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# From Welfare to Working Poor: Prioritizing Practice in Research on Employment-Training Programs for the Poor

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*In an effort to better understand relationships among poverty, education, and work, this article uses data from an ethnographic study of two companies in which welfare recipients obtained employment to examine the move from welfare to work. The analysis delineates 23 men's and women's transitions from welfare poor to working poor, and focuses on the ways welfare-generated identities shaped employment training pedagogies, the social organization of the workplaces, and individuals' resistance and accommodation practices at work.*

## Prioritizing Practice

While the need to reform welfare is a common topic of conversation these days, little attention has been focused on the welfare recipients who move from welfare to full-time jobs after participating in government-funded employment-training initiatives. One or two men and women, cast as role models in the press, may find a few moments of public recognition, but for most former welfare recipients, the "successful" transition from welfare makes them invisible in conversations about welfare reform. Yet without a clearer understanding of their circumstances after welfare, moving from the welfare rolls remains the stuff of newspaper anecdotes. This article uses data from ethnographic research on the "lived cultural experience" of 23 former welfare recipients who left the welfare rolls via government-funded employment-training initiatives to foreground their proffered words and experiences. It gives voice to men and women who have been silenced by their own "successful" actions, and informs conversations about welfare by examining the role the adult education and training programs played in their move from the welfare rolls to the status of working poor.

*Welfare Poor to Working Poor: "I think they only pay for training when it leads to a poor-paying job"*

Development, a welfare-funded job-training site known throughout the city for its welfare-to-work and inner-city renewal efforts, trains the "hard-core" unemployed and subsequently hires many of its graduates to work as educational-kit assemblers, weatherization technicians, archive managers, or clerical workers in several small on-site businesses.

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Over a period of 18 months, I regularly visited Development's educational-kits department, housed on the top floor of the compound's old five-story red brick factory building. The department's eight employees, all former welfare recipients hired after participating in the company's training program, assembled and disassembled science kits used by science teachers in area primary schools, and inventoried, stocked, and organized the kits' supplies. The following excerpt is from my field notes of June 1992.

The educational-kits department occupied half of the old warehouse's fifth floor. Its wooden floor was dirty, strewn with bits of paper and string. Eight long tables ran the length of the room and boxes, labeled "Thermometers," "Plates," "Scissors," were stacked high on shelves against two walls.

I joined Ruth and Henry, the department's two Anglo employees, who were perched on stools at the end of one long table. Preassembling kit parts, Henry cut box patterns from flat pieces of cardboard, and Ruth taped cardboard boxes shut, each with 15 small cans inside. Ruth told me that prepacking cans inside a box, later to be placed in a large kit box, was Henry's idea. Their previous practice of putting 30 cans in each kit separately took a great deal of time; prepacking 15 cans now would save time later. Henry added that this modification required cardboard boxes wider than the precut version, which was why he was recutting the cardboard. "This will save us a lot of time. After this we'll put ten jars in a box. . . . Those boxes have to be cut in half."<sup>1</sup>

I asked how he determined the new box size and Henry explained he just measured to size. Ruth commented, "Men know that stuff." Henry added, "I had warehouse experience in my file." Henry was 49, and had been employed previously by a dye factory up the street. Over his 20 years with that company, Henry had worked his way up to purchasing agent, responsible for ordering large quantities of dyes. "I was there 20 years, until 1980," he explained. "The company went bankrupt. They just started the pension when the company closed. I was in shock after the closing." He spent the next few years in a tail spin, living with his mother, working odd jobs, until his caseworker at the welfare department referred him to Development. Ruth, younger at 36, also had a background of factory work. "Gaskets, chewing gum, Mack Truck. . . . It's all about the same. It puts food on the table. Not much but . . ."

I wondered aloud how much of Henry's ability to visualize packing solutions was learned in training. Henry shook his head. "You don't get trained for anything here. . . . I'll probably get fired for saying this when Bill [the company director] reads your paper. They need to give people training. All you get here is one hour of computer lab every other day, because there are too many people."

He talked about other people in his training cohort. "The men got jobs as security guards," and Ruth added, "The women get jobs in day care . . . [and in] cleaning." Henry continued, "Of the guys in my group, I'm the only one hired here. One guy worked real hard at Adam's House [a subsidized housing project run by Development] in the hope of gettin' hired there. He didn't. They

were up there mopping floors, cleaning windows. What kind of training was that?" He added that he had wanted to go to a local university's training program. "I heard they had more hands-on . . . electronics. It didn't get funding." Ruth, reflecting on Henry's comments, offered, "I think they only pay for training when it leads to a poor-paying job. Any training that leads to well-paying jobs you have to pay for yourself."

At the time of this interaction, Ruth had been employed at Development for one year and Henry for just more than four months. Both sought employment at the company after participating in its training program, and both accepted job offers with much optimism and high expectations. But over time, they settled into a state of muffled despondency. They complained that their salaries were just over the minimum wage and that they saw virtually no increase in their wages or in those of their colleagues. They had no paid sick leave and were insured by a health care plan that barely met their needs. Equally problematic, they had no voice in the organization of their work or in their lives as workers.

In the attempt to understand how welfare-to-work initiatives function and what the process of moving from welfare to work means to the participants themselves, I spent 18 months in 1992 and 1993 as an ethnographer of government-funded employment-training initiatives whose primary objective was moving welfare recipients from welfare to work, and in workplaces where graduates of the programs successfully found employment. Based upon data collected through ethnographic interviews and participant observation, in this article I examine the welfare-to-work transitions of Henry, Ruth, and 21 other former welfare recipients who were employed across two of the workplaces.

During the 18 months of data collection I heard stories about welfare reciprocity, training, and work that were vastly different from those currently constructed in public conversations, where the welfare system is under attack by liberals and conservatives alike for inviting dependency and indolence, fostering moral turpitude, and encouraging the spread of illegitimate births. In the debate playing out in these very public discussions, the welfare system en masse, its recipients, and in particular single female heads of households have become easy scapegoats for problems ranging from juvenile delinquency, high dropout rates, and poverty, to the breakdown of the traditional family and the annihilation of moral values. State governments are translating a rhetoric of forcing welfare recipients to choose work into large cuts in their welfare budgets. Wisconsin's "Work Not Welfare," for instance, has limited families' welfare-cash benefits to two years in two test counties, and Michigan has completely cut off welfare benefits for single adults. In both public talk and these new policy reforms, poor men and women are framed not as the victims of economic inequity, but as the cause. Underlying the discourse are beliefs that recipients choose to be on welfare because they do not want to work, and that accordingly, left to their own devices, they would rather stay poor.

This article attempts to disrupt this discourse of blame by providing an emic view of individuals' difficulties, challenges, and successes in moving off welfare. It presents experiences of individuals who successfully crossed the chasm from welfare to full-time employment only to find that the goal of moving off the welfare rolls, advocated by politicians of all persuasions and adopted by government representatives and training providers, did not in itself promote real change in their lives. This article delineates three themes to explain their experiences: the melding of identity and poverty in welfare-to-work programs, the low-status workplace positions to which many welfare-to-work programs assign welfare recipients, and finally, the cyclical relationship of social structure and agency that unfolded across these welfare-to-work transitions. The body of this article examines these themes through descriptions of the unfolding of the transitions in practice, delineating how participation in government-funded employment-training initiatives deemed most successful by official voices (because they placed the required number of welfare recipients in jobs) moved welfare recipients from the status of nonworking to working poor. It concludes by using these lived experiences to reframe America's current preoccupation with welfare reciprocity and work from an image of recalcitrant poor to one of frustrated poor, and it connects a microanalysis of practice with macrolevel issues of economic access and welfare reform in the United States.

*The Training-to-Work Systems.* Development, a nonprofit organization dedicated to training and employing the urban poor in its several small on-site businesses, is situated in the city's "badlands," an urban sprawl of empty fields, abandoned shells of houses, and street corners claimed by local drug dealers, who are the community's main employers. Using state money, the company targeted its training to single adults categorized as Transitionally Needy (TN)<sup>2</sup> by the state's Department of Public Welfare (DPW), and described in a company fact sheet as "recovering substance abusers, at-risk youth, homeless, ex-offenders, women reentering the work force, [and] community residents" (Development 1992, emphasis in original). Development's trainees attended five hours of life-management classes and five hours in the computer-assisted learning lab each week. The majority of their training, however, was spent in a supervised work crew. They cleaned, packed educational kits, assembled storage shelves, assisted with clerical work, and provided labor for building renovations. Development hired approximately 20 percent of the men and women who completed its six-month training to work in semiskilled positions in its small businesses, all part of the company's attempt to create employment opportunities for inner-city residents. For reasons of space, this article focuses primarily on the eight individuals employed as assemblers of reusable educational kits in Development's kits department.<sup>3</sup>

Church Hall, a 240-bed for-profit nursing home, is in a tree-lined upper-middle-class residential neighborhood, just inside the city limits but 20 highway miles from center city. The facility had a constant need for nurse assistants (also referred to as nurse aides), and the local DPW's Job Development Unit (JDU) recruited and screened long-term recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), 99 percent of whom were single female heads of households, to fill Church Hall's employee needs.<sup>4</sup> The JDU facilitated five-day training seminars to orient the referred women to the world of work, and Church Hall then hired from one-third to all of the women who completed the orientations to work as nurse assistants. Within the women's first four months at the facility, Church Hall also provided an 81-hour nurse aide certification-training program for anyone not yet certified by the state.<sup>5</sup>

Development and Church Hall cumulatively employed 23 former welfare recipients, who became my primary informants during this research.

## **Identity and Poverty**

Welfare recipients came to these two welfare-to-work initiatives bearing an array of local identities: they were mothers, fathers, substance abusers, problem-solvers, team-builders, Puerto Ricans, college-educated, high-school dropouts, sports fans, and more. But in the eyes of training staff and employers at both Development and Church Hall, the men and women never lost the identity of inner-city poor. As former TNs, Development's kit assemblers remained members of a group defined as high-school dropouts and substance abusers, instead of as the problem-solvers and experienced workers they also were. And as former AFDC recipients, Church Hall's nurse assistants were perceived only as poor African American women from the inner city, never as college-educated or science-oriented. These identities, constructed around welfare categories, provided a rationale for training programs designed to help welfare recipients compensate for a lack of middle-class norms. They followed the men and women into the workplaces, marked them as both culturally different from colleagues and supervisors and culturally deficient in work-related skills, and gave justification to employers who stratified workplaces across economic status and treated these new employees as less than their professional colleagues. The next sections will describe the unfolding of these welfare-to-work transitions in practice, and illustrate how educational initiatives, grounded in welfare-derived identities, served to reinforce, rather than disrupt, a stigma of difference.

*The Hard-Core Unemployed: "They really need a lot of guidance and instruction. They don't come with skills"*

Development's history was closely enmeshed with explicit beliefs about individuals referred to as "the hard-core unemployed." Its mission, to reach the hardest to serve, was essential to the staff's conception of trainees and of their appropriate post-training work roles. Initiated as part of a large-scale national demonstration called Supported Work, nearly 20 years later Development had not strayed far from its original ideology and training paradigm. The company continued to espouse Supported Work's hypothesis that a transitional work experience helps the hard-core unemployed gain work experience, overcome fears of entering the labor market, and gain a regular income (Auletta 1983:226). A department manager described the training model as "a job-readiness program. In other words, you learn how to work, you learn how to behave. You learn how to accept authority, all those things that people who are disenfranchised have for some reason not learned. We teach them and they go out and look for a job."

The theme, that the training participants (that is, the hard-core unemployed) do not know how to work, behave, or accept authority, was often repeated by Development's counselors and managers. Some supervisory staff attributed these deficits to a particular ethnic background. A counselor explained, "Working with Hispanics [that is, the Puerto Ricans at Development] who haven't been in this country for too long . . . they really need a lot of guidance and instruction. They don't come with skills. The language skills—there's an educational barrier, even in their country." But like Oscar Lewis (1976) and the culture of poverty he attributed to his Mexican peasants, others credited poverty itself. According to another counselor:

People are homeless because they don't pay the bills. They buy their kids designer sneakers, pay their habit. Most are on drugs. People don't know that it's not because of insufficient housing. You can always tell people on welfare. Did you ever notice they don't open their blinds? Their houses are dark, they're afraid someone will peer in. Welfare will pay; why pay the electricity if you know LIHEP [a DPW support program] will pay once your bill is more than \$500? Gas too. Most people have no experience beyond welfare. They live check to check. They don't realize they could do better.

These beliefs about the poor shaped Development's supported-work model of training, which, like others designed for this population, prioritized the teaching of job readiness and other middle-class norms over either technical skills or academics. Paid work experience was a substantial part of the training, because, as a counselor explained, "for some people, just being in the day-to-day job environment is important." Development's director justified the model.

Our clients don't like school. They may have had bad experiences. Work doesn't seem like school. We can spoon feed the school part. Even better with the advent of the computer. Computers in the learning lab help people learn they're not stupid. We're not telling them, the box is.

In addition to supported work and computer-assisted learning, the participants spent one hour a day in "Life Skills." Life Skills resembled group-counseling sessions in which students reflected on their experiences and those of other clients, and case managers invited comments and provided direction about daily choices, job search strategies, and the move toward economic stability (i.e., opening a checking account, buying property insurance). Fifty percent of Life Skills focused on the psyche, counseling individuals on ways to overcome self-imposed barriers. The other 50 percent was an attempt to compensate the trainees for their lack of experience with the demands of middle-class life.

These beliefs about the hard-core unemployed continued to be applied to training participants who found employment on-site, and they echoed in the upper levels of management where decisions about the organization of training and work were made. Managers, relatively free with their comments about the former welfare recipients they oversaw, tended to frame them as inexperienced, and without work histories or commitment. "Eighty-five percent are here in a job; they wouldn't last in a job anywhere else," asserted a supervisor. He continued, "They expect leniency. They're minorities, they're poor." Despite Development's training, little had changed in this discourse, and as later sections show, beliefs about deficits provided the company's managers with easy justification for their treatment of all inner-city employees.

*Poor Women: "They don't react the same way. They're not too educated at all"*

While women employed at Church Hall were assigned an institutional identity different from that of my informants at Development, it was nonetheless shaped in large part by beliefs about their status as welfare recipients. They were poor women from the inner city and as such, were deemed to be "out of the mainstream." "For welfare recipients, a big problem is the fear factor, not knowing the environment," explained a staff member of DPW's Job Development Unit (JDU). Guided by these beliefs, DPW designed a one-week orientation providing what Goffman called "clues, hints, and stage directions" (1959:72) for the role of nurse assistants, so that the women would know what to expect at work. During the orientation, women practiced skills needed to obtain a job. They completed applications, talked about their own strengths, obtained references, practiced interviewing, and discussed strategies to negotiate work. Facilitating four of the five DPW orientations for Church Hall in 1992, Debra Miller, the DPW employment trainer, described her objective as helping the women "think like the employer's mentality." She maintained,

They have trouble looking at the application from the point of view of the people who gave it to them. This tells me something about how far out of the mainstream many of these people are. You really have an uphill fight to make their resumes acceptable. Without the workshops, they most likely would not be hired, since they don't know how to present themselves or adequately fill out an application.

Yet despite what DPW Job Developers described as their best efforts at compensation, the image of cultural deficiency followed the women to suburban Church Hall. The particulars of employee demographics were different there, however, from those at Development. Rather than filling jobs designed specifically for an inner-city population, at Church Hall the women became part of the facility's preexisting hiring pattern, in which 95 percent of its "professional staff," Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) and Registered Nurses (RNs), was Anglo from working-class communities bordering the suburban site, while more than 95 percent of the aides were African Americans from the inner city. Aides traveled to the facility's suburban location by bus or carpool. "By public transportation . . . it takes many of them two hours to get here," explained the facility's personnel director. To the Anglo-dominated nursing and management staff, the difference in origins was amplified by the aides' lack of middle-class norms and behaviors. As an LPN explained, "They don't react the same way. They're not too educated at all. I spoke with one girl, she said she thinks I was cursing at her when I was encouraging her. Their language is very street language. I can't think of the word now, but she thought I was cursing her."

In the white-ethnic suburbia of Church Hall, identification of the nurse assistants as inner-city poor meant they were strange and dangerous. Their supervisors told me, "Last week a girl from wing three got in my face. She don't even know me," and "I got attacked by an aide; I was out of work seven months." These stories cast the assistants as a tough lot, with priorities beyond understanding and behavior frightening enough to demand precautions in the dark parking lot at night. Like Development, DPW's training was designed to mediate cultural differences, but its connection to Church Hall only served to feed an already existing bifurcation defined by urban-suburban, poor-middle class, and black-white differences. Regardless of the women's new presentation skills, the perception of deficiency followed them into the workplace, and as the next section illustrates, provided justification for their subsequent low status at work.

### **Low Status at Work**

#### *Development's Hourly Workers: "This place is shitlist"*

One of the most definitive characteristics of Development's social organization of work was its two-tiered classification system, in which employees were either salaried or hourly. The assignment of individuals

to these wage-related categories mapped over the company's welfare link and created a cultural and social hierarchy along the lines of Bourdieu's (1990) cultural and social capital. Salaried employees, Development's managers, counselors, and support staff were generally hired either through employment ads in local newspapers or through social or professional contacts with the executive director. Counselors had at least a bachelor's degree, several had a master's degree in counseling, and for them, education proved important cultural capital. For other salaried employees, social capital was salient. Most salaried staff members of Development's Archives Department, for example, were hired through sports contacts with Bill, the company's director. Dick, the business manager, coached a football team on which Andrew, the director's son, played. Joan, the Anglo woman hired as office manager, told me "my son played football with Andrew. I met Dick that way, and Bill." And Ron, the systems coordinator, knew Bill as his golfing coach from college.

Individuals hired from the welfare rolls, as well as almost all the other poor African Americans and Puerto Ricans on Development's staff, lacked both the cultural and social capital required to enter the ranks of salaried employees. Instead, they were categorized as hourly workers, and fell under a completely different set of personnel policies. Their hourly wages, ranging from \$4.25 to \$6.00, were well below those of salaried workers.<sup>6</sup> They received neither paid sick leave nor vacation nor paid or unpaid leaves of absences. They received no tuition reimbursement, and while the personnel policy stated that "hourly workers without a high school degree or a General Educational Development (GED) are eligible to participate in three hours a week of GED tutoring," no tutoring was available during my year and a half at the company. Development's director explained the wage and benefit schism as necessary support for his still "fragile" hourly employees.

You always have folks who are still fragile. As to work and self-respect, they're still fragile. Sometimes they get here working, feel good about themselves, feel they can do more than they can. It's like me, as golf coach, trying to recruit kids. They think they're great, but they're not. It's maintaining that balance. Their expectations exceed capabilities.

Supervisors framed unpaid sick time as a strategy that encouraged these workers to "come five days a week and on time." In fact, according to Development's director, "We have a hourly policy designed to encourage attendance and participation—all kinds of bonus schedules are built in." But while hourly employees appreciated the extra income generated by the bonus system, they vociferously disagreed with the assessments of their worth and consistently highlighted the inequities between the company's two wage and benefit packages. Barbara, a 25-year-old African American in the kits department, declared, "This place is shitlist. No personal days, no vacation after one year. We need a union. I say if we

been here a year he should give us a week vacation, personal days, sick days." The inadequacy of the health-care coverage and the low wages were the foci of constant complaints, and the lack of paid sick days presented an array of real problems for the hourly employees. Noreen, Barbara's 41-year-old Puerto Rican colleague, was hospitalized for pneumonia during my observations. Difficulties encountered by the lack of paid sick leave and general resentment of workplace policies became explicit during her illness. From my field notes of August 1993:

On one of my last visits to Development, I was told that Noreen was in the hospital. Ruth told me Noreen had pneumonia, but that she had come to work yesterday anyway. "She looked dead," added Henry. I asked them if she would get paid sick time, since at this point Noreen had worked at Development for three years, and was titular supervisor of the kits department staff. They told me "no, no paid sick days," and Ruth added "That's why she didn't go [to the hospital] earlier, she had to pay her rent."

On my next visit nearly three weeks later, Noreen was back at work, attaching labels to cardboard boxes stacked six high against a wall. She explained that she had asked Bill to be paid for the two days she was in the hospital, particularly since "I left from here. But he said 'No, there's nothing I can do about it.' I told him, 'Why? We all work here.'"

The no-leave-of-absence policy was also tested during my time at Development. Barbara was pregnant during my visits, and much time was spent in talk about whether her job would be held after she delivered her baby. "When I go out I'll have to go on welfare," she told me. Ray, the manager of the kits department, explained the maternity policy to me as, "no maternity leave. Getting pregnant is her responsibility, her decision. If and when she decides she's not pregnant, she can come back. If there's a job, you're welcome back." However, there was not a job after Barbara delivered her daughter in August, and although she attempted to get her job back via an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) lawsuit against the company, she did not win. I tried to contact Barbara several months after her baby was born, but her phone had been disconnected and she had moved from her apartment, leaving no forwarding address. My guess is that after her investment in employment training and four years at the same job, Barbara had disappeared into the welfare system.

Despite Development's lofty ideals, its training did nothing to help Barbara and her inner-city cohort lose their identity as urban poor. Without a formal upgrade in skills, the men and women who were hired from training as permanent workers were unable to divorce themselves from an identity of fragility, disorganization, and irresponsibility. Their differences, in terms of race, economics, and education, were posed as deficits, and functioned as an official rationale for relegating them to a second-class status at work. The identity of the urban poor remained so compelling that at Development it was even applied to employees who

did not come from the welfare rolls, but who resembled the men and women who did. Poor African Americans, Puerto Ricans, recovering addicts, and high school dropouts all remained short on the cultural and social capital Development required of its permanent employees.

*Church Hall's Nurse Assistants: "You can't say our certification isn't worth anything"*

At Church Hall, the former welfare recipients blended so completely with the existing staff that the particulars of their hiring were lost in time. Like all nurse assistants at the facility, they made residents' beds, helped with their toiletry, took them to lunch, put them back into bed for naps, woke them, fed them dinner, and readied them for bed at night. They comforted them, listened to their complaints, settled disputes, documented residents' activities and physical well-being, and liaised with family members. As a physician at the facility asserted, "The aides are the backbone of this place. They're the ones who lift the residents, wipe their heinies."

An aide's responsibilities, multiplied by a minimum of 8 and a maximum of 14 elderly residents a day, more than half disabled by Alzheimer's disease, translated into a weighty workload. In addition, the facility was often short-staffed. One aide complained, "Too much work, too many residents." And another asserted, "I don't like it, but don't tell them. There's not enough people. There are never enough people." But even with adequate staffing, which was never assured, a nurse assistant's work was not easy. All the aides had stories about difficult residents. Teresa, a Puerto Rican nurse assistant, told me about an incident with one of her regular residents.

Yesterday one of the residents was in the bathroom. It was Joan, you know her. She was wiping herself with a rag and when I came in to get her she threw the rag at me and the water and shit got all over me, all over my face. I had shit on my lips. I was so upset I had to walk out. She was ringing the buzzer. Elizabeth [the LPN] asked me if I had Joan and I told her what she did. I told her I'm not going back in there, she should go. She wouldn't go, so I had to go back in. I couldn't leave her in there. I was so mad, I could have abused her. I wouldn't but that's how mad I was.

As Teresa noted, even with the difficulties inherent in the nurse assistants' work load, they received little to no help from most supervisors. I saw many instances of nurse assistants sharing work and lending support to each other, but virtually none of RN and LPN supervisors helping nurse assistants with basic resident care. Rather than giving direct patient care, RNs managed the floor, and LPNs managed each wing. They spent most of their time at the nursing stations completing reports and updating records, and at their medical carts, distributing medication. One nurse assistant asserted, "That's right, all they do is write reports and stand by those medical carts." Yet while the aides were

most intimately involved with residents' daily welfare, taking note of their skin tone, speech capabilities, idiosyncrasies, mood changes, toiletry habits and requirements, and improvement or deterioration in physical condition, and recording their weights and vital signs on a monthly basis, this knowledge was neither recognized nor validated by their supervisors. Nurse assistants had no regular input on resident care, and they were not involved in care meetings. One nurse assistant explained, "They have them [care meetings] for the family, the charge nurse, and the physical therapist, but nurse assistants aren't involved." This stratification of power around credentials and job responsibilities was a source of concern for the aides. As Teresa noted, "As though our nursing assistant certification isn't worth anything. We may be bottom-of-the-ladder, but you can't say our certification isn't worth anything."

But in practice, the nurse aide certification had little relative value at the facility. Wage scales matched the educationally-driven and racially-segmented hierarchy. While the starting salary was \$18 an hour for an RN and \$12.50 an hour for an LPN, an uncertified nursing assistant (often with only six months less schooling than an LPN) started at \$5.25 an hour, which was raised to \$6.00 after she was certified. But even with attendance-related bonuses, at \$6.00 an hour the aides made less than \$13,000 a year. Consensus was that the assistants' pay was too low, particularly for their workload. One nurse assistant stated succinctly, "Too much work, too little money." Many worked double shifts, from two times a month to two times a week (at time and a half their hourly rate), to augment their salary. Overtime improved wage levels, but without the increase in credentials that comes through additional education, hard-working, underpaid women only worked longer hours, in equally stressful conditions.

### **Structure and Agency**

After working at Development for more than a year, Henry and Ruth began to grumble, gossip maliciously, commiserate, slow the pace of their work, and boycott company activities in resistance to organizational structures that they perceived as demeaning and demoralizing. From my field notes of July 1993:

Henry and Ruth were taking their morning break on the stoop outside the old factory building when Pat, their newly-appointed supervisor, walked by. Looking at Henry, Pat asked, "Can you do me a favor? Can you tell Joan Sister Eileen is here? She's in a meeting and I think it's better if you interrupt them than me." Henry, with a note of incredulity in his voice, asked, "You want me to give her a message?" Pat responded "Yes, please." Henry looked up at the sky, seemed to wince, and repeated "Sister Eileen?"

After Pat left, Henry asked rhetorically, "Now I'm the messenger boy?" and Ruth suggested that he "just say you forgot." Henry asserted, "I ain't tellin' her nothin'. Let her fire me. I ain't her messenger boy." Henry and Ruth were

quiet, and their cigarette smoke curled above their heads like a visible manifestation of their anger.

About five minutes later, Joan walked by. Elbowing Henry, Ruth whispered, "Tell her." Henry gave Joan Pat's message and after she disappeared around the corner he explained to me that he hadn't realized Joan was in the nearby garden. He thought she was in her office.

As we walked back inside after the break, Ruth commented that Pat will probably fire them "for insubordination or something, anything to deny us unemployment." Henry began filling small boxes with BB gun pellets. Ruth sat, staring into space. I commented on Henry's expectations about supervising the department. He responded, "I thought so too. No, I'm just a stock boy here."

Henry's quiet acts of resistance, grumbling and giving Pat the cold shoulder, were strategies for dealing with working conditions he found to be both inequitable and disrespectful. He had been promised the job of department supervisor, but a year after his initial hiring, it still had not materialized, and he felt consigned instead to a role of "messenger" or "stock boy." Still, Henry balanced his expressions of animosity with behavior sufficiently compliant to keep a job. In an inner-city neighborhood where there were "no other jobs," Henry knew he walked a thin line.

"Cooling out," as Burton Clark (1960) called this dampening of personal objectives, was common during the time I spent at both work sites, and individuals' emotional shifts, from initial excitement about new opportunities to ensuing disappointment and resignation, were obvious. Maintaining a sense of self in a context in which the individual is minimized and even denigrated is a difficult feat, and the men and women coped with this psychological disharmony with an array of strategies. Hourly employees at Development and nurse assistants at Church Hall asserted themselves in the only ways they could in social structures typified by segmented employee policies and feelings of voicelessness. They grumbled and engaged in other forms of everyday resistance (Adas 1986). The next section will illustrate that practice, played out as resistance to or accommodation with the social organization of work, was located in the men and women's conversation with each other and with their supervisors, and in their relationship to the work of caring for elderly residents or of assembling science kits. It was in what Ortner calls the "practice of everyday living . . . the little routines people enact, again and again, in working, eating, sleeping and relaxing, as well as the little scenarios of etiquette they play out again and again in social interaction" (1984:154).

*Resistance in Practice: "When I leave here I'm leavin'. I'm walkin' out and not comin' back"*

As illustrated at the beginning of this section, resistance played out in talk. Hourly employees at Development complained constantly about salary levels and benefits and gossiped about colleagues and supervisors. They called the director "Massa," behind his back, and only grudgingly complied with supervisors' requests. At Church Hall, the nurse assistants' resentment over power inequities was regularly reflected in communication between the facility's nurses and nurse assistants. The following is from my field notes of November 1992.

Terry, the RN supervising Church Hall's second floor, approached the nurse assistants behind the nursing desk. "Well as long as everybody's here," she began, "I should tell you. Evita [the facility's on-site trainer] says no one's allowed to sit on a resident's bed to feed them."

A sudden outburst erupted from the aides. Jane asked, "What do you mean? Do you mean, how are we supposed to feed those patients that can't sit up?" Terry suggested standing. Now Jane and Teresa spoke at once. "Now you're talking about regulations." "If the state comes in and sees you standing feeding patients, you'll be out." Pam, the LPN on the wing, added, "You can't see if the person is choking." Pam, close to Terry now, repeated in a slightly lowered voice. "How are you going to tell if the patient's choking?" Terry mimed bending down in front of an imaginary resident, asserting, "I can see." Pam groaned at the pantomime, and with some resignation in her voice commented, "Oh never mind." Terry allowed, "Well, you're taller than I am. In that case it might be different." Jane complained, "These orders come down from people who don't feed the patients. Passing out meds isn't giving them breakfast in the morning." Terry concluded, to no one in particular, "I'm just trying to watch out for all of you, so you don't get into trouble. This is an RN who looks out for you. I'm just telling you what Evita told me."

As Terry left the nursing station, Jane and Teresa commented, "She thinks everything she says is right," and then, "They don't even feed the patients."

The interaction among Jane and Teresa, African American nurse assistants, and Terry, an Anglo nurse supervising the floor, might be attributed to miscommunication across status lines. But it filled the air with a hostility that I came to recognize as stemming from a contest of power between aides and the RN over decisions concerning patient care. Ownership of work was contested in talk. "It's the way people talk," explained Rita, another nurse assistant.

At Development, another form of resistance practiced by the hourly workers was to slow down work. Assemblers in the kit department, for instance, matched their work speed to seasonal demands. While the educational kits required hurried assembly in September, dismantling returned kits and taking inventory of supplies was spread over the rest of the year. This schedule and the lack of close direct supervision

allowed the men and women to slow down or speed up their work pace according to an intuitive time-cost analysis, adjusting work speed to the low level of pay. While Henry, a self-described "workaholic," was always busy regardless of his mood on any particular day, his female counterparts worked only as much as they felt was absolutely necessary. They spent the remainder of the work day reading magazines, making telephone calls, and painting their nails.

Resistance also manifested itself in the distancing of oneself, psychologically, verbally, or even physically, from work. From a practice perspective, when hourly workers at Development boycotted the annual company picnic, they were resisting the company's weak attempt at *gemeinschaft*. From my field notes of January 1993:

The company picnic, held at the end of August in a picnic grove outside the city, was one of Development's main social events of the year. Described by supervisory staff as an important event for the company, Development paid for the food, picnic fees, and employees' salary for the day, and provided round-trip transportation for all employees from the workplace to the picnic. However, attendance at the picnic was not uniform. James, Development's assistant director, told me that several of the hourly employees approached him just before last year's picnic, asking how he thought the director would feel if they didn't attend. James was upset over their query and told them that "If I were Bill, I'd fire you for not attending. And I'm the low-key one." He conjectured to me that their hesitancy might stem from their not wanting to leave the neighborhood.

In talking with Ruth and Henry, however, I learned that they were not planning to attend the picnic again this year. Ruth hadn't gone the previous year and she said she would take the day without pay again this year if that was the only alternative. "I have something to do that afternoon anyway," she claimed. Henry added cynically, "Bill wants us to be a big happy family."

For Henry and Ruth, refusing to attend the picnic, even at the cost of a day's wage, was one way to resist Development's pretense that they were members of "a big happy family."

Detachment from work took a different form at Church Hall, where leaving the job was common among nurse assistants. The facility, like the industry in general, experienced rapid turnover of its nurse assistant staff. Most nurse assistants remained at the facility for only six months, leaving after becoming certified. My review of staffing patterns at Church Hall over a six-month period revealed a facility-wide turnover rate of 180 percent. One and a half years after the Church Hall-DPW link was in effect, 21 (88.5 percent) of the 24 individuals placed at the facility had left. Various theories concerning why nurse assistants left or stayed abounded, and most employees on Church Hall's nursing, food service, or environmental staffs had opinions on the topic. Low salaries, long distances traveled to work, and youth and its lack of responsibilities were all frequently-proffered hypotheses. But in practice, the nurse

assistants' turnover was a way of voting with their feet. As recorded in my field notes, lack of professional respect and turnover were related at Church Hall. Leaving, often in the form of job abandonment, was both a rational act and an expression of dissent from women who were otherwise incapable of improving their circumstances.

It was after lunch when I talked with the nurse assistants. June complained about a resident who had a sore on her body that had become purple and smelly. "But there's no point in saying anything. They don't listen to us," she asserted, referring to the LPNs. Shelly commented, "It's in one ear and out the other."

Helen changed the subject by saying, "One girl left, the one you was always getting in on with. She got another job offer and took it." Shelly commented, "That's not right. You should resign a place when you leave, so you can come back if you like." But June disagreed. "When I leave here I'm leavin'. I'm walkin' out and not comin' back."

The nurse assistants were much better prepared to look for work than their counterparts at Development. The kit assemblers there felt stuck. Their histories of factory work, low levels of education, and poor test-taking abilities left them with few alternatives in a city with a shrinking manufacturing base. Describing a shared perception concerning job alternatives, Noreen asserted, "Sometimes it's hard, particularly since you're often asked for a high school diploma and other things you don't have. You're afraid to approach employers since you know you won't have what they want." With no other alternatives, most hourly employees at Development marked their space and maintained the dignity they could by grumbling, controlling the pace of work, engaging in petty theft, and distancing themselves from company activities. But at Church Hall, nurse assistants' newly earned nurse aide certification reduced the risk of future joblessness. Quitting the job for a slightly higher-paying position elsewhere was the most certain strategy for improving job status, particularly for aides who could best afford the risk of leaving (i.e., the certified, young, and unattached) (Auletta 1983; Bluestone and Harrison 1982; Thurow 1975).

*Accommodation: "This place do give you a lot of chances"*

Not all individuals employed at the companies, however, engaged in oppositional behavior. Practice reflected a match or mismatch of each individual's beliefs about him or herself and the opportunities afforded by trainers and supervisors, and since the men's and women's histories, expectations, and opportunities differed, the ways in which they made sense of their training and work experiences differed as well. Variation occurred both within sites and, in the case of Maria, a colleague of Ruth and Henry at Development, even within the course of an individual's affiliation with one company.

During her training at Development, Maria, a young Puerto Rican woman, had been assigned to provide clerical support to the human resources manager, and after training, she was hired to work in the kits department. One year later, Maria was clearly unhappy working in this capacity. On Fridays she complained, "Soon it will be Monday and that's what I hate," adding, "I hate to come here. . . . I hate thinking about coming back to work on Sundays." Her demeanor changed completely after several midlevel supervisors recognized her talents and potential, and promoted her to the position of office manager. I noted the change in the following field note entry.

I saw Maria a few months after her promotion. She showed me a resume that she had just finished typing for a client, and talked about revised job search plans. She had had a job interview at Brand and George, a center city law firm, a few days before. "They offered me a job. I talked with Tomas [her husband, who was employed as a training supervisor at Development]. He's looking for a job. I want to wait to see what he finds. He told me to wait a little while, since it's not an emergency. He may get something up this way, then I'd be going the opposite way. . . . I've learned a lot here. I do all the reports. . . . Ben [a counselor] keeps telling me I need to move on, get a better job, but I think I'll wait. I'm thinking about working part-time and going back to school for accounting. That's what I want to do." Maria smiled as she continued down the hall toward the copier.

In the space of a few months I saw Maria transform from a disgruntled and stone-faced assembler to a challenged and stimulated secretary. While she remained Maria, her new status at work gave her such an expanded sense of possibilities that when she was offered a better-paying job with a law firm downtown, she decided to remain at Development. Limited possibilities for mobility in either worksite made Maria's upgrade unique. Yet the shift in her connection to and her sentiments about work illustrates the fundamental relationship between social structure and personal agency that played out in both companies.

Six other hourly workers at Development, all recovering substance abusers, provide another illustration of this structure/agency paradigm. While their success both at Development and at staying sober varied, they all voiced gratitude for both the opportunity to work and the support Development provided. Andy, who worked in the company's weatherization unit, reflected, "They put me in the right direction here. I like them for that." Will, who supervised a training crew, asserted,

This is great. It's something I like to do. I was a substance abuser. I've been clean for four years. I give a lot of insight in how my life was, what I did. I like to work with a lot of people. I bring my whole background into my work.

For Edith, working in the company's kits department provided a regular income with minimal pressure. "I get to feed myself every two weeks. I get to—you can work at your own pace."

These hourly employees described Development as "family-like," a characterization that differed dramatically from the complaints of most hourly employees. Sam, another crew supervisor, asserted, "This is like a family. People feel they belong, people who don't belong anyplace else." Will, who developed diabetes while working at Development, described "belonging" as the ongoing concern he felt from his coworkers.

Everybody here helps watching what I eat. Everybody watches out for me. I just have to eat on time. I'm doing pretty good. They watches over me. These guys, they watches over me a lot.

For Andy, the support came in a different form. He had occasional relapses and sometimes asked a counselor to hold his paycheck for him. If he had the money on him, he would "mess up."

Development's professional staff of counselors and private-sector managers provided balance for these hourly employees. They were individuals with rocky employment histories interrupted by periods of substance abuse, prison internment, and treatment center participation. At Development, they found a staff who held their jobs while they got clean. "This is my first and longest job I've ever had," Edith told me. "This place do give you a lot of chances. He [Ray, her supervisor at the time] would rather give us a chance than hire and train someone else." The company's policy on addictions codified Edith's assertion about chances. "We usually give somebody an unpaid leave of absence until they get straightened out," the human resources manager explained. Unlike many companies, in which entry-level employees are terminated when they evidence current or even confess past problems with substance abuse, when individuals at Development like Edith or Will were absent too often, they were warned verbally, then in writing, then put on probation. Individuals were ensured a job until all possible options were exhausted. Perceived as fragile by supervisors, these six individuals also saw themselves as fragile and in need of Development's quasi-patriarchal environment. While they complained about inadequate wages and benefits, the assistance and respect afforded them at the company outweighed any perceived inequities. In their eyes, even without a training upgrade, Development perceived them as more than their addictions. That kind of professional respect felt rare and well worth the tradeoff of a lower salary.

This same variation was not as clear at Church Hall. Of the 24 AFDC recipients originally hired by Church Hall, only three women were still employed there at the end of my year and a half at the facility. The reason these three chose to stay while their colleagues left was unclear. They said they liked working at Church Hall, but their words did not differ greatly from Lynn's and Joan's, two informants who left the facility during the research. (Lynn was terminated for fighting with a coworker, and Joan walked off the job after a disagreement with a supervisor over

her assignment.) The most that can be said is that the three remaining aides simply enjoyed the odds of attrition.

*Creating "Other": "I don't like the way these girls talk to me. They have no respect"*

While oppositional behavior emboldened most individuals' feelings of self in contexts in which they found few, if any, outlets for self-expression or action, it did not improve their situations. In fact, their resistance only served to reinforce supervisors' beliefs about them as "other." Henry and Ruth's cold shoulder to management, like Jane and Teresa's resolute exchange with Terry, resulted in little more than a chill that lingered in the spaces between them and supervisory staff, and perhaps in the affirmation, for the former welfare recipients, of their powerlessness in workplaces that paid them minimal respect, and for management, of the hostility and fragility of the inner-city poor. By asserting their own knowledge, which appeared to supervisors as acting with defiance, nurse assistants at Church Hall only confirmed the professional staff's image of them as dangerous and strange. After her exchange with the two nurse assistants cited previously, for instance, Terry told me, "I don't like the way these girls talk to me. They have no respect." I never witnessed anything more than verbal sparring, but tales of past physical confrontations between nurse and nurse assistant, and even between nurse assistant and resident, coupled with an implicit distrust engendered by racial, class, and urban/suburban difference, provided the nurses with ample reason to believe that the aides were indeed strange and dangerous. At Development, the kits workers' lack of involvement in social activities and their work slowdowns only provided confirmation to their salaried coworkers of their peculiarity, frailty, and even their deep-rooted indolence. Their grumbling earned them a reputation of being sullen and unmotivated, and provided ample rationale for management to keep salaries low and to frame the lack of paid sick days as necessary reinforcement for hourly employees' attendance and punctuality at work.

Expectations and practice were cyclical. Individuals who were perceived and treated as less than, as deficient, or as "other," were stifled and silenced at work. Given neither opportunity nor support for career or academic advancement, they quickly became frustrated and disappointed (particularly after the training programs' rhetoric of promised jobs and rosy futures). They dealt with these frustrations in what Scott (1986) called a "quotidian struggle . . . with the ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups" (1986:35). They silenced themselves and created either physical or psychological distance between themselves and the work. Yet through their actions, they actually became the identities with which they were charged; they became "other." On the other hand, when individuals like Maria were put in positions in which they felt challenged and respected, they proved themselves to be capa-

ble, hardworking, and dedicated. Through this process, Henry, Ruth, Jane, and Teresa played an active, albeit unconscious, role in creating these official identities and in establishing their confrontative relationship to work. As Giddens illuminates in his structuration theory,

the movement of the production of action is also one of reproduction in the contexts of the day to day enactment of social life. . . . In reproducing structural properties . . . agents also reproduce the conditions that make the action possible. Structure has no existence independent of the knowledge that agents have about what they do in their day to day activity. [1984:26]

Perceptions about available employment options also contributed to the way structure and agency played out at both Development and Church Hall. While Henry and Ruth believed that by participating in Development's training program they were making an investment in their careers, in reality, the training's emphasis on working in crews, dealing with coworkers, coming to work on time, and following directions had less to do with a theory of human-capital investment than with beliefs about a culture of the poor and the respective need to teach poor men and women new attitudes and habits (Harrington 1962; Ryan 1971; Stack 1974). Although the goal of Supported Work was the clients' "development of good work habits while simultaneously building up employment credentials necessary for . . . successful competition in the labor force" (Maynard 1984:213), Development's trainees did not participate in a credentialing process, nor did they receive certification of any kind. By participating in Development's training program, they found jobs, but did not increase their own marketability. Offended by the treatment they received at Development, saddened by their dashed hopes, and dissatisfied with their lot, Henry, Ruth, and their colleagues unfortunately perceived few available alternatives. Ruth asserted that looking for another job is "depressing. Filling out applications, being rejected. It's depressing." In contrast to Church Hall's voluminous turnover, 12 individuals (or 27 percent of the company's 45 full-time employees) left Development during my observations, but of those 12, only two were former welfare recipients. Neither left for another position. After resuming her substance abuse addiction, Edith abandoned the job and disappeared. Barbara's position was not held for her after she took time off to have a baby. Though the employees as a group advocated Barbara's return, Henry later told me, "She's lucky, she got out. . . . Everyone told us not to work here during training. I thought different, but we learned soon. And now we're stuck." Even here, rather than attributing this lack of mobility to a reality of limited job options, Development's salaried staff again applied a framework of personal deficiency to explain the hourly employers' long-term job retention. As construed by the manager of one of Development's small businesses, "People who stay at Development are too insecure about their own capabilities to look for another job. People here have low self-confidence. They don't think they can do anything else."

The scenario was completely different at Church Hall, where the aides' newly-earned certification gave them a competitive edge over uncertified aides. Liz, the facility's quality-control manager, told me, "Several [nurse assistants] left recently. They got their certification and found a job closer to home. There's also the possibility of more money if they go to an agency." Yet here again, even though leaving Church Hall was a rational choice for many aides, job turnover was instead attributed to a lack of responsibility rather than perceived as a rational act. According to two nurse assistants in their late thirties, "Young ones don't stay . . . they don't have responsibilities like us." Development's hourly workers were perceived as lacking self-confidence, Church Hall's nurse assistants as irresponsible. In both cases, behavior was decontextualized and again linked to assumed character deficits. Expectations and practice were cyclical and, to quote Nelly Stromquist, "a cohesive vicious circle is created" (1993:205).

However, while the nurse aides' job abandonment can be interpreted as an expression of power in the midst of powerlessness and an affirmation of identity on the part of individuals who felt their skills were minimized at work, the outcome in terms of improved conditions was undoubtedly minimal (Giroux 1983). Moving horizontally to facilities that paid only minimally more than Church Hall, they knew that without an investment in additional education, they would neither advance professionally nor become economically independent. Nurse assistants talked about going back to school, asserting, "The only thing to do in this place is go on for more schooling." But they also identified several obstacles. Church Hall offered no tuition-reimbursement plan, and financing tuition costs was a major dilemma. Many had studied in nurse assistant tracks at area proprietary schools, most often a six-month and \$3,500 commitment, before coming to work at Church Hall. They continued to pay back loans and were unwilling to incur more debt. Time was also a concern. Since the majority of nurse assistants regularly worked double shifts to earn extra income, overtime demands, combined with the familial responsibilities of single motherhood, led to fatigue and little time for school commitments. For most, this dilemma of time and money was unsolvable, and without a strong kinship network from which to access support and financial assistance, school plans remained only talk. Without this additional investment in education, the aides were caught in a revolving door of low-wage and low-status jobs, unable to either advance professionally or become truly economically stable.

## **Conclusion**

### *Prioritizing Practice in Research on Employment Training*

The assumption that work in and of itself is an antidote to the "welfare problem" drove both job training initiatives examined here. Yet while both models were considered successful because they linked sufficient

numbers of unemployed individuals to jobs, neither offered any training that allowed individuals to upgrade their job status. The experiences of my informants illustrate best-case scenarios of men and women who made a successful first move from welfare but soon realized that without additional education, they remained economically precarious. They were overlooked by a system that supported their transition from welfare but offered no training or educational assistance once they were working. My field notes of August 1993 illustrate their dilemma:

When Carla, one of the assemblers at Development, asked about returning to school, she explained that she was not on DPW and could only afford to repay a loan if the payments were small. "I have to pay rent, my bills. I have my daughter, that's why I want to go back."

She guessed she would have to go back to school and get her GED. I mentioned Development's computer lab, but Carla responded, "I can't go because we're working all day. They should keep it open two hours after work." And tuition benefits? "No, they only think about the TNs. They don't think about us. They should do that. A lot of people would want it here. A lot of people want to move but can't afford to go to school."

In policy discussions, these concerns are obscured, at least in part, by beliefs about the availability of internal and external career ladders. The assumption is that welfare-to-work initiatives help welfare recipients get their "foot in the door," and from this ground floor they can compete for better jobs and higher rungs on the job ladder. "We are leading them to the economic ladder, and they can move up from there," stated an official involved in the implementation of Oregon's Jobs Plus program, a large subsidized-work program that moves welfare mothers into minimum-wage jobs and converts food stamps into cash to subsidize their employment (Dixon 1994). However, this article highlights several flaws in this line of reasoning. While my informants may be described as successful in their pursuit of employment, for many, securing a job in and of itself was not enough. Obtaining a job did not necessarily solve their problems; it merely moved them from the welfare rolls. Their current employment situation did not help them compete for better jobs, because at best, there were only other low-level jobs for which they could compete. While they may have had their foot in the door, without an additional educational investment there were no more rungs to climb, no place else to go. The job ladder, both internal and external, was fictional, and for many of the graduates, the door was a revolving one.

Post-welfare, all 23 men and women remained marginalized and poor. In fact, despite a variety of other differences, the common denominator among them was their precarious economic status. They continued to live in dangerous neighborhoods, sharing apartments with family members, parents, and siblings, and they never had enough money to live the middle-class norm that they heard so much about in training seminars. Banished by their welfare categories to programs that con-

nected them to jobs but did not provide the skills training necessary to access better-paying positions, their potential was squandered. Over time their energy dissipated, and their initial excitement turned to anger. They became part of a cycle of identity depreciation, lowered expectations, inadequate job placements (in terms of challenges and compensation), and worker resistance, through which they confirmed their own official identities.

If indeed our preoccupation with welfare reform arises from a concern about those individuals most marginalized from the economic mainstream, then other images for thinking about and linking welfare recipients to job-specific roles must be conceived. The welfare-to-work initiatives exemplified by Development and Church Hall are not the only possibilities. These stories might have been very different had more men and women been given opportunities to participate in challenging training programs and work roles, or had they been encouraged and rewarded with a work upgrade for a continued investment in accessible training. Flexible training models do exist that dispute the foot-in-the-door premise that guides the placement of welfare recipients into bottom-rung jobs. Assuming instead that moving onto the job ladder requires not just a first step, but second and third steps as well, programs like Chicago's Project Match support individuals through a combination of idiosyncratic routes from welfare to work over a period of three to five years. In Project Match, some participants start with an entry-level job and then return to school full- or part-time, others work through a series of jobs, others attend college classes and work part-time, and still others volunteer, obtain a GED, work, and then attend college. Competency-based models, with broad-based funding and multiple-target groups, can also offer training in skill areas that include high and low technologies, and can accommodate choices based upon interests and skills rather than on categorical group membership and academically-sanctioned knowledge. While not a panacea, this sort of creative programming is a step closer to supporting individuals in a move toward economic self-sufficiency.

But if the current attack on welfare instead masks a move toward government downsizing, then this ideological shift in assigning responsibility for economic inequities from the state to the poor functions as a diversion, obfuscating the real budgetary choices the country is making. In that event, the men's and women's stories are best-case scenarios of what is to come. For far too many of the individuals most affected, they portend a future of frustrated dreams and prolonged poverty. For the larger society, however, they augur the marginalization of an entire stratum of the work force, the inevitable reduction in the country's labor productivity, and the intensifying alienation and hostility of the poor. While cutting welfare may be a natural trend, the assumption that work in and of itself, even in the form of high-turnover, low-end jobs, is the only possible or even the most expedient solution to the "welfare prob-

lem," denies both the agency of the poor and the implications of their actions (Maynard 1995). Their ensuing resistance may not improve their own plight, but multiplied by ranks far more numerous than represented in this article, it will surely amplify the growing divisions in the United States between the rich and the poor, the haves and the have-nots, the inner city and the suburbs. Civil unrest can be very expensive. We had best be clear in choosing what we can afford.

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## Notes

1. All quotations retain the speakers' original syntax.
2. Transitionally Needy (TN) was a state-funded welfare category encompassing single adults, aged 18 to 45, who, if they met economic eligibility, received cash and health care benefits for 90 days each year. However, state guidelines for benefits changed during this research. The TN category was extended to include individuals from ages 45 to 55 who formerly received year-round benefits, and benefits for all TNs were cut back to 60 days every two years.
3. Former welfare recipients employed at Development also supervised work crews of trainees, provided clerical support, and weather-proofed neighborhood houses. Other graduates of the training program found work outside the company as assembly workers, general helpers, general laborers, production workers, utility workers, custodians, machine operators, health care aides, mental health aides, communications technicians, housekeepers, building maintenance men, pressers, shipping and receiving clerks, and data entry operators. Almost all were entry, low-level jobs.
4. The funding for this initiative came through the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training Program (JOBS). JOBS is part of the Family Support Act of 1988, which requires state and local governments to implement a welfare-employment program offering education, training, and employment services to individuals most likely to become long-term AFDC recipients. The Act also increased federal funding for child care, transitional medical benefits, and other supportive services deemed necessary for individuals to participate in the programs. Funded through JOBS as part of the department's initiative to "Break the Cycle of Dependency," DPW's JDU matched and screened welfare recipients with incoming job orders from Church Hall and other companies, and facilitated job-readiness training for the recruits. As per federal regulations, DPW targeted their efforts and limited funds to individuals who had received AFDC for any 36 of the previous 60 months, custodial parents under age 24 receiving AFDC who had not completed high school or had worked less than six months in the previous 12 months, and members of an AFDC family in which the youngest

child was within two years of being ineligible for AFDC (Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare 1992:50).

5. Church Hall was one of 22 nursing homes and six educational institutions in the city that offered an approved nurse assistant certification program. The facility covered all costs associated with certification for nurse assistants employed by the facility, including the trainer's salary, six days' wages for nurse assistants who were off the floor and in the classroom, and the \$105 testing fee.

6. Unlike hourly workers, salaried managers, supervisors, counselors, and selected support staff were considered full-time regular employees. They received paid vacation, sick days, administrative leave days, holidays, leaves of absence for a variety of personal reasons (i.e., disability/maternity, military, personal, paternity, bereavement, and jury duty), health insurance for employees, their spouses and children aged 19 and under, life insurance, and tuition reimbursement of up to \$600 per year. They also participated in a company pension plan.

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