) and overtly states which side she believes the president of the United States supports. For her, the president is clearly not on the side of the people in the “border” region, but rather, he supports the corporations leaving the

border behind. These are not the ramblings of a lazy, uneducated welfare recipient, but the intuitive insights drawn from lived experience of a woman directly affected by government policy, particularly NAFTA, stating in her own words how economic policy has impacted her life and the lives of other people she knows. And, TX-14 not only states the problem, she offers a possible remedy.

Women living in poverty struggle to name the system that oppresses them. For women on public assistance, the system is both the welfare system and the larger economic/social/educational systems within which it resides. In part their discourse reflects the confusion of the dichotomy inherent in the system: it both oppresses and supports them:

TN-62: I a whole lot happier. I don't see how—a lot of people—I don't—you know a lot of people, they like to be—I mean the system, once you get into it, I mean it's, it's good, I mean they help you, they really do.

WA-11: Well, the biggest part is, is me not being able to work and um—having so much difficulty with, with um—you know, social services.

WA-12: Yeah, so, I mean that's the drawbacks to the system is that people that are not used to dealing with policies and procedures like we have, it could be difficult, I could see—. I mean, it's difficult for me.

These passages offer an example of the difficulty many women experienced when trying to describe their relationships to the welfare system, including their reluctance or inability to name the system as evidenced in their prevalent use of the term “the system,” “it,” “social services,” and “they.”

Furthermore, their discourse is full of repetition, ellipsis, and passive construction showing their confusion, their feelings of impotence, and their reticence to actually name the source of their oppression. Passive construction distances them from blame, but also reveals their belief they are victims: “the biggest part is, is me not being able to work and um,” and in another instance, “—having so much difficulty with, with um—you know, social services.” Hedging is prevalent in their discourse as they work to gain affirmation or agreement from their interviewer and to clarify their meanings with phrases such as “I mean,” “you know,” “Yeah, so, I mean.” Ellipsis is often used to avoid naming the actual problem they are experiencing or to avoid identifying the perpetrator of their problem: “I could see—” [why people have so much trouble understanding and receiving what they are entitled to] and “you know a lot of people, they like to be—I mean the system, once you get into it, I mean it’s, it’s good.” They feel the system oppresses them rather than helps them, but the women have difficulty articulating their blame or complaint against the system. Why? Is it fear of retribution from the greater system (the president, Congress, voters) if they complained about its social service delivery system? Or is it a feeling of hopelessness stemming from a life lived as victims of circumstances beyond their control? Or is it because they have never or rarely had the opportunity or platform from which to voice their concerns or offer their opinions. In many cases, the hesitant speech of the women authors establishes the beginnings of a standpoint from which they articulate what they see as weaknesses in the system, what they are willing to do to accommodate it, and where they will negate the system or subvert it. If welfare receivers are given more voice in solving their own problems and the problems of the

system, many would eventually learn to articulate their feelings and their knowledge more clearly and eventually discover what it is they need to thrive in this world.

Further analysis shows that the women studied use another face-saving strategy to distance themselves from their discourse; they include themselves in a larger group, as in “a lot of people, they like to be—,” a device which at the same time establishes their solidarity with others in similar circumstances and lends credibility or *ethos* to their point of view. Many feminists see group resistance to oppression as not only a place of self-discovery, but also a place to expose otherwise hidden power relations (Hundleby 36-37; Collins). As these women begin to speak, not just for themselves, but for others in their group, they begin to lay the foundation of a standpoint from which all members of their group might speak and from which their relationship with the welfare system can be scrutinized.

Another interesting component of these segments is the use of what could be called quantity or measurement metaphors, including phrases such as “a whole lot happier,” “a lot of people,” “the biggest part,” and “so much difficulty.” These passages exemplify the discourse of women existing in a world of deprivation, where limited quantities of food, clothing, necessities, and so forth have an enormous impact on their lives—quantity is often what they are lacking. This environment of deprivation, I would offer, might be a factor in the prevalence of quantity metaphors in their discourse.

Not only do many of the women struggle to name the system, but a number of them see the system as a force in opposition to their efforts to survive. In some cases, the women see the system as a hindrance to their ability to enter the mainstream. Once

again their discourse is diffused with repetition, hesitation, and ellipsis, showing a possible fear of clearly articulating blame and actually naming the source of their personal feelings of oppression. By eliciting the mantle of a group (“the majority of people”), they try to reinforce the validity of their assertions while veiling their role as accusers.

WA-11: So it’s reeeelly, reeeelly, reeeelly frustrating, it’s—frustrating to hav’ta to deal with any of those type a people because they—treat you—like you’re tryin to get over, I mean, it’s like—the majority of people that are going in and requesting help are people that honestly need it and people that um—are honestly trying to make a better life and ta’ get a foothold, but they make it so difficult on you.

WA-12: Yeah. And then there’s stuff like—things that you’re entitled to in the system—you have your five years and you know, in my situation I definitely needed to be—to take advantage of that and they don’t tell you all the things that you’re entitled to. It’s like you have to find out other ways or you can go on their website and read it, but even that’s really confusing. It’s big and it’s a lot to read, so yeah, if I hadn’t found out through my own research, they never would have told me that I was entitled to have my car fixed like once a year, like up to \$600 and other things like that.

WA-14: You know, it’s um—it’s weeks before you can hear anything, which turns into months which if it’s a very serious problem—um—it

could—this wait actually causes problems. It's very difficult. [Sighs]

Um—basic needs. How about just some of the people that they talk to?

Um—when, when you're reaching out for that help and you reach out and find an angry person out there um—that doesn't help with—with um—ones' self esteem or wanting to go out and get that help you know, it makes somebody want to um—just say never mind, you know, I'll do without it even if that is an essential need. Some people would rather do without it, which causes problems.

The consistent use of “they” to describe the system avoids placing blame on a specific person and instead globalizes the system's inability to meet their needs. Their use of the second person plural “you” gives support to their arguments as they adopt the role of advocate for others in their group. These discourse techniques enable them to accuse the system from a position of safety, neither directly naming the source of their frustration nor directly assuming responsibility for their complaints.

In some cases, the participants discuss the system as an entity that almost consumes them as individuals, as if once one enters into the system, one can never escape it. There are numerous consumption metaphors, implying the system devours women participants like people consume food, such as “We are just herded through there” and “people get caught up,” as if “we” were livestock and “people” were fish. Also present is the idea that one must “give” herself to the system, much like a sacrificial offering, before the system will give back to her all of the things to which she is entitled.

MI-15: Some people need welfare, but it makes people get caught up.

TN-2: It's, you know, I think the welfare reform is great. . . . you know they give a lot back to you and *you just have to give yourself to them* and, you know, get your education and all that and I don't really know what the government could do to give it more incentive. . . . you know, I really think the government's done pretty much all they can do and it's just up to the people, you know, you gotta just slap'em and say get up there and do this, you know. [emphasis mine]

TN-62: I mean the system, once you get into it, I mean it's, it's good . . .

WA-16: We're just a number in their system. Okay, I'm sorry. There's no individuality. We are just herded through there. The children, they're going to grow up to be systematic, do you know what I mean? I been in the system a long time. Once you're in the system, you are in the system forever.

WA-16: It's hard when you—. I don't know if anybody can relate, but once you get into the federal, or something state, or welfare or you're in their computer, you stay in there, okay?

Prepositional phrases that begin with “in” are ubiquitous in TN-62 and WA-16's discourse signifying a feeling of entrapment. The consumption metaphors include the use of technology, a vast web of unknowable and uncontrollable technology, which also captures, consumes, and devours its participants. For many of these women, social services is an all encompassing indefinable mass that permeates their lives and envelops them in a ubiquitous fog that is so pervasive it is impenetrable.

Social comparison is a technique used in discourse to contrast the behavior of one group against that of another. Like Wood and Kroger's date rape victims, women on welfare commonly use discourse that involves social comparison. In these cases, the women are not comparing their poverty or behaviors to those of middle or upper class women. They are comparing their behavior to those of others within their own group. These social comparisons are an effort to distance themselves from commonly accepted characterizations of women receiving welfare. They are also an effort to align their behaviors and values with those of mainstream culture (including the interviewer). As they attempt to express their stance on work and welfare, popular derogatory welfare characterizations infiltrate the discourse of TX-3 and WA-16 through the use of adjectives such as "lazy," "addictive," "excuses," "single females," and "partying":

TX-3: Well, I'm pretty healthy, and I mean, there's not, I'm not sick or anything. I think that I'm perfectly capable of going to work. And a lot of people, I think, that a lot of people get lazy because they're on welfare. And they maybe make up excuses like I can't work, like whatever, they have a bunch of excuses. But I'm a healthy individual, and I want to work. I don't want to be one of those lazy people.

WA-16: And I just, I try not to think, boom, boom, boom—beat myself up over it 'cause I could have been out there doing drugs, you know what I'm saying? Which a lot of single females experience with the going out and drinking or partying, you know, or whatever. There's a lot of people that do that, you know, for an outlet, for a release or something, you know.

And those that don't know, know that they have a addictive personality. I don't know much about that, but those who have problems or whatever and go out there to drink and experiment with that stuff, watch out because, you know, if you're working, you're raising a family—na, na, na—all this occurs with their emotional stability and everything, which had happened to me. So, I mean, it all—.

Social comparison gives the speakers a strategy for distancing themselves from the stigma of receiving welfare and the behavior associated with those who do. TX-3 does not “make up excuses” and is not “lazy” like “a lot of people . . . on welfare.” WA-16 “could have been out there doing drugs” like “a lot of single females,” but instead is focused on keeping herself straight. Ellipses abound in this discourse with repetitive nonsense words to signal some of them, such as “boom, boom, boom” for punishing herself and “na na na” for all the work involved in taking care of a family. Infiltrating this discourse are the standard labels such as “lazy” that are often found in welfare discourse. In some cases the women’s discourse evidences an alignment with mainstream culture and the ideologies associated with blaming the individual rather than questioning the economic and social systems that perpetrate poverty.

Further, the women’s social comparisons connote Foucault’s discussion of “panopticonism” (referencing J. Bentham and N. H. Julius) in which self surveillance is the ultimate result and action of the “disciplinary society” (216-17). TX-3 and WA-16 are checking their own behavior as they observe the behavior of those around them. TX-3 says she is ‘healthy,’ “not sick,” “perfectly capable of working,” and “wants to

work”—she has gazed at herself and characterized herself in opposition to those who are deviant, who she describes as “lazy” with “a bunch of excuses.” The welfare ideology of the dominant culture as presented by politicians and the press infiltrates her discourse as it does WA-16’s. They both stumble to justify their own actions by pointing their fingers at others. They have in part adopted the discourse and the stance towards welfare receivers perpetrated by those in power, reinforcing the concept that it is the individual’s responsibility for their life circumstances rather than the economic or social systems that envelop them.

Concluding Remarks

Foucault’s research concerning the concept of *parrhesiastic* discourse led him into the world of elite Greek men and the philosophies of other scholars that followed the Western philosophical tradition. These erudite philosophers sought truth-telling as a vehicle to enhance their moral character, to illuminate their understanding of the world around them, and to help others grasp the knowledge that sometimes eluded them. Using feminist epistemologies, I sought in this chapter to extend the definition of *parrhesiastic* discourse to individuals who reside outside elite circles as well as to artifacts that reside outside the philosophical and literary canon, indeed artifacts that are on the very margins of the “other”—the discourses of women living in poverty. As Cole said, this kind of process of extension is “part discovery and part creation” (86-87). Drawing on Foucault and Seneca, I sought to prove that self-disclosure by women in poverty was a *parrhesiastic* process, even though it is arguably in its infancy—a discourse that stutters, hesitates, stops, and starts as a toddler stumbles when learning to walk. The women

evidenced components of *parrhesia* in their discourse. They spoke with frankness and publicly took responsibility for their own words—words they knew would be published. They used criticism, both towards the system (as judgment of actions) and towards themselves (as self-disclosure). And they examined the moral validity of their own behaviors albeit hesitatingly. These women speak the “truth” as they live it on behalf of themselves and their community. Who acknowledges and thereby legitimates their truth?

Feminist standpoint theorists such as Hundleby believe that “developing a standpoint requires learning from other independently articulated perspectives” (37). It is work that begins a process of discovery where a number of sites of oppression present themselves for examination. The development of a standpoint begins what Collins calls a “paradigmatic shift of thinking” (225). The women in this study have provided a discourse which gently calls for a definition of standpoint. Smith says the current sociological ways of viewing subjects of study are created from the standpoint of those in power, specifically the men who rule the disciplines and apparatuses of power (2). I agree with Smith and feminist standpoint theorists who draw on Marxian understandings of the validity and uniqueness of the discourse of the proletariat, or as in Smith’s case the “other.” To that end, this chapter sought to explore the discourse of the “other” by expanding the subject of rhetorical study to the discourse of women receiving welfare in an effort to identify their attempts at truth-telling and self-revelation, their depiction of contradictory realities, oppression, and the system they both depend on and despise—and eventually the beginnings of a group standpoint in relation to their lived experiences as women in poverty.

I believe the women formed a group standpoint. Although some of the women adopted the language of their own oppression and used it to mark others within their group, many showed resistance to the more common characterizations of welfare receivers. This resistance, their standpoint, is born from several dimensions evident in their discourse about their lives. One dimension is a world of deprivation where mothers work, scrounge, barter, beg, lie, and steal in an effort to provide for their children. This dimension is evidenced in their discourse through the use of ellipsis, repetition, and hedging which signal feelings of powerlessness or helplessness in a world beyond their control. Moreover, this dimension includes discourse with quantity metaphors, which exemplified the deficit of material necessities in their environments. But in their discourse of powerlessness and deficit, the women carried a thread of opposition to both the naming of their behaviors and control over their lives.

Another dimension to their standpoint is the world of survival, the knowledge of survival and what it takes to rear children in the ghetto on minimum wage employment with family abuse, gang violence, prostitution, and addicts filling the streets. This dimension appears in their discourse through the use of profanity, their exploration of fairness, and the example of multinarrativity—whereby their view of the world of work and family is very different from that of the dominant culture. And their discourse evidenced the concept of metanullification, whereby welfare receivers negate the rules of the dominant culture and embrace the rules necessary for their families to survive. Survival trumps (as Lakoff would say) welfare laws and work rules.

Still another dimension to the women's standpoint is the world of the system—that world apart from theirs, where often angry people hold the key to a hand up and out of poverty, a life they can only glimpse from afar. The discourse used to reference the system is hesitant and full of ellipses, repetition, intensifiers, and modals. This is the language of the oppressed. Yet, resistance infiltrates their tentative discourse creating a common space, a standpoint, from which they not only oppose the system but offer solutions to their problems. The question then becomes: when will the public listen to the voices of these women and grant validity to their standpoint?

Women on welfare must overcome a number of obstacles prior to entering mainstream culture. Much of their struggle comes from their inability to acquire or maintain a living-wage job usually as a result of one or more life issues such as lack of education, poor mental or physical health, insufficient childcare alternatives or their exorbitant costs, unaffordable or unreliable transportation, and unsafe or unstable housing. This struggle is evidenced in their language, an inarticulate discourse full of pain and promise, a discourse that is almost always poignant.

The Alliance for Children and Families conducted their national research project through their affiliates to gather information directly from welfare mothers and other women in poverty in an effort to explore the real-life experiences of women receiving welfare. This research helped to create a clearer understanding of the complexity and comprehensiveness of the obstacles women face when trying to penetrate the barriers of poverty. While other studies have come to similar conclusions, most have summarized

the words of women on welfare, few have published welfare receivers' words verbatim as the Alliance has done.

The women's own words and stories help to provide insight into what it means to live in poverty. Their stories confirm what numerous researchers and service providers already know, that many women living in poverty will need overwhelming support to enter the workforce or, in some cases, may never be able to sustain employment because of multiple significant barriers. Whatever else their stories tell us, I believe their knowledge, their strength, their indignation, and their frustration deserve rhetorical examination and additional platforms from which their voices are made available to the public.

Notes

ⁱ For a thorough discussion of feminist perspectives concerning women and welfare see Meredith L. Ralston's "*Nobody Wants to Hear Our Truth*": *Homeless Women and Theories of the Welfare State*. She also explores the Marxist, neo-conservative, and neo-liberal ideologies as they apply to the welfare state.

ⁱⁱ Chapter 5 of *Black Feminist Thought* discusses the black women's struggle for self-definition across intersecting ideas of oppression, race, sex, and class.

CHAPTER VI

IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

"To communicate is our passion and our despair."

William Golding, *Free Fall* (1959)

This study examined the rhetoric of social welfare in relation to the intersecting discourses of political speeches, newspaper stories, and welfare receiver interviews. Several rhetorical approaches were used to accomplish this task, all undertaken under the rubric of Foucauldian concepts related to domination, resistance, and the search for truth. The artifacts associated with welfare rhetoric cross numerous disciplines and originate in historical, cultural, social, economic, political, and philosophical discourses. These discourses find the overlapping rhetorics of care, responsibility, community, work, and morality vying for primacy. These rhetorics shift their positions across centuries as new notions of economics, science, politics, and philosophy emerge. Each generation finds itself redefining what it means to be poor, calling for new responses from society to the requirements of its citizens in need.

Social responses to those in poverty are most clearly articulated in the rhetoric of the political. A Rogerian examination of former President William J. Clinton's speeches referencing welfare reform reveals how his use of rhetorical strategies enabled him to connect to his audiences, show a comprehension of the myriad issues associated with welfare reform, and lead welfare receivers to a promised land of jobs and freedom from dependency. His welfare rhetoric changed the terms of the welfare debate from a focus

on the behavior of women and cycles of dependency to a focus on work and work-related issues.

As he articulated his messages of hope, responsibility, and work, the media reported his message to the people. Indeed, few would dispute the media's ubiquitous influence on the perceptions of the public concerning news events and political actions, especially as they related to welfare reform. Newspapers in particular provide more thorough, if sometimes biased, analysis and reporting of how welfare reform programs impacted individuals throughout the country. Discourse analysis of newspaper stories about individual welfare receivers revealed that their voices appeared sparingly. As in other media studies, this study found much of the news about welfare receivers and welfare reform came disproportionately from elite sources rather than the welfare receivers themselves. Moreover, the ideologies of morality and capitalism infiltrated newspaper reporting about welfare reform, which included highly-charged language about work, family composition, and welfare receiver's behaviors. Any deviation from the norm served to silence the mother receiving welfare, and when she was silenced, other elite sources spoke in her place. Though the language about welfare reform shifted to the problems of low-wage work after 1996, concerns about morals, family values, and legitimacy continued to infiltrate welfare discourse.

Welfare receivers' interviews provided an insight into the lives of those living in poverty and showed the influence that elite interpretations about their behaviors have upon their discourse. A number of rhetorics were used by welfare receivers. Sometimes welfare receivers criticized the system and resisted its ubiquitous insinuation in their lives

through the rhetoric of deception. Sometimes welfare receivers criticize themselves or others receiving welfare using the ever-ready rhetoric of blame and morality. And, sometimes welfare receivers use a confessional rhetoric to explore their feelings and their circumstances and in the process identified a stance from which they might resist the regulating discourse of the system that monitors and attempts to control them. This is the discourse I sought to uncover—the often stumbling, stuttering, laughing, halting discourse of subversion, omission, evasion, and revision. This discourse is not overt, for it comes from a community that must be covert in order to survive. In this furtive discourse, I found a beginning of self exploration and group definition—a place from which group identity could be considered and group resistance could be constructed.

The methods I used to explore Clinton's speeches and *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* newspaper stories about welfare receivers were not unique, although they did assist me in focusing on the ways in which welfare receivers were referenced and depicted in both genres and offered places from which to connect the language used by the women in their interviews. Though I found no prior treatment of Clinton's speeches using Rogerian argument, it proved an appropriate tool for examining his rhetorical strategies and assisted me in identifying how he related to his audiences, including welfare receivers. And, though critical discourse analysis applied to newspaper stories is prolific, I found only a few applications rhetorically examining news stories' characterizations of welfare receivers and none including how their voices were directly or indirectly attributed in the text.

My methodology for examining the women's interview transcripts blended two theoretical concepts. It combined Foucault's *parrhesia*, the concept of moral truth-telling, with feminist standpoint theory, the concept of group resistance, and applied them to the everyday language of a disempowered group. My purpose was not only to rethink and re-vision how these theories could work together to examine language, but it was also to explore how they could be used to grant dignity to everyday discourse reflecting the lived experiences of a particular and special group in society. Moreover, this study sought to reveal possible sites of individual or group truths—even tentative truths—as a potential form of resistance.

I believe this study contributes to feminist rhetoric through its awareness and sensitivity to the voices of women who are for the most part excluded from the discourses that otherwise determine the circumstances of their lives. It sought to use rhetorical theory to assist in uncovering the ways in which their oppression is embedded in their discourse as well as to identify their difficulty in articulating their thoughts and feelings. Rhetorical examination of the words of mothers receiving welfare elevates their language by recognizing the epistemological value of their discourse. It acknowledges the validity of their experiences, their emotions, and their feelings. It attempts to place their discourse in social and historical context and to identify the impact of public discourse on their self perceptions and their perceptions of others. Additionally, it found a common ground from which the voices of welfare receivers collectively stand and resist the system that determines the material existence of their lives.

I agree with Patricia Hill Collins, Eve Browning Cole, Nancy C. M. Hartsock, Dorothy E. Smith and other feminists that individual voices examined from the circumstances of everyday life create a model or a place from which a group becomes identifiable and comprehensible. The discourses of those in poverty are rich with history, humor, struggle, compassion, resistance, failure, and triumph. Their rhetorics provide a vast opportunity for further research to explore, for example, a comprehensive examination of how Western ideologies infiltrate their discourses, how racial and class dimensions and the aspect of time present themselves in their discourses, and why and how narrative provides an appropriate vehicle and opportunity for their stories' distribution. Their discourses comprise legitimate sites of study and deserve consideration, not only by those seeking remedies for their issues, but also by rhetoricians seeking to understand the language of those on the margins of society and to assist their voices in being heard.

By the end of 2003, the number of people in poverty rose by 1.3 million to 37.2 million people (U.S. Census Bureau). Politicians, scientists, sociologists, psychologists, the criminal justice system, and government institutions convene to identify and discuss the reasons for poverty, the victims of poverty, the cycles of poverty, and the possible solutions to poverty. The numbers of people in poverty are mind-boggling, and the remedies often seem beyond reach. In this land of seemingly endless opportunity and unfailing promise, it seems impossible that there are many who will never know the comfort of health, home, or hope. Few social questions are more prescient and worth our attention than how to meet the needs of the growing numbers of people who now live in

poverty—who need social support services—and who deserve a place at the table where their voices contribute to the discussions about their futures.

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