WOMEN STEPPING OUT: INTERSECIONS OF WELFARE POLICY, WORK AND ABUSE

by

Danielle Marie Ficco

BA, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 1995

MA, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 1998

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This dissertation was presented

by

Danielle Marie Ficco

It was defended on

June 29, 2007

and approved by

Kathleen M. Blee, Distinguished Professor, Sociology

Akiko Hashimoto, Associate Professor, Sociology

Maureen Porter, Associate Professor, Administrative and Policy Studies

Dissertation Advisor: Lisa D. Brush, Associate Professor, Sociology

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AND ABUSE

Danielle Marie Ficco, PhD

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Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) was created in 1996, and it effectively abolished the sixty-year-old federal entitlement program for poor women and children known as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). TANF imposed lifetime limits for receipt of assistance as well as work requirements for all recipients. These changes are problematic for many reasons and hit especially hard for women who are subject to abuse from an intimate partner. In this project, I use a qualitative approach to explore the relationship between women's experiences with battering, work and welfare use.

I interviewed 20 women enrolled in a Work First program in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. These women are transitioning from welfare into the paid workforce. I found that many of these women enjoyed the social and financial benefits of paid employment. Women generally view work as beneficial for their families and believe it will afford them greater opportunities and allow them to be good role models for their children. Unfortunately, for all of these women, abuse complicates their journey. For some, work means an escape from violence at home. For others, abuse at home is an insurmountable obstacle to work. Understanding what work and welfare mean to them and the hurdles these women must overcome is critical to assisting them in their quest to break the cycle of dependency on the state or men. We must be sensitive to the variations in women's experiences with welfare and dispel the myths regarding broad stereotypes that doom all poor women and their children to a stigmatized existence.

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1.0   INTRODUCTION

In 1996, Congress created Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and effectively abolished the sixty-year-old federal entitlement program for poor women and children known as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). TANF imposed lifetime limits for receipt of assistance as well as work requirements for all recipients. These changes are problematic for many reasons and hit especially hard for women who are subject to abuse from an intimate partner.

Often, access to cash assistance is directly related to women's safety or that of their children. Brandwein (1999) lists six links between family violence and welfare use:

"1. A woman may go on welfare to be financially able to leave her abuser. 2. A woman may be unable to leave welfare because her abuser is sabotaging her attempts to pursue education, training, or employment. 3. A woman may find it difficult to work or prepare herself for a job because of the long-term effects of abuse. 4. The abused woman seeking welfare may be further endangered by child support enforcement requirements. 5. A woman who was a victim of earlier child sexual abuse may be more vulnerable to early pregnancy and the ensuing need for public assistance. 6. A mother whose child has been abused by the male provider may need to seek welfare assistance in order to provide

full-time supervision, (p. 10)." For all of these reasons, the restrictive new welfare reform laws are especially harmful to battered women and their children.

In this project I examine welfare recipients' assessments of the link between abuse by an intimate partner and work. Are welfare reforms putting women at risk for further abuse by mandating work requirements? Is battering an obstacle to securing and maintaining employment? Are some women able to overcome it? How do women view the connection between abuse and their labor force participation? Answers to these questions will inform policy decisions regarding the feasibility and merit of the current welfare reform laws and directions for future policy decisions. My research contributes a piece to this broader puzzle by analyzing women's assessments of the connection between labor force participation and experiences of abuse, namely acts of sabotage, control, and violence, and injuries or resulting posttraumatic stress symptoms. Using in-depth interviews, rather than a scale or checklist, I am able to uncover the complexities and contradictions of women's experiences with work, welfare and abuse.

Sociologist Ann Goetting (1999) defines battering as "an obsessive campaign of coercion and intimidation designed by a man to dominate and control a woman, which occurs in the personal context of intimacy and thrives in the sociopolitical climate of patriarchy" (p. 4). Weiss (2000) argues that we cannot define battering as a set of physical acts. It is an insidious process of control and coercion used by a man to gain control over a woman. The way in which researchers define battering has direct implications on the measurement and scope of the problem. By expanding the definition of battering beyond a set of physical acts, we are able to see the intimidating way a man may control his partner through threats and coercion as well as physical violence. By

situating the definition of battering within the larger context of patriarchy, we make a statement about how our male-dominated culture creates a climate of risk where men are allowed to batter women (Goetting 1999). The more inclusive the definition of violence, the higher the prevalence rate that is reported (Tolman 1999).

In March 2002, the TANF program turned five years old and Pennsylvanian recipients who were on welfare in 1997 may have reached their lifetime limit for assistance. Without a safety net to assist women in need, a number of dreadful outcomes are possible. Services targeted to battered women often only consist of a few weeks of emergency support, and women who leave abusive relationships face a high risk of homelessness (Davis 1999). Men, threatened by their partner's increased independence through waged work, may take violent measures to insure her failure (Raphael 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001). Without a safety net, women may find it increasingly difficult to leave abusive relationships because of the economic dependence on their partner (Shepard & Pence 1988). Women who do leave abusive relationships may choose to return to a dangerous situation for economic security (Davis 1999). The time for research on the links among battering, work and welfare is now. Through in-depth interviews, I am able to capture the complexity of women's experiences and destabilize the categories and ideologies that shape current law and policy.

The title "Women Stepping Out" emerged from women's descriptions of the welfare system. Many of the women I interviewed described welfare as a "stepping stone" or simply a temporary financial assistance to be used as they transition from welfare to work. Welfare policy time limits and work requirements were established to help (force) women to take that "step" away from state assistance and toward

independence. The stepping stone metaphor is also useful to describe women stepping out from dependence on abusive men. In fact, two main goals of domestic violence shelters are: 1) establish a secure escape from violence and 2) provide a stepping stone toward independence. Although they may not always succeed in their efforts, women who are "stepping out" are clearly attempting to move toward independence from both welfare and abusive men.

1.1   LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1.1   Battering and Work

Battering is control over women that thrives within the larger system of patriarchy. Battering, which includes both interpersonal and societal forms of gendered abuse, can constitute a tremendous obstacle for women who are trying to gain safety and solvency through waged work. Goetting (1999) maintains that,

> "For the woman [battering] is a terrifying process of progressive entrapment into an intimate relationship of subjection that is promoted and preserved by a social order steeped in gender hierarchy – where mainstream ideology and social institutions and organizations, including the criminal justice system, the church, social service and medical institutions, the family and the community, recognize male privilege and accordingly relegate secondary status to women" (p. 4).

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Some of the most popular methods for assessing abuse (tactics based scales such as the CTS or Conflict Tactics Scale) are misleading because they fail to consider context, consequence and motivations and interpretations of the men and women under study (Dobash & Dobash 1983). The CTS is used to measure the frequency with which respondents reported certain tactics such as hitting, pushing, choking, and threatening with a knife or gun (Straus & Gelles 1986). Feminists critics argue that battering often cannot be reduced to specific violent acts (Dobash & Dobash 1992, 1997). By using these tactics based scales, researchers misinterpret or lose the power dimensions, gender relations, and context of the violence.

Moreover, many of the standardized instruments designed to measure violence, are not designed to get at work-related issues. For example, the Index of Spouse Abuse or ISA (Hudson & McIntosh 1981) is a 30 item self report measure with 2 subscales, one measuring physical (ISA-P) and one non-physical abuse. The Abusive Behavior Inventory, ABI (Shepard & Campbell 1992), is a 30 item inventory used to measure 20 psychologically abusive behaviors and 10 physically abuse behaviors. The Severity of Violence Against Women scale (Marshall 1992) is used to rate various acts of aggression in terms of seriousness, abusiveness, violence and threatening nature. The Measurement of Wife Abuse or MWA (Rodenburg & Fantuzzo 1993) is employed to examine the frequencies of different kinds of abuse based on number of acts within a 6 month period and the emotional consequences experienced by the victim. Researchers need to expand away from these and other such tactics scales which do not ascertain specifically if partners were abusive in order to keep women from working.

Riger, Ahrens and Blickenstaff (2000) developed the Work/School Abuse Scale (W/SAS) to measure violence or threats of violence or other coercive tactics used to thwart women's progress in work or school. This is a useful instrument that may help us to measure some of the ways men may impede women's work. Interference with women's work may stem from both actions involving physical force and actions in which physical force is not used. The W/SAS is therefore designed to measure both sets of items. In addition, this scale does not contain items that would require mandatory reporting (to child welfare services for example) if administered to women in a welfare office (Brush 2001). This type of scale, specific to work/school and abuse, adds to understanding of prevalence studies of welfare caseloads and anecdotal studies of employment. One of the problems with the testing of this instrument is that the researchers only tested women who were working or in school – a sample selection bias. This is a major flaw since women who are *not* currently working or in school are probably the ones who are having the most difficult time in overcoming abusive behaviors in order to work. In addition, researchers only administered the scale to women residing in shelters; a population restriction that inflates the extent of abuse measured by this scale.

There was a need for future research with the W/SAS to include women who are unable to enter the labor force due to the abusive tactics if their partners. Brush (2002) administered the Work-Related Control, Abuse, and Sabotage Checklist (WORCASC) to the 40 women in a work first program (the study from which this sample has been drawn.) She compared the WORCASC and the W/SAS (Riger, et al 2000), and confirmed the reliability of both instruments. Both the WORCASC and the W/SAS

measure something distinct from battering, to include work-related tactics of control and manipulation. These measures both provide a relatively fast, inexpensive means of assessing tactics of sabotage and the outcomes associated with those actions.

A cross-sectional picture limits researchers' ability to examine the full effects of partner violence on women's welfare use and employment status. Raphael calls for further research using longitudinal data to study effects of violence, over time, on employment. "Longitudinal data and measures of employment that include job stability will yield more revealing analyses of how domestic violence affects the employability of women" (Raphael, 2001, p.450). Although this is not a longitudinal study, I questioned each subject about changes over time in their experiences with their relationships, work and welfare. This yielded a more comprehensive picture of women's changing life experiences than one "snapshot" in time.

Battering is like a military campaign, complete with coercive tactics employed to gain control over the victims and use them to do the will of the victimizer (Weiss 2000). A man threatened by his partner's attempts to gain independence through waged work may resort to violence to prevent her successful transition into the labor force. Raphael (1996, 2000) examines the ways that men use threats of violence, violence itself, and other, non-violent forms of abuse to sabotage women's efforts to comply with the requirements of welfare reform and build their capacity for safety and solvency through work. He may take or wreck work or school materials, bother her at work when it isn't allowed, beat her up the day before an interview or a big exam, or perform any number of acts of sabotage to prevent her success in work or job training.

In contrast to findings by Raphael (1996, 2000, 2001), Brush (1998, 1999, 2000, 2001), Murphy (1993), Brandwein (1999) and others who cite abuse as a serious obstacle to women's successful labor-force participation, Lloyd & Taluc (1999) report that past abuse does not significantly predict current employment status. Their analysis indicates that although women who reported current or past abuse were as likely to be employed as those who did not report abuse, abused women were more likely to suffer a history of past unemployment, suffer health problems and have higher rates of welfare receipt (p. 370). These contradictory findings indicate a complex relationship between battering, welfare and work, and a need for further evaluation of the links.

Brush (2000) notes that battering potentially obstructs work in three time frames: short-term, intermediate, and long-term. First, battering creates short-term health problems or dangers that may prevent women from going to work or job training. Second, the distracting and damaging effects of battering sabotage women's success in work or job training (Raphael 1996). Third, battered women may suffer long-term consequences such as posttraumatic stress disorder, disabling injuries or emotional impediments to job performance (Murphy 1993). In addition, battering as an obstacle to work may take different forms and obstruct work in different ways (Brush 2002). Physical battering, in which males beat up their partners and inflict physical injuries, is likely to reduce women's ability to work. This form of battering is measured by conflict-type scales (most notably Straus's Conflict Tactics Scale, 1979). Control and sabotage act as an obstacle to women's work or education efforts and are measured by interference and control tactics scales specific to work (Riger, Ahrens, Blickenstaff 2000). In this

project, I will be adding the subjective assessment dimension to both the physical battering tactics as well as the control/interference/sabotage acts of battering.

Women who are entering the paid work environment may encounter difficulties related to the effects of their abuse. For example, Brush (2000) notes that injuries and/or court appearances to obtain Protection From Abuse orders may cause women to miss work. Davies, Lyon, & Monti-Catonia (1998) explain that women who suffer abuse have many physical and mental problems that may prevent them from performing effectively at school or work. Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a fairly common disorder among abused women, causes problems with concentration, hypervigilence about danger, loss of interest in work, hyperarousal, low self-esteem, memory problems (flashbacks or partial amnesia), all of which can be detrimental to job performance (Brandwein 1999). In addition, Raphael (2000) has observed that the anger which must be hidden while the woman is in an abusive relationship (for her own safety) often manifests itself in inappropriate ways on the job.

The effects of abuse are not the same for all women. For example, Brush (2000) uncovered a complex set of relationships among battering, traumatic stress symptoms and the welfare-to-work transition. She found that although some women subject to controlling acts by abusive partners were more likely to drop out of a job placement program, others who experienced abuse by an intimate partner were able to comply with program requirements and move toward independence through waged work. Therefore, it is essential that we look at the variations in context of the women's experiences with abuse and resulting PTSD symptoms.

Lloyd and Taluc (1999) report that women who are abused are as likely to be currently employed as women who are not abused. Further, they contend that past abuse does not significantly predict current employment status. Lloyd and Taluc's finding that women who experienced partner abuse had higher rates of welfare receipt could, in fact, mean that men, in order to retain access to welfare benefits, may abuse women to keep them out of work and on welfare long-term. This study also does not address the fact that the women may be trying to escape the abuse. For some women attempting to leave an abusive partner, welfare may be their only alternative. An examination with specific focus on women's assessments of the link between work and abuse might shed more light on the context and connection. On a positive note, Lloyd and Taluc's finding is good news for policy makers who initially feared that the implementation of the Family Violence Option (or FVO - an exemption that I will discuss later in this chapter) would involve granting too many waivers to welfare recipients.

Browne, Salomon and Bassuk (1999) found that women experiencing recent abuse have one-third the odds of maintaining employment for 30 hours per week, for six months or longer as do women who did not have these experiences.   These findings offer further evidence that the time limits for public assistance may be problematic for battered women. They also found that past abuse had no effect on women's ability to maintain work. Unlike my procedures in this study, Browne, Salomon and Bassuk didn't focus on women actively looking for jobs and how abuse limits women from obtaining employment. They do not include specific measures of abuse designed to prevent women from working including information about controlling and threatening acts. As is typical in this research, they measure only violent acts from the CTS.

Brush (2003) points to at least two explanations for the conflicting results of studies on the effects of battering on work. The first is that partner violence may affect women's ability to work in multiple ways –some of which may not be captured by current measures of abuse. Second, standard instruments used to measure violence may not be able to capture the effects of violence specifically intended to obstruct women's working. Current measures of abuse are used to measure both the physical components of battering and the deliberate control, interference and sabotage techniques used to prevent women from working. Therefore, conflicting results on the effects of battering on work may be a result of using measurement techniques that are poorly fit to the question at hand.

1.1.2   Poverty and Family Violence

Davis (1999) explains how violence perpetuates women's poverty. She argues that it is unrealistic and unfair to impose federal time limits on assistance when such assistance is supposed to be a safety net. Adequate financial assistance, whether it comes from friends, family, religious organization or the government, is often what enables women to leave an abusive partner. Economic isolation is a big problem for battered women who are dependent on their abusers (Davis 1999, Shepard and Pence 1988). Some batterers may forbid their partners to work outside the home. In fact, Davis points out that battered women who leave even severely violent relationships often return to their batterers for economic reasons. Federally mandated lifetime limits on welfare shred the income safety net for battered women. Policy makers need to think about the consequences of the

removal of this safety net for battered women and their children. We will most likely see an increase in the homelessness of women and their children. Also, many women may be more reluctant to leave their abuser, since they cannot afford to support their families (Brandwein 1999). The pervasive problem of women's financial dependence on their husbands (Kalmuss & Straus 1990) becomes especially problematic when combined with the need to escape his abuse. With a financial safety net, at least abused women have options.

1.1.3 Welfare Reform and Family Violence

In 1996 Congress passed new legislation – the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRA) - which ended Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), the federal entitlement program instituted as part of the 1935 Social Security Act. The provisions of the PRA devolved income assistance for poor mothers and children to the states, abolished the federal entitlement to assistance, strengthened work requirements, and set a lifetime limit of 60 months on receiving cash benefits through the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program.

Work requirements and time limits may be especially problematic for abused women and their children. A woman may be unable to leave welfare because her abuser is sabotaging her efforts to work or pursue educational opportunities. She may find it difficult to work because of the long-term effects of abuse. A woman whose child has been abused by her partner may need to go on welfare in order to protect her child (Brandwein 1999).

Another obstacle faced by poor women is mandatory paternity establishment used to aid in child support enforcement at the state level. Unless they are able to obtain a "good cause" exemption, battered woman run the risk of further danger of violence in retaliation for the collection of support (Roberts 1999). Advocates fear that child support actions against the father have the potential to renew violence by alerting the abuser to the woman's location, provide contact with the abuser in the courtroom, and possibly provoke a custody battle which could lead to regular and dangerous contact with an abusive partner (Pearce 1999, Raphael 1996). Rather than punish fathers, who are difficult to find or who may hide their assets, the law punishes mothers by sanctioning her if she does not cooperate (even if her assessment of the situation is that cooperating would endanger her and her children). However, Pearson, Thoennes & Griswold (1999) found that when presented with the option of obtaining an exemption, most women said that they wanted to collect support and that it would pose no danger to them or their children.

The Family Violence Option provides exemptions from work requirements and time limits for women for whom abuse presents a serious obstacle to labor force participation. This option allows states to provide screening, counseling, and other services, and to temporarily waive work requirements for abused women (Raphael & Haennicke 1998). The initial controversy over the implementation of the FVO was the policy makers' fear that "too many" recipients would gain waivers from work requirements and time limits. However, there is little evidence to support this concern (Tolman 1999). There *is* a discrepancy between anonymous disclosure and disclosure in

the welfare office; this suggests welfare officials would benefit from training on the needs of battered women (Brush 1999; Raphael 2000; Brandwein 1999; Stuart 1999).

Welfare does not make women independent of men. Raphael (1996) argues that because women cannot live solely on a welfare check, many become dependent on a man for support. Brush (2003) reports that high co-residency rates among welfare recipients suggest that the independence effects of welfare and education are overrated. Moreover, because welfare has traditionally substituted for consistent labor force participation, poor women who have been on welfare may be especially dependent on men for income and identity, and may not develop their human capital in ways that will make living wage work likely or possible. "Because they have not developed their skills, a vocational identity, or any work experience, and because the world of work thus remains alien to them, some women on welfare find their choices limited when they realize it is time to escape the abusive relationship" (Raphael 2000, p. 122). This point hits especially hard for women of color who find even greater structural barriers to obtaining employment due to labor force discrimination (Brush 2001).

1.2   OUTLINE

In the next chapter I report on my methods, and the value added by using qualitative interviews to investigate the meanings of battering, work, and welfare in the lives of poor mothers. I provide a description of the sample and the study from which it was drawn. I explain my process of securing participants, establishing rapport and conducting the actual interviews. I note the problems that I encountered, as well as the little triumphs

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along the way.   Finally, I provide a detailed illustration of my data analysis procedures, including the costs and benefits of using the program NUD*IST to help organize and sort the data for analysis.

Chapter 3 consists of a rich description and analysis of poor women's experiences with abuse. I demonstrate the importance of focusing on *poor* women based on the established links between abuse and poverty. Throughout this chapter, I provide examples of physical and verbal abuse, as well as coercive tactics like control and isolation. I establish that abuse is onerous for this group of poor women making the journey to welfare to work because of their lack of social and financial resources. I uncover the women's reactions to abuse, namely: emotional, physical and legal responses. In addition, I reveal the consequences of all types of abuse on these women's lives. Finally, I provide two graphic illustrative cases of experiences that were extreme in both the violence and consequences.

In Chapter 4, I demonstrate how the meanings of work to women and their partners can encourage or deter women's waged work in the same ways as do other, more tangible obstacles and barriers. I present women's descriptions of their own and their partners' feelings about waged work and the costs and benefits of working. I show how men's traditional formulations of masculinity and femininity can negatively impact women's ability to work. I examine women's assessments of their job performance, which was also telling of their views on working and dependency. Lastly, I utilize 2 women's accounts of what work means to them to illustrate the high value that these welfare recipients place on paid employment.

Chapter 5 consists of a discussion on the meanings of welfare use to the women and their partners. By examining the meanings of welfare for these women, I dispel the some of the commonly held beliefs about the laziness and dependency of "welfare queens." I reveal some men's satisfactions with their partners receiving welfare, and the subsequent feelings/actions taken by the women in response. I report women's dissatisfaction with the welfare system and desire to become independent. I reveal women's frustrations in navigating the welfare system problems include: unsympathetic caseworkers, paltry benefits, and paperwork hassles. Additionally, I illustrate the concerns of *some* women and the *lack of concern* by others regarding the impending time limitations on their welfare benefits. I uncover ways that some women use welfare as an act of resistance against a partner who restricts her finances. Finally, I also reveal the benefits, according to these women, of the welfare system and the new policy requirements.

2.0 RESEARCH METHODS AND DATA DESCRIPTION

2.1 MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In-depth explorations of welfare recipients' assessments of the temporal and causal connections among work, relationships, and abuse will help to measure and re-conceptualize the effects of battering on women's transition from welfare to work. The fundamental questions guiding this study are:

1. What are the effects that women's working has on their experiences of battering, especially their evaluation of the degree to which their labor force participation aggravated or ameliorated abusive behaviors by partners?

2. How does battering affect women's work?

3. Does the meaning that *her partner* attaches to her work affect the exacerbation/amelioration of the abuse? Does the meaning *she* attaches to work affect her ability to work despite the abuse?

4. What are her and her partner's perspectives of the welfare system and what are her assessments of the role they play in her success/failure of moving into paid work?

My hope is that the answers to these questions will begin to reconcile the contradictory research findings on the link between battering and work, comprehend the nature of women's experiences, and adjust policy and assistance decisions accordingly.

2.2   DESCRIPTION OF THE PREVIOUS STUDY FROM WHICH THIS SAMPLE WAS DRAWN

Subjects were drawn from the pool of respondents from the study "Qualitative Research on Battering, Work and Welfare," conducted by sociologist Lisa Brush. This set of data, collected in 2001, consists of 40 face-to-face, retrospective and prospective, structured interviews which Brush and I collected (follow-up prospective interviews were also conducted by Lisa Huebner).   These subjects were welfare recipients enrolled in an employment training program designed to assist referred welfare recipients in making the transition from welfare to work - "Work First." Participating in the job readiness and job search activities offered by Work First fulfills the work requirement under the new TANF (Temporary Aid to Needy Families) policy.

The Work First program is a four-week, job readiness training program. Most participants are required to complete 30 hours of job search or work-related activities per week, which consists of classes and job search activities.   There are different requirements depending on how long the individual has been on welfare. The referrals to this program come from the County Assistance Offices.

The response rate for the retrospective interviews was 40/42 or 95 percent and is for all practical purposes a cohort study, rather than a sample. The mean completion time

of the interviews was 56 minutes and they were conducted in private on site at the Re-employment Transition Center. Respondents were compensated with a $50 voucher for a local supermarket.

The average respondent in this group of women was 31 years old and the majority of them (83%) identified their race as black. Only one woman had neither a high school diploma nor its equivalent. Just over half of the respondents had a high school diploma or GED and forty-three percent had received some form of education beyond high school. Nearly one-fourth of the women reported having an infant (child under one year) living at home with them. The majority of the respondents had never been married. While none of the respondents reported being married at the time of the interview, about one-third of the women were divorced or separated (Brush 2002).

In Brush's original study, the subjects were asked about abuse at the hands of an intimate partner and specifically, about perceptions of the link between abuse and work. Women who reported abuse in any relationship were asked to assess whether the abuse started, got better, got worse or stayed about the same when she started work or job training. Researchers asked these assessment questions for every relationship. For each relationship, interviewers administered three series of items:

> **"Interference or sabotage**: failed to provide promised child care; withheld car keys or promised ride; picked fights; took or wrecked your books, homework, work clothes, eyeglasses, etc.; kept you up late or interrupted your sleep; demanded sex when you needed to leave for work, study, take care of your children, or just be alone; needed help because of being drunk or high

Control and threats: threatened to withhold money or gifts; threatened to hurt you or your children; seemed jealous that you might meet someone new at work; told you that you could never keep a job, learn, or accomplish things; told you working mothers are bad mothers; told you that you could work only if you kept up with the housework; threatened, bothered, or visited you at work when it was not allowed

Violence and injury: hit you, kick you, throw something at you; threaten you with a weapon or use a knife or gun to hurt you; demand to have sex with you or force you to have sex; cut bruise, choke, or seriously injure you; make you afraid for your safety or the safety of your children" (Brush 1999).

Interviewers also collected data on the start and end dates of each period of education, each job, each period on welfare, and each relationship.

By relying on tactics-based measures to understand abuse, researchers are missing the full picture of women's experiences and how they impact other areas of their lives (such as work, welfare use, etc.). This information is especially invaluable to policy makers and caseworkers who would be better able to understand and meet these women's needs and make appropriate policy changes. Employers would also benefit from greater understanding of the obstacles faced by these women. I was interested in the ways that women contextualized their experiences of violence and therefore, I adopted a qualitative approach.

2.3   PROCEDURES

2.3.1   Eligibility requirements

Subjects from the initial study (N=40) were considered eligible for my follow-up interview study if they either reported filing a Protection From Abuse (PFA) order or scored higher than 1 on the Work-Related Control, Abuse and Sabotage checklist (WORCASC; Brush 2002). Based on these criteria, the eligible women have reported some form of abusive, controlling or threatening behavior in a relationship. There are 36 eligible subjects. I made a list of the eligible women and, starting alphabetically at the top of the list, began contacting each woman until I accomplished my goal of contacting and completing interviews with 20 of them.

2.3.2   Recruitment

Due to the short-term nature of the program at RTC (4 weeks), I was unable to recruit my subjects while they were participating in the training program at RTC. It was necessary that I contact my subjects by phone or through the mail. This was problematic for several reasons. Some of the women had moved and left no forwarding contact information. One woman was evicted from her home and RTC had no further contact information for her. Several women had their phones turned off by the phone company – a common problem for women on a fixed income or those who are receiving no income. I had a contact person at the RTC who was able to access their database and provide me with

addresses and phone numbers. However, this information changed so quickly that it was nearly impossible to keep track of all of the women. The information was sometimes outdated or simply incorrect. For example, after failed attempts to contact one woman by phone, I visited her at the address given to me by my contact at RTC. The building in which she had once presumably resided had just been torn down and was reduced to a pile of bricks.

The issue of confidentiality is always important to a researcher and her subjects; however, in cases involving victims of abuse, privacy also becomes a huge safety concern. Some of the subjects in this study were still in abusive relationships or still had contact with their abusers. As a consequence, I had to exercise particular care contacting these women. I was very careful about the types of letters or messages that I sent to the house, in the event that the woman's partner did not know about or did not like the idea of her speaking with a researcher about her life. Letters I sent to the home were in envelopes with the RTC return address. This type of letter would not arouse suspicion since the RTC had sent letters to the home before.   In addition, if I were to call the home, I would tell whoever answered that I was, "Danielle, from the RTC." Again, I had permission to use the RTC as a cover and I knew that it would not arouse suspicions from the woman's partner since she was accustomed to being contacted by people at the RTC. Telling them that I was "Danielle, a researcher from the University of Pittsburgh," might cause a partner to ask about the type of research I was conducting, which might cause trouble for the woman.

I began by contacting as many subjects as possible by phone. After exhausting those options, for the women I was unable to contact by phone, I sent letters to a current

address. In these mailings, I explained that I was sending the letter because I was unable to contact her by telephone. I thanked her for her participation in the previous interviews (Brush 2000) on work, welfare and family, and explained that I was doing similar interviews for a new project. I instructed her, if interested, to call me to schedule a face-to-face interview appointment. As I received new contact information for the women, I sent out another round of letters (total of three sets).

The subjects and I read through, discussed, and signed a consent form that includes a detailed description of the research. Subjects were informed about their right to refuse to participate or withdraw from participation at any time without consequences to their current or future relationship with Pittsburgh Partnership, the Department of Public Welfare, or the University of Pittsburgh, and without jeopardizing any benefits to which they may be entitled.

2.3.3   Interview Refusals

I experienced only one refusal. She explained that she had just started a new job and was very busy with it. She said that although she would like to participate, she simply didn't have the time to meet me for an interview. If I had known then how difficult it would be to contact this group of women, I might have offered her the option of doing a phone interview. After speaking with her in the summer of 2002, I made another attempt to contact her in Spring 2003, since I was still tracking women down for interviews. At that time, she was less busy with work, and extremely eager to participate. She opted to do a phone interview with me at that time.

2.3.4   Rapport

One of the key components to good research is being able to establish rapport with your subjects.   Brush (1990) maintains that the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee can be the biggest barrier to gaining information regarding intimate violence. She claims, "To elicit adequate information about the highly stigmatized, traumatic phenomenon of battering requires an infusion of trust, safety, and intimacy into the interviewing relationship" (p. 65).   I was cognizant of the personal nature of their experiences, and I attempted to establish a good connection in order to facilitate their disclosure.

My subjects all had at least one child. At the time of about three-fourths of my interviews, I was visibly pregnant, and I had already had one other child – a fact I disclosed at our initial meeting. I believe that the visibility of my pregnancy punctuated the fact that I had children of my own and could relate to the struggles faced by a working woman with children.

 An important component in establishing rapport is the way you present yourself in the interview – especially your manner of dress. I was dressed in professional clothing when I met the women at the RTC for an interview. It was required that the women wear professional clothing to their classes at the RTC - preparation for their work in the labor force. However, when I met women at a coffee shop or restaurant or library, I wore casual clothing in order to match the casual atmosphere.

Another aid to establishing rapport was that I have been formally introduced to all of these women before, when I spoke with them about Dr. Lisa Brush's study, "Qualitative Research on Battering, Work and Welfare." For this project, I interviewed half of the 40 women in her study. I conducted follow-up interviews with 13 of the women in my study. Consequently, I was interviewing 8 of the women for at least the second time. I had not interviewed 4 of the 20 women before asking them to take part in this study.

2.3.5   Scheduling Interviews

I maintained a strict policy against conducting any interviews inside the woman's home. Conducting the interviews outside her residence seemed a safer place for the woman to talk about her experiences – especially considering that some of the women were still in the abusive relationship. In addition, I felt safer doing the interviews in a public place where I would not be concerned about any negative reactions towards me by a woman's partner.

When I began the study I was adamant about only doing face-to-face interviews. Doing these interviews in person allowed me to read body language and develop good rapport with the woman. This was done to ensure both that I had the woman's full attention, and that she was able to speak freely in the privacy of the interview session. Over the phone, it is impossible to control for interruptions/distractions caused by the needs of her children or other people in her house at the time of the call. Obviously, when dealing with this type of qualitative interview, it is desirable to gauge subjects'

physical reactions and facial expressions in addition to their verbal responses. Also, I was concerned that by doing such a long interview over the phone, I may lose the attention of my subject to interruptions by: children, partner, pet, doorbell, television, etc. The problem with doing interviews in person was that I was relying on the women to keep the scheduled appointments. It was frustrating to be the only one to show up for a scheduled appointment – especially after all the effort I had invested in contacting these women. I was unwilling to risk losing contact with these women, whose contact information changed frequently. They were willing to participate, but, for one reason or another, were often unable to keep scheduled appointments. After months of scheduling and rescheduling canceled or "no-show" interviews, when the timeline for the project becoming an issue, I gave 4 subjects the option of doing the interview over the phone. With their permission, I recorded our phone conversation so it was as accurate as the face-to-face interviews. I sent these women the consent form and instructions to initial each page and sign p. 4 and send it back in the return envelope I enclosed. I also sent a note – she should call me if she had any questions or concerns about the form (since I was not going through it with her). This worked out well since the interviews were scheduled for a time when the each of the women was by herself in her home and therefore was not distracted by others.

2.3.6 Compensation

I compensated respondents at the completion of the interview with a $50 voucher from a local supermarket chain. This amount was sufficiently generous to demonstrate respect

for the time and effort required by the research subjects without being coercive. The vouchers were not taxed and did not count against any welfare benefits (including Food Stamps) that participants might have been receiving. The University of Pittsburgh Center for Social and Urban Research generously provided funds for the vouchers.

I also reimbursed the women for their childcare expenses. I based my reimbursement on the amount given, per child, by welfare for childcare expenses. Some women's children were in school at the time of the interview and did not incur any expenses. Those women who incurred expenses were reimbursed in cash, in addition to their Giant Eagle voucher, upon completion of the interview. In retrospect, I wish I had also reimbursed subjects for transportation costs. Because we were meeting in a public location, it was necessary for some women to use public transportation – an added expense for them.

2.3.7 Labeling Experiences of Abuse

After doing my first three interviews, I realized that the word "abuse" contained in the consent form, was causing a reaction – a grimace or shift in their seating position or even a verbal explanation that they were not a victim of "abuse." I came to the realization that I was inadvertently *labeling* their relationship, and doing so in a way that they did not agree with or which made them uncomfortable. Some women did not define their partners' actions as "abuse." Therefore, I removed the word "abuse" from the consent form and submitted the change to the IRB. The IRB approved this minor change. Instead of explaining the study in terms of seeing "the relationships between abuse and work," I

described it as an examination of the "connections between relationships and work." This minor change was not misleading to the subjects and served to introduce the study in a more neutral manner.

2.4   SAMPLE

The average respondent in this group of women was 32 years old (the youngest two were 19 and the oldest two were 43) and the majority of them (80%) were black. The remaining 20% were white. Two women were pregnant at the time of the interview. All of the women had at least one minor child (only women with a child are eligible for the particular welfare benefits that made them eligible for the original retrospective interview study). One–third had 2 children, one-fourth had 3 and one-fifth of the subjects had only one child. The woman with the largest family had a total of 6 children. Although the majority (85%) reported that they were no longer in an abusive relationship, three of the women reported that they were still in a relationship with an abusive or controlling partner. Fifty percent of the women reported having never been married, and another quarter of them were divorced. Only one woman was married and another was engaged to be married. The remaining women (15%) were separated from their partner. Half reported that they had at some point, filed a Protection From Abuse order (the civil restraining order the county provides as a legal protection from battering).

2.5   THE INTERVIEWS

I used semi-structured interviews, featuring open-ended questions and extensive probes in follow-ups, to provide data on the link between battering and women's labor force participation.   The interviews ranged in length from 25 to 90 minutes, but most interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes.   The 25-minute interview was with a woman who had many health problems and admitted that her medications made her feel "disoriented and tired" much of the time. She answered all of my interview questions, but did not offer to elaborate on any of her answers. The interview appointments were made during the most convenient times and practical locations for the women. Since all the women had different work schedules, some interviews took place during the daytime, some in the evenings and some on weekends.

I received permission to conduct interviews at the RTC. Although that was not suitable for everyone, I conducted 13 interviews there. The site was convenient for women who were conducting other business downtown, or who were working downtown, or who were simply comfortable with the familiar atmosphere of the RTC. I had my own conference room and the interviews were private and uninterrupted. For the other interviews, I met women wherever it was suitable for them – coffee shops, bookstores, libraries or fast food restaurants – any place that was convenient, relatively quiet, and where they felt comfortable.

The interviews were conducted in private in nearly all cases. In one interview, the woman's sister sat at a table nearby, waiting for her to be finished so that they could get a ride home together. At another interview, a woman brought her grandchild with her. I was unaware that the child would be accompanying her to the interview, but because she

was under 2, I chose to proceed with the interview. I made my decision based on the very young age of the child, and since the woman seemed comfortable conducting the interview while holding the baby.

At the beginning of each interview, I explained that our conversation would be recorded for accuracy. We read through the consent form together and I answered any questions she had about the interview or the study. Due to the sensitive nature of the interview questions, it was essential that the women understood that I was not a member of a government agency and would not be reporting anything they told me to the welfare office or any other place that may interfere with their benefits, support, employment, or child custody.

The interview focus was on the patterns and meanings of work, relationships and battering among welfare recipients. The central research questions focused on the ways that violence and controlling behaviors by an intimate partner may act as an obstacle to work and ways that work may aggravate violent and controlling behaviors.   I began by sorting women into two categories by asking whether or not they had ever filed a Protection From Abuse order. If not, I asked the women whether they had ever been in a relationship where someone made it difficult for them to go to work. It quickly became apparent that there were discrepancies between the women's definitions and my objective measures of abuse, which I did not anticipate in my original research questions.

One of the obstacles I encountered while conducting my interviews was based in my eligibility criteria. A subject was eligible for this study if she met the following criteria: 1) She participated in Brush's study in summer 2001, *and* 2) She reported in that interview that she had either filed a PFA, *and/or* she scored higher than 1 on the Work-

Related Control and Sabotage checklist (WORCSC). My first two interview questions deal with this information so that I am able to categorize the woman from the start of the interview. Although I recruited subjects based on those criteria, when I asked my first two questions, I received unexpected responses. In one case, the woman told me that she has never filed a PFA in any relationship. I didn't expect this response; in the previous study, she reported filing a PFA in a past relationship. In several other cases, the woman reported that she had never filed a PFA and she also said that she had never been in a relationship with anyone who has been controlling, abusive or made it difficult for her to work.

Because these first questions were both my eligibility requirements and the starting point for all the other questions, I was not sure how to proceed with the interviews at that point. I moved on to asking about what things made it difficult/easier for her to work. I figured if I got her talking, something might come out about it. In several instances, that was the case. After the woman started talking, I realized that although *she* didn't define the relationship as controlling or abusive, there were outward signs of such experiences. In other cases, although the woman may have scored higher than 1 on the WORCSC in Brush's study, she reported no experiences with abusive or controlling partners and no problems going to work.

Although I initially viewed this as a huge dilemma, I realized that I had uncovered a very interesting empirical puzzle. How do I reconcile the WORCASC scale findings in the previous study with the responses about their partner being an obstacle (or NOT an obstacle) to work? Recall is one concern. Another issue here is women's definition of

what is considered an abusive or controlling behavior. I attempt to reconcile this methodological conflict through semi-structured interviews with extensive probes.

We discussed the partners' violent or controlling actions, including where, when, and her assessments of *why* they occurred. She provided contextual information, namely the events leading up to the violence, the persons involved in or witnessing the incident, and the after-effects of his actions. I used follow-up questions to ascertain her reaction to these incidents, especially as they related to her ability to go to work. Consequences included but were not limited to police action, Protection From Abuse orders, interventions from other relatives or friends, or no repercussions whatsoever. I also probed for details about the relationship, including type of relationship, when it occurred, whether the man was the father of her children, etc.

These types of questions were the most sensitive and I assumed that they would elicit the most emotional response from the women. That was true for some women – especially the cases in which children were involved. However, I was surprised to notice that most women were very clinical and matter-of-fact about their discussions of violence and the subsequent injuries they received. In her nine-year study of a women's shelter, Winkelmann (2004) found that as a coping mechanism, battered women, "tend to metamorphize the experience of pain and violence away from their bodies and onto matters of agency, weapons, or wounds" (8). Winkelmann found that women tended to focus more on the actions of their partner rather than the resulting pain they experienced. This coincides with the most popular types of tactic-based scales used to measure battering which focus mainly on the actions of the partner, rather than the consequences of those actions.

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I asked about the costs and benefits of working and of being on welfare in order to learn more about the meanings she ascribed to them as well as her assessment of the risks or rewards associated with working or receiving welfare benefits. By understanding what work means to the woman, as well as her assessment of the costs and benefits associated with working, I have a better context for her experiences, as well as a means of comparison across the group.

I asked each woman about her assessments of the pros/cons of her working, as well as the consequences of her working and what the repercussions would be of her *not* working. In addition to *her* assessment of the situation, I asked her about her partners' feelings about her working.   I was interested to see if the meaning that she or her partner attached to her work affected the exacerbation/amelioration of the abuse. Also, I was eager to learn if the meaning she attached to work affected her ability to work despite the abuse. These questions revealed some interesting issues of gender dynamics that I had not anticipated with my original research questions.

I asked specific questions about barriers that made it more difficult for her to work, as well as supports that made it easier for her to work. I followed up with questions about what her family, boss, co-workers, and partner said or did. By uncovering patterns of supports and barriers to women's working, caseworkers and policy makers will be better able to assist them in their continued participation in the labor force.

I asked each woman to assess her job performance on a scale of 1 to 10, and provide the reasons for why she gave herself that rating. These questions about job performance contribute to our understanding of the effects of abuse on the job. Interview questions

about the ability of the woman to work or to continue working may help in our understanding of the degree to which battering acts as an obstacle to work.

In order to gain some understanding of her experiences with welfare use, we discussed her feelings about the costs and benefits of receiving welfare benefits. I also asked about her *partner's* feelings about her receiving welfare benefits. We discussed the consequences for her and her family of not being on welfare. These questions are especially relevant since noncompliance with the new welfare laws (which include work requirements) results in loss of benefits.

2.6   INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

Women were very eager to discuss the problems with the welfare system as well as the assistance it provides for many women. I believe that their eagerness to discuss this topic stems from the fact that I developed my contacts with them through the RTC. They were referred to the RTC because they were receiving welfare benefits and were required to complete the program in order to keep receiving support. I think they may associate me with the RTC program, and as a result, be willing to discuss welfare issues. During this part of the interview, it became especially apparent to me that I was viewed as a neutral observer and not someone who would report anything to the welfare agency.

2.7 LIMITATIONS

The women in this study have all (presumably) had at least one relationship with a partner who has acted in a controlling or violent way. Some of the relationships are current or recent and some are in the distant past – 10 years or more. There may be limitations to making comparisons of this nature. I am asking women to recall feelings that they may have had 10 years ago. These emotions may not be as vivid or as easily recalled as those that may have happened only yesterday or last week.

In several interview questions, I asked the woman to gauge the feelings of her partner regarding work and welfare recipiency. This was difficult for some women to do and is obviously limited to *her* impressions of his feelings. For the purposes of this study, since I am interested in how her experiences influenced her work and welfare use, these perceptions are sufficient. It would have been ideal to gain firsthand information from her partner or former partner; however, some of those men are in jail or have moved and would have been nearly impossible to contact.

2.8 ANALYTIC APPROACH – CODING AND ANALYZING THE INTERVIEWS

After transcribing all twenty interviews, I used QSR NUD*IST (Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorizing) 6 to analyze patterns in women's answers questions about battering, labor force participation and welfare recipiency. NUD*IST is a computerized qualitative data management and analysis program that

allows for accurately recording, structuring, and assessing of textual information. Using both inductive and deductive coding, I uncovered themes that addressed my research questions, and labeled text units with the appropriate thematic codes. I also discovered that I had obtained information that went above and beyond my proposed research questions. This information provides a rich detail to the women's lives and I coded these patterns as well.

In addition to analyzing my qualitative interviews, I examined the background information on these women that was collected in 2000, in the study, "Qualitative Research on Battering, Work and Welfare" (Brush 2001). This information, coupled with the richness of my semi-structured interview data, provides a broad picture of these women's experiences with work, welfare and abuse. In addition, it was interesting to note the discrepancies between the two sets of data and explore possible reasons for such inconsistencies.

Throughout this section, I will provide some insights into my analysis process including transcribing the interviews and using the software package NUD*IST (Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching and Theorizing,). Huberman and Miles (1994) argue that the analysis methods in qualitative research were rarely reported in enough detail to allow readers to map the journey from thousands of pages of transcribed field notes, to final conclusions. I attempt to remedy that problem by offering a detailed examination of key steps in my analysis process.

My data consisted of 20 interviews. I kept track of those interviews in a spreadsheet that included the identification number, the subjects' name, the date and place of the interview, as well as the type of interview (phone or face-to-face). In

addition, I input the field notes for those 20 interviews. The field notes complemented the interviews and provided a more complex picture of the interview.

For my first task, I transcribed each of my interviews into a Word document. I believe that if it is possible to transcribe your own interviews, you will become infinitely more familiar with the data – a big help when you move on to coding. In places where the tape was inaudible, I simply wrote [inaudible] in that space in the interview. None of these spaces was key to the understanding of the interview. Initially, I simply used numbers to identify each respondent. However, for a clear presentation of the information, while still retaining strict confidentiality, I found it necessary to assign pseudonyms to my respondents.

I used both a coding down process (coding from the themes I expected to see, based on my interview questions, the literature review and a preliminary examination of the data) and a coding up process (making additions and changes to my coding scheme based on what I was finding in the data). I concentrated on exhausting the coding of one set of themes and sub-themes (nodes and their children) before moving on to another subject. This worked well because I was able to visit and revisit a certain topic and devote all of my attention to it before moving on to the next theme. This iterative process was labor intensive, but extremely useful in making sure the analysis was systematic and thorough.

My initial set of codes came directly from my interview protocol. I began with the questions that I believed were answered by all respondents, and I saved the more complex data for later on in the analysis process. This was an excellent place to start

because I was able to build confidence in my coding skills while working with some easily identifiable themes.

Throughout my coding process, themes quickly emerged that provided answers to my major research questions. However, it became clear that I was uncovering additional information which captured more about the women's lives and especially their experiences with abuse. By using the NUD*IST software package, I was able to quickly and easily make changes to my coding schemes as I uncovered new and interesting patterns. For example, "poor health" was an unanticipated obstacle to work for several women. Making changes and additions to my coding scheme would have been cumbersome without the software for managing the data and coding process.

As I worked with this initial set of codes, many categories emerged. However, I left an "other" category as a catch-all for anything that did not fit within my coding framework. Rather than leave this "other" category full of useful information, I refined the nodes over and over again, until I felt confident that I had exhausted the most relevant categories. Through this process, I felt confident in my development of a thorough and detailed coding scheme.

My initial set of categories was fairly extensive. I had enough information from my initial study of the transcriptions to develop a decent first round of coding. Huberman (1994) advocates taking time to operationalize and record coding rules: "Whether codes are pre-specified or developed along the way, clear operational definitions are indispensable, so they can be applied consistently by a single researcher over time and multiple researchers will be thinking about the same phenomena as they code" (p. 63). I wrote detailed descriptions of each category, which I intended to help out someone else

who was looking to use this data set, but which became quite useful as I was refining and extending my coding categories.

My categories were hierarchically ordered. Although I used some free nodes in my "coding up" process, I had a difficult time keeping any theme in the "free nodes" section for very long. Although it is acceptable to keep a node as a "free node", it was helpful to me, in the long run, to see all of my themes in a hierarchy. This metaphorical family tree format helped me to visualize the complex relationships between my themes and eliminate certain nodes if they were redundant or add nodes that were needed in order to be sure that every theme (parent node) contained complete sets.

The NUD*IST software program was a useful tool, both for organization and manipulation of data. I was able to view my data in many forms – the transcribed interview itself, or specific parts of the interview. NUD*IST can be used as a lens through which to focus attention on many different areas of any particular interview. I was able to generate reports containing a compilation of different nodes and I am confident that I was able to capture every instance of each of my nodes, which may not have been the case if I had coded my documents my hand.

In addition to the mobility afforded me by using the NUD*IST reports, I was also able to use the coding stripes feature to carefully analyze nodes. Coding stripes allowed me to see which nodes tended to overlap. I was then able to revisit those specific areas to uncover patterns that appeared in the women's experiences. For example, I uncovered the overlap between certain obstacles (namely partner and childcare).

I found the "text searches" to be very useful – especially when coding things like "obstacles" or "supports". These nodes were explicitly marked in the text, and therefore

it was easy and helpful to perform a text search rather than sorting through an entire interview to find that particular section. Text searches were less helpful for finding patterns in meanings that the women attached to welfare or work in which the women expressed themselves in very different terms.

The Matrix charts were also an effective tool in my analysis. Huberman (1994) advocates the use of matrices, which he believes require the researcher to really think about their research questions and what portions of the data are needed to answer them. I focused my matrices on the obstacles to work and ran them against demographic characteristics of the respondents. Although most of these results were rather unremarkable in this set of nodes, I was able to find some noteworthy points, namely the relationship between certain obstacles and the tendency to file a Protection From Abuse Order.

I was able to use the "Memo" feature in NUD*IST to leave myself notes about where I stopped in my coding, which enabled me to keep track of my progress and avoid duplicating work, as well as leave messages regarding coding decisions. Even working alone, I was engaged in continual internal dialogue. Memos are an essential part of that dialogue and add up to the final interpretations (Strauss 1987, p. 110).

The greatest advantages to using this particular data analysis method were the ease of manipulation of data in order to make changes and compile reports and view emerging themes, and the organization of different types of data in one location. The disadvantage to doing this type of analysis is the initial time commitment to learn the software and input the data. Overall, I believe that the advantages to conducting a thorough, systematic analysis make the initial commitment worthwhile.

2.9   REFERRALS TO PROFESSIONALS

All participants were offered a card with information about how to file for a Protection From Abuse order and resources for battered women in Allegheny County. This card constitutes a referral resource for shelter and counseling. In addition subjects who were interested were offered a referral for counseling with a psychotherapist specializing in work with battered women.

2.10   SUMMARY

The main problem with this type of interview approach is cost, in terms of both time and money. Working with a small sample, I was able to schedule and complete 20 interviews at a minimal cost (vouchers to compensate participants, and childcare compensation). However, in order to conduct this research using a much larger sample, costs and time constraints could be prohibitive. The benefit of the popular tactic-based methods to studying violence is that is more cost-effective and can be quickly administered.

This type of interview approach is advantageous both to the researcher and to the participant. As a researcher, I am able to gain a rich understanding of the ways that women encounter, describe, and cope with experiences of violence as they transition from welfare to work. Participants are able to relate their stories to an eager listener in a way that is cathartic for many women. In addition, if they are in need of aid or assistance, I am able to provide these women with referrals.

3.0   THE ELEMENTS OF ABUSE

3.1   ABUSE AND POVERTY

Tjaden & Thoennes (2000) use the National Violence Against Women Survey to estimate that 1 in 5 (22%) U.S. women are physically assaulted in their lifetime, and 1 in 13 (7.7%) are raped by an intimate partner. They reported that 1.3 women were physically assaulted and more than 201,394 women were raped by an intimate partner in 1999. Current research suggests that 20-30% of women receiving welfare benefits are victims of domestic violence (Raphael 2002, 2000). One of the reasons that these estimates vary so widely is because people tend to compare point estimates and lifetime prevalence measures. This is not a prevalence study; indeed, in order to be eligible for this study, women who were on welfare must have reported some form of abuse, control, or threatening behavior in a relationship. Listening to the varied experiences of these women reveals not just the fact but also the consequences of control and stalking as well as physical, verbal and sexual abuse, which throw these women's lives into a state of disorder and can trap poor women in poverty.

Although it is important to study all women's experiences with abuse, it is especially critical to learn about poor women's situations because they have so few resources. Those women who want to leave violent relationships face serious problems gaining the

financial stability that they need to get out (Kurz 1998). In this chapter I examine women's accounts of the violent actions to which their male partners subjected them, including verbal abuse, stalking, control and physical abuse. I explore the reactions these women have in the face of such traumatic experiences: fear, minimization, denial, coping, retaliation and legal actions. Finally, I describe and interpret some of the consequences of abuse faced by these poor women on welfare: fear, depression, injuries, battles with the criminal justice system, incarceration, homicidal thoughts and job loss.

3.2   TYPOLOGY OF ABUSE

This examination of male violence against women will illustrate how violence can have dramatic and sometimes life-threatening effects. This is by no means an all-inclusive list of tactics that abusers use to control their partners, but it is a typology of the most salient elements of abuse as discussed by the welfare recipients in this study.

3.2.1   Verbal Abuse (n=9)

Verbal abuse is a common violent tactic and it may include any or all of the following behaviors: harassing, threatening, interrogating, accusing, taunting, yelling, putting down, name-calling, raging and bullying. Verbal abuse was widespread in this group of welfare recipients who had reported abuse; nearly half of the women I interviewed

reported experiencing some form of verbal abuse from an intimate partner. Kyra explains that her partner put her down and called her names and told her that she was "not a good Mom." Ann explains that the verbal onslaught was constant: "He was mean, evil, he was yelling at me 24 hours a day, calling me no good things." Patricia's partner repeatedly accused her of infidelity and often yelled and screamed at her while she was at work: "He ended up comin' out on my job one day – just showin' off – just actin' a fool. 'I don't want you here no more. I know you [are] down here fuckin'!'"

This group of women experience different types of verbal abuse. Six women explained that the abuse often involved name-calling and humiliation, both at work and at home. For the remaining 3 women, the verbal attacks were even more serious and included threats to hurt or kill them. Dutton and Goodman caution that rather than lumping violent tactics into one common rubric, researchers need to develop subtypes of intimate partner violence (p. 744, 2005). Verbal assault consisting of humiliation is quite different than assault consisting of terroristic threats. In the case of these nine women, those who experienced the most serious and threatening verbal abuse, also experienced the most extreme physical violence.

In response to the verbal abuse, most of the women minimized their partners' actions. Ann describes her response to the verbal abuse: "I was just like, well, here it goes again, another bad day." This pattern of abuse had become commonplace in their relationship and it is clear that Ann has simply accepted it. She remains in this currently abusive relationship. Patricia simply laughed as she recounted the verbal abuse from her partner. It is unclear whether or not the assaults impacted them at the time, but minimization is often used as a coping mechanism by women to avoid the pain of abuse.

Kyra was defensive about the name-calling and attacks on her mothering skills: "If I'm not a good Mom then come get her. You're not a good Dad either, so it doesn't matter." She minimizes his name-calling, but it is clear that these attacks have hurt her. Kyra is challenging her partner to do a better job at parenting. It is apparent that although she shrugs off the cruel remarks, her defensiveness suggests that she may have internalized the abuse and started to doubt her mothering skills.

In contrast, for women like Candace and Jean, who were threatened by their partners, the emotional impact was substantial. Jean, whose partner repeatedly threatened her life, still lives in fear of him even though he is incarcerated. Similarly, Candace fears that her stalking ex-partner will one day make good on his threats to kill her. This form of verbal abuse has clearly had a deep and lasting impact on these women.

It is interesting to note that all of the women who reported verbal abuse reported some form of physical abuse and/or stalking as well. Because these women typically experienced more than one form of violence, it is impossible to separate the ramifications of one particular type of abuse. Therefore, I will discuss the consequences at the end of this chapter.

3.2.2 Control and Isolation (n=7)

Isolation is a common tactic of violence against women. The abuser will curtail his partner's outside contacts and, eventually, she will believe that she is alone and helpless to prevent his assaults. Isolated from family and friends and without social connections, these poor women typically feel unable to seek help or to leave the relationship.

In the experiences and accounts of this group of women, there were numerous reasons for their partner's efforts to control and isolate them, namely: paid employment, paternalism, jealousy, and sexual possessiveness. These male-dominated actions are indicative of traditional gender dynamics at work in these relationships.

For some women like Lena, control and isolation was directly related to work. Lena, who felt powerless to change her situation, describes her husband's control: "He didn't really want me to do anything outside the home. He was just jealous. He didn't trust other men out there. He kind of just wanted me to stay away from…the world, I guess. You know, just stay in the house." She added, "If I went to the grocery store, or wherever I went it was just a big thing for him. If we weren't together…he wanted to be with me the whole time." By isolating Lena from "the world" because of his distrust and jealousy, her partner was eliminating her social connections and increasing her dependence on him – making it virtually impossible to leave him.

Kathy also endured control and isolation by her husband: "I couldn't, go out, go to the store. If I did go, I went with him and I had to hold my head down. I mean, he was bad." She hated feeling submissive to her husband: "He tried to control me and tell me where and what to do. I'd better do this, I'd better do that…like he was my father rather than my husband." It is noteworthy that Kathy equates her husband's authoritative behavior with the role of "father". She is adamant that although a father may have authority and control over his young children, that power does not carry over into a marriage.

Candace describes her reluctance to fight for her freedom and dignity: "There was times I couldn't even leave the house cuz I didn't wanna fight with him. He was just

mad and just wanna fight over anything. Like, what takes me so long to get home. Or he'd call the job and see if I got there at the right time." She gave up work and school because it was not worth all of the fighting. She was afraid to walk her daughter to school because she fears for her safety and her daughter's safety. Candace's situation is supported by researchers who have found that work-specific interference and control were associated with higher levels of unemployment (Riger, Ahrens & Blickenstaff 2000). This tactic also obviously interfered with her child's education.

The women's emotional responses to these types of controlling and isolating actions are extensive. In the face of a manipulative, controlling partner, some women felt powerless, others felt fearful and some just felt resentful. For women like Kathy, whose partner monitored her every move, she describes feelings of anger and resentment against her abuser. She longed to be free from his control and isolation, and those feelings manifested in the form of resentment of him for his actions.

Lena simply felt powerless to change her situation. Dutton and Goodman (2005) explain that verbal threats may constitute control tactics, but they are not *coercive* unless they signal the threat of consequences for noncompliance. Lena's husband was in the military, and she believed that, because of his combat training, he would be able to follow through on his threats. This knowledge of his ability and willingness to use physical violence perpetuated Lena's feelings of powerlessness within their relationship.

Candace, who explains that the verbal attacks were often a result of her partner's jealousy and sexual possessiveness, was fearful of her partner and believed him when he said he would kill her. Her experience is also illustrative of Dutton and Goodman's idea that verbal attacks are only coercive if they include threats of consequences for

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noncompliance. Unfortunately, in Candace's case, she often experienced physical violence as punishment for violating his controlling relationship "rules".

3.2.3   Partner Stalking(n=3)

Stalking, according to the Department of Justice, consists of, "…the willful or intentional commission of a series of acts that would cause a reasonable person to fear death or serious bodily injury and that, in fact, does place the victim in fear of death or serious bodily injury" (Office of Victims of Crime 2002, p. 1). Stalking, as used in this chapter, occurs within the context of intimate partner violence. Three women's experiences met this criteria, and I have included them to illustrate the invasive and often terrifying effects of this particular form of violence on women's lives.

Logan, Cole, Shannon, and Walker (2006) explain that stalking of an intimate partner does not just affect a woman's physical or mental health; rather it can extend to almost every area of day-to-day functioning. They describe two general types of coping strategies used by women who are subjected to stalking behavior: emotion-focused and problem-focused coping. Emotion-focused strategies include ways that women manage feelings of distress. These include denial of the stressors to avoid emotional disturbances or framing the stressors in a more positive light. Problem-faced coping strategies involve actively changing the environment or the situation so that it no longer poses a threat (pp. 187; see also Carver, Scheier & Weintraub 1989, Lazarus 1993, 1999). The following examples illustrate these coping styles.

Candace describes her attempts to go back to school after she ended the relationship: "I could come home, like if I finished class late, like, he would be standin'

outside my building, like, waitin' for me." One night after class, she was coming into her building with her children. He spit into her hair and she turned around to yell at him and he sliced her in the eye with a razor. "My kids were just hysterical and it was just so crazy (Sigh)." Candace was 4 months pregnant at the time of this incident. She had a Protection From Abuse order against him and had terminated the relationship months before this incident took place. She expresses her anger and dissatisfaction with the criminal justice response: "The police is like, so screwed up. Like, I don't know, somebody could be dead and by the time they get to my house, like, it's over. Like, he could've killed me and left and y'all are just gettin' here." Candace reports just "shutting down" while this was happening. She lived in constant fear for her life and for her children's lives. However, she also reports planning to kill her abuser – one example of a "problem-focused" coping strategy – actively changing the situation and eliminating the threat.

Kyra is in a current relationship in which her partner is using both physical and verbal abuse, and tries to control her actions. Her partner works in a fast food restaurant directly across the street from her – literally within shouting distance. In addition to the physical and control issues she faces at home, she experiences verbal abuse and harassment from her boyfriend while they are at work. She discovered that he has friends who follow her all over town and keep watch over her when he is not able to be with her. Kyra describes her current partner's behavior as unpredictable and she reports being afraid of him at times. She explains, "His threatening, it bothers me a little, but I tell people so that just in case anything ever did happen to me, they know who did it. (laughs)." It is clear that on some level, Kyra knows that this man is dangerous and

unpredictable. She tells her friends about his threats so that if "anything happens" they will know who was responsible. I ask her if she has ever called the police in response to her partner's actions, and she replies: "I don't know. He might really try to get me then." Kyra believes she might be in greater danger of physical retaliation if she involved the police in these matters.

Kyra seems to be in denial about the abusive nature of the relationship. This is an example of an emotion-focused coping strategy. During the interview, she described feeling afraid, and in the next sentence, she was minimizing her partner's actions. It seems that she either feels conflicted about his behavior, or she is trying to save face during the interview, for remaining in the relationship in which he does these things to her.

Kyra who is in a currently abusive relationship and Candace who is still being terrorized even though she terminated the relationship, are both reluctant to utilize the help of the police in these matters, but for different reasons. Kyra believes that if she calls the police on her partner, he would be angry and violent. Candace is reluctant to call because she believes the police are unable to protect her.

3.2.4 Physical Violence (n=11)

The physical aspect of abuse is the most salient for these women. Physical aggression may take the form of minor acts that escalate over time. Hitting, kicking, choking, throwing objects or beating using objects are just a few of the physical actions used by batterers to control women. There are many theories about why men abuse women, but

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power and control seem to be the most salient and valuable approach for this group of poor women.

Power is the ability to impose one's will on another, and one of the characteristics of intimate partner violence is the use and abuse of that power. If the male desires power and control within the relationship, this is one factor that may indicate a potential for violence. In addition, women who have been victims of battering report feeling powerless as a result of the abuse they have suffered. This gendered cycle of power imbalance continues as does the violence.

Jean, whose husband was a professional boxer, chose his physical actions carefully; cognizant of his powerful punch: "His way of abuse would be, like, chokin' me. So..um, like the white part of my eye – it would always be bloodshot red." Jean believes that her partner would typically refrain from punching her in the face because it would (hypothetically) "break my jaw, every time." The physical ramifications of choking were more easily explained to family and friends than broken bones in her face. Jean's partner based his career on physical violence and domination of his opponent. Based on Jean's story, it is clear that there was little distinction between his assertion of power in the ring and assertion of power at home.

Kimmel (2002) presents another view about the ways that gender ideologies are enacted by men and women. He proposes that men may find it "emasculating" to report that they had such tenuous control over their partners that they needed to resort to violence to keep them in line (p. 1344). Therefore, based on Kimmel's view, intimate partner violence may actually be about the breakdown of masculine power, not the assertion of that power. These men may feel entitled to control over their partners, and

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become violent when they fear the loss of that control. Violence, Kimmel claims, is therefore a way to restore manhood as well as to establish dominance and domestic inequality (p. 1353).

Physical violence can also take the form of threats with a deadly weapon. Candace, who was stalked by her partner explains: " It was just like crazy like he'd come to my house, like with a gun, or he'll call me and threaten me. I couldn't tell him to take my daughter to school or he'd threaten to kill me - he threatened to do a lot of stuff." In addition to these threats, Candace describes other acts of violence: "He like bit me. And I had marks from the bat [which he beat her with]. And recently he like sliced me in my eye, so….with a razor." It is notable that unlike Jean, who experienced violence throughout her relationship, Candace experienced the most serious acts of violence after she left her abuser. When a woman leaves her abuser, she often in the greatest danger of violence (Lees 2000). Candace feels that her partner was getting desperate to have her back, and so he kept increasing the levels of violence. Candace's experience supports Kimmel's (2002) view that men employ violent tactics when they fear that their control over their partner is fleeting, in order to restore male-dominance and control.

Many women endure violent battering for years before they are able to leave the relationship. Several women in this study were still being victimized by their male partners. Although I report several responses by women, and although most have left their abusers, only 1 woman, Kathy talked about the process of "leaving" as a response to the physical violence: "I was gonna leave anyway, eventually. You know, I mean, how many times can you really abuse a person before they really leave? It should only be

once." It was clear that Kathy was critical of her decision to remain with her abusive husband for so long (8 years), which may be why she remarked about her plan to leave.

3.2.4.1 Protection From Abuse Orders (n=10)

An order of Protection From Abuse is an order of Family Court ordering someone to stop abusing another person, and may include other relief, such as ordering the abuser to stay away from the person being abused. With a PFA order, the police can intervene before an abuser physically harms his partner. PFAs are usually a response to severe physical violence: ten of the 11 women who experienced violence filed for a Protection From Abuse order. However, some women, like Kyra, refuse to take legal action because they fear their partner will be angry and violent.

Candace has essentially given up calling the police when she is in danger because she doubts they would arrive in time to help her. Part of Candace's dilemma regarding the criminal justice system is her assertion that the police, her lifeline, were slow to respond to calls originating from her Section 8 housing neighborhood. This is further evidence of the ways that abuse exacerbates the already difficult lives of poor women.

3.2.4.2 Retaliation (n=3)

One of the responses cited by some women was fantasizing about retaliation against an abusive partner. Physical retaliation and thoughts of killing their partner were reported by three women who endured the most violence of all of the women I interviewed. Like Jean and Patricia, whose cases I will discuss in detail at the end of this chapter, Candace

also had homicidal thoughts about her abuser: "I wanted to kill him. I don't know, I was just thinkin' of ways to kill him and, like, what if they don't know it was me? I don't know, I was just thinkin' of ways to kill him…..just for him to leave me alone." He was terrorizing her at home and at school. He ignored the PFA against him and the police were slow to respond to her government subsidized housing neighborhood. Pregnant and scared, she feared for her own safety and for the safety of her children. Candace was desperate to be rid of her stalking ex-partner and killing him seemed like a viable alternative.

Valerie's threats of retaliation came after she was severely injured by her partner. I asked her if she had ever filed for a PFA.

"No, the police took it up on their own. When the paramedics came the police automatically was called. They arrested him and put him in jail, but I didn't press charges. I never showed up for court."

[Is there a reason why you didn't want to press charges?]

"No, I just, cuz I could take care of myself. That don't bother me, cuz I knocked his teeth out. (laughs) It don't bother me. I wouldn't put him in jail. I didn't know when you call the paramedics and say when somebody was fightin', that you arrest him."

[So you didn't want him to be arrested.]

"No, cuz I know I'd get him good when I caught him. I didn't want to press charges."

Valerie's case is interesting because she describes her experience with the mandatory arrest policy. In PA, if the police are called to the scene of a domestic dispute

and they witness an injury, even if the woman does not want to press charges, they are required to make an arrest. This policy was implemented to protect women who were fearful of violent repercussions if they pressed charges against an abuser. In Valerie's case, even though she sustained injuries and required medical attention, she did not want to press charges because she wanted to inflict her own physical punishment on her abusive partner.

3.3   CONSEQUENCES

3.3.1   Injuries (n=11)

Sharon describes her injurious incident as the "worst experience" she has ever had: "He literally picked up a construction awl – a metal one from the neighbor's yard, and came through my front window with it. And then he got in the house and started poundin' on me. And then, this, like, metal stand I was tryin' to use to block him – he smacked it up against the wall and two of my fingers got really smashed. I had to wear a brace for a couple of weeks." His abuse and the resulting injury disrupted her work because she was unable to perform her duties as a waitress. This was not the only incident and she reports that she often called off from work because she did not want anyone to see her bruises.

In addition to stalking, Kyra's current partner physically abuses her at home: "He'll just, he'll try to shake me or frighten me or just basically to choke me. He'll unplug my phone. He'll try to hit, try to choke me. He'll try to push me. And I'm like, why are you doin' this?!" Kyra's incredulous response is indicative of the confusion and

emotional imbalance that has been a result of her partner's abusive actions. She has a difficult time assessing the triggers for this seemingly random behavior: "He's not usually like this." Kyra's situation is illustrative of the Cycle of Violence often used to describe patterns of abuse. A period of "tension building" occurs in which the abuser starts to get angry. This period of tension escalates into some form of abuse (physical, sexual, verbal, mental). This violent incident is followed by the "Honeymoon Stage" during which the abusive partner tends to apologize for his behavior and vows never to do it again. He may deny the abuse altogether or even convince his partner that it was her fault. This cycle continues in this manner and often, the period of time between each stage becomes shorter and shorter until there is little or *no* "honeymoon" stage at all. Kyra seems to be caught up in this pattern or Cycle of abuse.

Kathy explains the experience that led her to file for a PFA: "Oh, I was beat up (laughs). Yeah, he was fightin' me all the time." Notice the language these women use to describe their experiences with abuse: the focus is on the actions of the partner – not on their own pain and suffering. This is consistent with Winkelmann's findings in her interviews with women living in a shelter (2004). She found that in describing their experiences with violence, women tended to shift the focus from their own bodily pain to the activities of the abuser. She found that at intake interviews, when battered women are directly asked about how and where they are hurt, they tended to recount the painful injuries with flat, dull tones. Winkelmann reads this as evidence that they have already distanced themselves from the physical pain and the accompanying emotional pain. Patricia's flippant manner is a good illustration of the way battered women create distance between themselves and their physical injuries, the material evidence of their

suffering: "Uh, I had a couple black eyes, broke finger, couple bumps and bruises like on my head & stuff. Other than that, nothin' major." She lists her injuries in a very matter-of-fact manner and is able to distance herself from the pain and suffering of her injuries.

3.3.2   Incarceration (n=5)

One-fourth of the women I interviewed explained that their partner was incarcerated at some point during the relationship. For some, like Jean and Patricia, this meant the end of the relationship. For the other 3 women, their partner's spending time spent in jail had become routine. One woman, Patricia, was incarcerated for beating her partner with a crowbar in a response to his abuse. This account will be discussed at length at this end of this chapter.

Candace reports that her ex's new girlfriend is resentful of her for pressing charges for assault: "We have kids that need to grow up together [as half-siblings] and she hates me because I put him in jail. He beats her too and she, like, drops the charges because his Mom said 'don't put him in jail', so it ends up happenin' again. She walks around with black eyes and she don't wanna press charges." Candace, like others I will discuss below, is trying to reach out to this woman and help her to avoid the same problems that Candace experienced, but she is unreceptive.

3.3.3 Lessons Learned (n=6)

Several women explained that their experiences in abusive relationships enabled them to help other young women to avoid similar affairs. Like Jean, who counseled young women in a group home, they reported feeling that, as survivors, it was their responsibility to help others. Candace (above) and Kathy revealed that their ex-partners were abusing their new girlfriends. Candace's advice and efforts were unwelcome, but she still attempts to offer assistance. Kathy recently met with her ex's new wife and discovered that he is repeating many of the same violent patterns: "She is bein' abused and battered, and I happened to see her and she asked to talk to me and we compared the same stories. He's very abusive. It's sad. He even had gotten to the point with her that he was givin' her pills. Like, she said that she had some kind of accident, she asked him to get her medication. He was givin' her other pills to knock her out." Kathy hates to see this happening to someone else and is "there for her" if she needs to talk. Over one-fourth of the women interviewed wanted to make a difference in the lives of other "at risk" women. Having felt worthless for so long, this form of helping behavior was a way for these women to assert their agency and feel useful again.

The lessons they most commonly wished to impart to young women were: "You deserve better than this." These women typically did not offer advice about how to handle an abusive partner or what to do in certain situations. Instead, they desired to impart a much more general lesson about self-esteem and agency. They felt that if women learned to "love themselves" (as Lena put it) they could avoid some of the same tragic consequences.

Kathy related an experience from her childhood to her willingness to stay in an abusive relationship: "A lot of women that are abused and allow it are the ones that come from families that really are…that really have been – you know – it's a learned process. It's a learned thing, because I looked back and I will always wish that my mother would have just left. Now, my brother, he's not abusive but he's takin' abuse from other women. And instead of leavin' a relationship he'll try and work it out. You know what I mean? And then I'm the same way. You know? She taught us, my mother always taught us to try to work it out. You shouldn't teach your kids that. It's time to leave. You know somebody's treatin' you bad – leave." Kathy, who witnessed her father beat her mother, believes that staying in an abusive relationship to "work it out" is a lesson learned in familial relationships. Her advice to young women, based on her own experiences is: "leave." Based on several of the aforementioned cases, this advice is not as easy (or safe) as it may seem.

3.4   TWO EXTREME CASES

I have demonstrated the many ways that abuse is disordering and impoverishing for women. The following accounts are the most extreme examples of physical violence in the lives of the women I interviewed for this study. Both the violence and the consequences are extreme, but the experiences of "Patricia" and "Jean" are not uncommon. I have chosen these cases because they embody elements of abuse that are present in many different cases. These women also were among the most willing to discuss, in rich detail, their experiences in violent relationships. As you will see in the

following cases, abuse permeates all aspects of their lives and simply throws their lives into disarray.

3.4.1 Patricia

> "My boyfriend, well, it was my daughter's Dad at the time, my boyfriend, he wanted me to keep havin' kids. I wasn't ready for no kids cuz I wasn't even 18 yet so I already had one & he wanted me to keep havin' kids. So he thought beatin' me would trick me into gettin' off the pill. So…I ended up callin' the police. He went to jail and that's when I went and did the PFA papers. *So* it was like, we were always arguin' and it ended up into a fight just cuz I didn't - I was too young to have kids. I didn't really want no more."

Patricia is a black, 22 year-old mother of 2 children, ages 4 and 8. She has never been married, but was in an abusive relationship for 4.5 years. Patricia endured physical and verbal abuse from a jealous partner who doubted her fidelity. This relationship ended 4 years ago when Patricia filed a Protection From Abuse Order against her partner. Patricia tried to work at various jobs – a telemarketing agency, a construction firm – but her boyfriend would harass her at work and he was the cause of her termination at one job.

As evidenced by the aforementioned quotation, children were often a focus of the fights between her and her boyfriend. She was a minor and already had one child; she knew she was not ready to have any more children. Patricia's boyfriend used violence to try to control her fertility and undermine her reproductive choices. Keeping their women

pregnant is an important method of control for batterers. Women with many children will not be attractive to other men. They will also be successfully kept out of the labor market (Raphael 2000).

The violence that Patricia endured often resulted in physical injuries. She had what she describes as a "collapsed vertebra," a neck injury that came "from bein' choked." As noted above, Patricia lists her injuries in a very matter-of-fact manner. For Patricia, the injuries had become so commonplace, that they were routine. She was no longer alarmed by the physical ramifications of abuse. Patricia may have been dissociating from the physical pain in order to distance herself from the emotional pain that accompanies it (Winkelmann 2004).

Patricia describes one of the more serious altercations that occurred as a result of her asserting her agency to work:

Patricia [to partner]: "I was goin' to get in the car."

[Partner:] 'Well you're not gonna drive this car. I bought it.'

Patricia: "No…I bought it with my income tax [refund]."

[Partner:] 'Well if I wouldn't have let you work, you wouldn't have no income tax.'

Patricia: "I'm like, 'What do you MEAN?!' I'm like, 'Huh? Who do you think you're talkin' to?!'" So I went to get in my car & he slammed the door on my arm & broke it in 6 places."

The power dynamic in the relationship is clear in this exchange. She argues that she is going to work in *her* car- the car that she bought with her income tax refund. She is asserting her agency to work and backs it up with the fact that she is taking her car to get

there. He counters with the argument that she only had the refund to buy the car because he *allowed* her to work. The underlying message here is that he is *allowing* her to work, and he wants her to do so on his terms. He is trying to take back some of her agency by expressing to her that the only reason she has the money to assert her independence is because he granted it.

Patricia explains that she experienced the most significant physical injury after the end of the relationship: "But the worst part of it all, Danielle, after ALL that I went through over 4 years, I had a stroke at 21. They said it was stress related. Like, my brain went into shock and shut down on one side. And it's called Bell's palsy. It shuts down and hit the nervous system. So, I mean like now, I mean, some people can tell [that I have this injury], like if I tell them & they look. But if I don't tell no one they really won't know, but… *I know*. Like, it messed up the one side of my face. But it's almost back to normal, like. I just stopped gettin' shock treatments cuz it was burnin' my skin, like literally *burnin'* my skin." Patricia claims that she had a stroke shortly after she had ended the relationship with her abusive partner. She reports that her doctors diagnosed the stroke as stress-related and Patricia agrees with this assessment. She made it through all of the injuries and the trauma while she was enduring the abusive relationship, but after the relationship ended, she feels that her body just gave up the fight. Patricia tries to minimize the injury by explaining that it is nearly imperceptible to others. Then she stresses the fact that *she* is aware of it. She attempts to rationalize that it's not a big deal, but then she recalls the painful shock treatments and it is clear that this really was a significant consequence of living with abuse.

The inconsistencies and seeming inaccuracies with Patricia's account are troubling. Bell's palsy is typically caused by nerve damage, not a stroke, which Patricia believes is the correct diagnosis. Based on her experiences with extensive and frequent battering, it is likely that Bell's palsy is the correct diagnosis, and probably a result of facial injuries inflicted by her partner. This account is very revealing of the consequences of physical violence, even as it shows Patricia to be an unreliable narrator of what has happened to her.

Patricia is only one of two interviewees who described fighting back against their abusers. "After our last fight, I beat him with a crowbar cuz I was just like, fed up. So I ended up goin' to jail for it. And that was the last time [he hit her]. He knew he couldn't keep hittin' me." She was charged with 2 counts of aggravated assault and disorderly conduct. She reports having to go to jail as a result of her actions, but does not seem remorseful about beating her husband – she justifies it as a means of ending the abuse.

Patricia was aware of the destructive nature of the relationship, but was unable to see another path for her life. It is clear that she wanted to get out of the relationship, but felt like she had nowhere to go. "I'm like, this ain't right. But at [sic] the same token, I'm like, [asking myself:] 'well if you leave, where you gonna go?' So, I don't know. I just used to feel a whole lotta ways. I was mainly depressed, though. Like, for the last year and a half, I was just depressed. If it wasn't for him goin' to jail, I think one of us would be dead or in jail." The depression is further evidence of her feelings of hopelessness and helplessness. Patricia felt trapped, both financially, because her partner often prevented her from working, and socially, because she had no familial support.

Patricia's partner went to jail for robbery while they were separated. At the time of the interview, he was still in jail and had been for the past 3 years. She discloses that if her partner had not gone to jail, "one of us would be dead or in jail." With this statement, Patricia reveals that she felt that either he would have killed her or she would have killed him.

After the dissolution of the relationship, Patricia met someone else. She has been in this new relationship for the past year and has had no contact with her abusive ex-boyfriend: "No [contact]. No way. (laughs). I told him a long time ago I cannot sacrifice my life for love and I'm sorry. I don't care how much you love me. I don't love you cuz I don't love to be hit." It is laughable to Patricia that she would ever have contact with this man again. She acknowledges an important point: love is a strong emotion. It binds many women to their abusers. Unlike many other women who return to abusive partners, Patricia realized that his protestations of love for her are not as persuasive as his hitting her. His emotions did not matter since staying in the relationship may have cost her her life. It took her years to get out of the relationship and it only truly ended when he was incarcerated.

In Patricia's case, abuse has caused irreparable damage to her life. She now deals with permanent nerve damage to her face. She has a criminal record for assault. Her work history has been damaged as a result of her partner interfering with her jobs and getting her fired.

3.4.2 Jean

> "It was physical, and verbal [long pause]…and mental [abuse]. Because
> he would make me stand in a corner after hittin' me…and sexual- because
> if I didn't have sex with him he would beat me up. You know, so, it was
> just – it was a no win situation."

Jean is a black, 35 year-old mother of two children, ages 12 and 13. She was married for 12 years but ended the relationship 2 years ago. Even though she remarried, she is still afraid of her ex-husband. Her ex-husband is a professional boxer with ties to organized crime. He is now in jail now for aggravated assault [of another man], but Jean fears the day he gets out.

Jean describes what she labels as "mental" abuse because her husband would humiliate her by forcing her to stand in a corner after beating her. This act of forcing the woman into a submissive and humiliating position is a tactic used by abusers to assert their power over their victims (Raphael 1999, 2000). Jean explained that the abuse included physical violence, so I asked her if she had ever sustained an injury as a result of the abuse. "Mmm hmm. Um, his way of abuse would be, like, chokin' me. So..um, like the white part of my eye – it would always be bloodshot red. And I wear a partial now because of loss of teeth. But he never would, like, punch me in the face where people – cuz if he punch me in the face, I would've had a broken jaw every time [because he was a professional boxer]. But he would like hit me on my head or somethin' like that, where people wouldn't be able to identify – unless him chokin' me. Then, the red – and then I couldn't come out. You understand me? You know, [he told me to] 'Tell your Mom you're goin' to New Jersey. Tell your Mom we're goin' here.' And then, um, he would

take the phone like, when he would abuse me, he would take the phone with him." Jean explains that he would take the phone so that she was unable to call the police or her family or friends for help.

Her partner was careful to hide the abuse from others. He hit her in places that others would be unable to see and he hid the phone from her so that she was unable to seek assistance. The careful planning and isolation that accompanied his physical violence contributed to Jean's feelings of being utterly trapped.

Abuse goes beyond the physical cuts and bruises to include damage to women's self-esteem. In addition to the physical abuse, Jean recalls her partner's verbal abuse: "He would tell me, you know, play mind games – 'you ain't enough' and 'you ain't never gonna be nothing'." For Jean, the verbal abuse was just as painful as the physical abuse. It is clear from Jean's story that belittling her by calling her names and destroying her self-confidence was his way of keeping her from establishing independence and leaving him. The message was clear: she was nothing on her own and if she was never going to be successful, she had better stay with someone who would provide for her.

"I never had privacy cuz he invaded my purse – he would look through my purse and um, look through my drawers – I didn't have a hidin' place. You know, because whatever room he was in, I had to sit in that room with him, you know. He wanted to know every little move that I make around the house. If I'm away from him he'd say 'What are you doin'?' you know. He would come and check. It was never a happy moment." By enforcing control over her, he was able to monitor every move she made.

Jean's partner wanted to know who she was with and where she was at all times. This mandate also included her relationships with her family. "He didn't want me to

interact with my family. You know, he didn't want me to do anything that he felt would disconnect me from him. Like I couldn't go to school. And as long as I was with him, I didn't go to school." School and work were out of the question for Jean. The level of social isolation and control her partner had over her did not allow for her to leave the house to attend school or work.

Being unable to work, Jean was completely financially dependent on her husband. Jean's financial dependence on her partner came at a high price: "He would um, *provide* for me, but then the minute I did somethin' he didn't like or he felt that I was doin' somethin' he didn't like….or like I talk to my mom and he – he didn't, he would you know, take stuff away from me. Like if, he bought me an outfit, I could only wear it around him. Or he would take it away – you know – everything he gave me, he always wanted it back. You know, and if he gave me money & I spent it, then, he would wanna know what I did with it and, you know, keepin' track of everything. So I didn't want nothin' from him."

"I tried to get out – wanted to end the relationship. Because for one, I was never in love with him. I was in this relationship with a person that I didn't love. It was outta force because I, you know, everybody I would try to date – he would go after or, you know, threaten, and I didn't know the power that he had behind him." Part of the control Jean's partner had over her was to diminish her social network until it consisted only of him.

"He was a professional boxer and like-and he fought for a Police League. So, I didn't feel safe because when I called the police on him they would talk to him about his fights. You know – his next upcoming fight and, like you know, forget about [my case]

And then they would- the judge would throw it outta court." Jean's help-seeking efforts were thwarted because of her husband's friendships and connections with members of the legal system. This inability to trust law enforcement deepened her sense of entrapment.

"They [her friends and family] hated him. And everybody was like – why would you be with him? And every time I tried to leave him, he would stalk me, find me, you know, try to uh, take me and stuff, try to hold me hostage." A woman's life is at greatest risk when she attempts to leave her abuser (Lees 2000).

Like Patricia, Jean reports homicidal fantasies: "I hated him. And the fact that I really didn't like him in the first place, then, at one point I tried to get a gun. And then I did get it and I wanted to kill him. And I almost did. But what saved him AND myself was this woman that I studied -Jehovah Witness lady- I was studying with- she happened to just be comin' by to see me…right in the midst of me gettin' ready to pull the trigger."

Jean has a job now in a residential group home and she works with young women. Like several other women I interviewed, Jean feels it is her responsibility to help them. She wants them to see that they do not deserve to be abused by a partner. "Um, I know one thing – my life experience – it helps me to reach out to the young women that I work with. Because some of them are 13, 14 and they um, they're already experiencing abusive relationships at a young age. Some of them are in placement because of retaliation of bein' abused by a man. So, you know, you're 13, you shouldn't even be havin' sex."

3.4.3 Similarities, contrast, comparison

Patricia and Jean had similarly horrific stories to tell about their experiences with abuse. Both women have moved on with their lives and have entered into new relationships. Jean's marriage lasted for 12 years and only ended 2 years ago. She is still afraid of her ex-husband, even though he is in jail and she has remarried. Patricia had been in an abusive relationship for 4.5 years and it ended about 4 years ago. Patricia seemed more distanced from the relationship, but still suffers from her painful injuries that followed the end of the relationship.

The criminal justice system impacted both women in several ways. Patricia had direct contact with the criminal justice system since she went to jail for beating her partner with a crowbar. Both women's relationships were effectively terminated when their partner went to jail. The incarceration, in both cases, was for a crime unrelated to the partner violence. Because of his occupation, Jean's partner had friends on the police force and in other areas of the criminal justice system. He also had connections with a welfare caseworker who provided him with her location when she left him and went to live in a shelter. These connections had direct consequences for Jean's safety since she was unable to rely on the police for assistance or the welfare system for confidentiality.

Patricia and Jean were both financially dependent on their abusers. Patricia was able to work more often than Jean, and therefore was not dependent on her boyfriend to the same degree that Jean relied on her husband. However, her working was a point of contention in Patricia's relationship and often caused violent fights. It is true that Jean was unable to work and was forced to be financially dependent. Working toward

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financial independence has not been entirely beneficial for Patricia. Her partner broke her arm in 6 places in order to prevent her from going to work.

Both women report feeling socially isolated by their controlling partners. Although Jean was close to her family, she was often prevented from seeing them or talking to them. If she had any visible injuries, she would be told to lie to her family and make excuses for not being able to see them. Patricia was less isolated but did not have the same level of support from friends or family. It is unclear from my interview whether Patricia had any family members living in the area. It is clear that she wanted to leave the relationship, but she simply had "nowhere to go."

3.5   CONCLUSIONS

These women's experiences of abuse and control have permeated every aspect of their lives, including their attempts to work and transition off of welfare. It is critical that policy makers, caseworkers, employers and researchers examine these women's life experiences to better understand the both the *obstacles* and the *achievements* of women in abusive relationships.

I had three main goals for this chapter on women's experiences with abuse. First, it was imperative that I allow these women's voices to be heard. Many of the women told me that the reason they agreed to be interviewed was to allow their story to be heard and to help others who may be experiencing similarly violent relationships. I asked these women to recount experiences of welfare, work and abuse. Their experiences with abuse

were, by far, the most painful to relate (and to hear). However, these women's stories provide the most compelling insights into the lives of women living with abuse.

The second goal for this chapter was to uncover women's agency when faced with a violent or controlling relationship. How did these women respond to the abuse? There is no judgment on my part in this documentation of their reactions, but there was occasionally judgment by the women themselves regarding their reactions to the abuse. Several women, hearing themselves retell their stories, marveled at how they could have stayed in the relationships for so long. Being forced to examine and recount their violent and controlling relationships gave these women a fresh perspective on their experiences. After giving detailed accounts of violent encounters, they seemed embarrassed to convey to me exactly how long they remained with their abusers.

The final goal for this chapter was to identify some of the consequences of abuse. The women told of their experiences with the legal system – fighting to secure a PFA or simply a response from police. They recounted injuries, some of which have yet to heal. Some women recalled emotional responses like depression or fear. They feared for their lives and for the lives of their children. Women described being isolated from friends and family and having to lie to cover-up injuries or their partners' manipulative behaviors. My hope is that my readers now have a much better understanding of the complicated and hard lives of these women.

As I described at the onset of this chapter, the prevalence of abuse appears to be higher among poor women and welfare recipients than in nationally representative samples. The women were not able to articulate the connection between poverty and abuse, but it has been well-documented in the research (Kurz 1998, Raphael 2000, 2002).

Many women described their inability to work as a result of the control or sabotage of their abusive partners. By examining the issue of domestic violence, we can no longer view women on welfare as lazy or helpless, but rather as women struggling to live and work in the face of the chaotic violent relationships. I will explore this aspect of poor women's experiences in the following chapter on The Meanings of Work.

4.0   THE MEANINGS OF WORK

4.1   IMPACTS

The meaning of work is different for each of these women, even though they come from similar circumstances.   All participants were welfare recipients enrolled in an employment training program designed to assist poor mothers in making the transition from welfare to work - "Work First."   Participating in the job readiness and job search activities offered by Work First fulfills the work requirement under the TANF (Temporary Aid to Needy Families) policy.

The referrals to this four-week, job readiness, training program come from the County Assistance Offices.   Most participants are required to complete 30 hours per week, which consists of classes and a guided job search.   There are different requirements depending on how long the individual has been on welfare, but these women share the same goals: complete the training and find jobs.

The cases of Kesha and Lena suggest several contradictory things about the meanings of work to women making the transition from welfare to work, and especially, women who are also overcoming obstacles such as violence at home.   First, abuse can either drive women to work, or prevent them from working.   Work, for some women, can mean an escape from the abuse.   For others, her partner prevents her from leaving the

house, or he interferes with work once she secures employment. Therefore, abuse, whether it is physical, mental, verbal or financial, can act to push women to work, or prevent it.

Second, abuse can result in different levels of success at work. By success, I refer to both the ability to physically get and keep a job, but also the level of (self-assessed) achievement at work. Are they able to get to work? Are they able to perform the required tasks and to what degree? Some women may view their performance as top notch – they simply push away their problems and focus on the task at hand, and they are successful. For others, inhibited by physical injuries and/or mental wounds, performing at work became extremely difficult.

Third, the women I interviewed appreciated the fact that working and earning their own income helped to lessen their dependence on their partners. Financial independence was a common goal among this group of women. This is especially true in the cases in which the woman's partner used finances to control (and often times limit) her daily activities. Many of the women also specifically expressed the desire to work in order to get off welfare. However, I believe that many women expressed this goal at least in part because of the rhetoric of welfare caseworkers and the Work First staff. Keep in mind that these participants were women enrolled in a Work First program that advocated getting off welfare and gaining financial independence.

Finally, the women in this study, who have been mandated by the state to work, actually enjoy working. These women expressed to me the ways that working helps their self-esteem, enables them to be role models for their children, and gives them a sense of purpose and order in their lives. The majority take pride in their work, no matter how

tedious the task or how little they are paid, and they find gratification in performing well at their job. Unfortunately, one drawback is that some women's partners discover that they liked going to work and enjoyed working, and then prevent them from working. Work is a source of connections and self-esteem, but because it is a resource, it is also a point of vulnerability for these women, subject to a partner's meanspirited control.

Throughout this chapter, I will illustrate how these themes contribute to the women's experience in the workforce. I will show commonalities and differences in meanings of work and some explanations for this variation. These issues are especially relevant for this group of welfare recipients who are all required to work, but who have varied success at securing or maintaining employment. Lena and Kesha exemplify the impacts of abuse and work on one another when/if they were able to work.

4.2   TWO PICTURES OF MEANING

4.2.1   Kesha

"I knew I had to get away from him because he was the problem. So I went to work everyday just to get away – cuz, it was like, I couldn't stand to be around him…That was like my free time. Then once I was at home, it was like I dreaded to go home. It was like – 'Oh, I have to put up with this.'"

Kesha is a black, 34-year-old welfare recipient who has been married for ten years but separated from her husband for almost three years. They have three children together

ages 10, 8 and 2. For Kesha, going to her data entry job at a bank was an escape from her husband. He was physically and verbally abusive, hitting her and calling her what Kesha referred to as "bad names," for about two years before they separated. I asked about the duration of the relationship. She looked down and seemed embarrassed to tell me how long she had stayed with him. "When he first hit me, I should have left, but I stayed. That's because of the children," she said. Kesha did not feel that leaving the father of her children was an option. Going to work, however, was a viable if intermittent escape.

Kesha was able to put up with her husband's abuse at home and use work as a time to get out and socialize: "I'm a people person. I get along with people. And, ah, I liked my boss and I liked my co-workers. They liked *me*." For Kesha, work meant escape, and she was eager to go to work and leave the abuse that she experienced at home. However, she was often forced to quit jobs; not directly due to physical abuse or related injuries, but because of her husband's refusal to provide childcare.

Even though Kesha was being physically and emotionally abused by her husband, she believes that it did not affect her job performance, and she rates herself a 10 on a 10 point scale. Kesha provides a rationale for this high rating: "Because I love the work. I am a hard worker. I had a lot of experience and a lot of skills and I basically rate myself as a 10 (laughs). I think I'm the best (laughs)." Kesha nervously laughs as she praises herself. In addition to seeing work as a means of escaping her abuser, she takes pride in her work. It provides a sense of accomplishment and a source of positive self-image.

Battered women often report that their abusive partners or husbands are jealous of other men and as a result, prevent them from working outside the home (Logan, Cole, Shannon & Walker 2006). Kesha echoes that finding in her assessment of her abusive

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partner's feelings and motives: "He was jealous of me [sic] meeting another man at work and insecure…he was *very* insecure." This assessment was fairly typical among the women I interviewed (n=13). Less common, however (n=2) was that in addition to the problems with sexual and social jealousy and fears of abandonment, Kesha's partner was also jealous of her job: "I think he felt that I should be working – because that was our only income. But I think he was like, jealous. Jealous that I had a job and he didn't." At the time, Kesha had a bank job that she liked and she believed that her husband resented her for being employed when he was unable to find work. Melzer (2002) found that men who are unemployed are 50% more likely to be violent at home than employed men. This "compensatory masculinity" perspective suggests that having failed at societal expectations for them to be breadwinners, these men attempt to compensate for their perceived shortcomings by trying to gain additional satisfaction at home. Blocked attempts to assert their masculinity at work may lead some men to assert their dominance at home via intimate partner violence (p.4). In Kesha's case, her partner may have felt threatened by her ability to act as the breadwinner for the family, and reacted with jealousy and violence.

During the time they were together, she was able to work, but her husband made it a difficult task. Although he was responsible for caring for their 3 children while she was at work, he would often abandon the family and force Kesha to find childcare on short notice. As a result, she was forced to quit several jobs, and afterwards, had a difficult time finding another good job. Kesha explains that part of the problem she had in finding a secure position was that she often fell back into the relationship: "Yeah. I would have to work... But it was like I was getting' temporary jobs cuz this kept goin' on

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and on forever, I mean on and on. Cuz me and him would break up, get back together,

break up get back together break up get back together and… I'm over that now." It was

only after they officially separated that she was able to secure a more permanent (albeit

part-time) job.

Kesha's case is a success story of sorts – she was able to enjoy the financial and

social benefits of being employed – but, as she reveals, this was not an easy undertaking.

She was able to overcome physical and emotional abuse and use work as an escape.

Kesha took pride in her work and viewed her job performance with a sense of

accomplishment. Kesha reported that in addition to sexual and social jealousy (typical of

abusive men) her husband was also jealous of her job –illustrating that his abuse,

especially his reneging on childcare, could be perceived as his performing compensatory

masculinity. Even though Kesha was able to work, she reports that her husband made it a

difficult endeavor by failing to provide childcare and forcing her to quit several jobs. She

also reflects on her failure to definitively end the relationship and reasons that it hurt her

chances for securing a permanent job.

4.2.2   Lena

"He didn't trust people. Didn't trust *anybody*. He didn't want me to work at all. I didn't

have a job. He didn't want me to work. I wanted to work but he wouldn't allow me to

work. *He* worked." Lena, a 36-year-old black mother of three children (ages 14, 16 and

19), is divorced. She was married for 11 years but has been divorced for 7. The

relationship Lena had with her husband was controlling and she laments that he

prevented her from working. According to Lena, he was verbally and emotionally abusive and controlling and although he never *physically* prevented her from working, he insisted that she stay at home. During their 11 year relationship, she was unable to work for pay, at all. Lena's husband worked full-time and because he had a well-paying job, the couple was able to survive on one paycheck. Because he was able to support the family on his income, he had the luxury of enforcing Lena's domesticity. I asked her how she felt about being forced to stay at home and not working: "I felt dependent on him and I didn't like that feeling…He was fine as long as I wasn't working." Lena's employment (and education) was the fulcrum of his leverage and control over her.

Lena's husband was employed by the military. Melzer proposes that, "occupations requiring training in interpersonal combat and requiring the use of physical force would encourage men's use of physical violence in the home" (2002, p. 821). Although Lena does not report any physical abuse, she recalls extensive verbal and emotional abuse and control.

Lena did not want to depend on anyone, and being forced to stay in the house just made her want her independence – both physical and financial -even more. "It just seemed like there was just more out there and it made me wanna be out there even more. SO, I ended up goin' to school." Her husband was very upset about that: "He didn't really want me to do anything outside of the home." She says he would give her reasons she needed to stay at home – mainly for the kids -- but she was determined to go to school anyway. She talked about how she enjoyed attending her classes: "Just learning. The learning aspect of it. It gave me a sense of independence and it gave me – I was able to communicate better with my kids. Cuz it changes, you know, I don't know, the way

you speak and you know, communicate with others. It just does change it." Lena has credits toward a nursing degree but was unable to finish her education because, as she was going through the divorce, her finances were stretched to their limits and she needed to work. She found a job as a medical secretary – doing transcriptions.

She liked setting a good example for her children – especially her 14-year-old daughter - to never be in a position of dependence. "I wanted to be an example for my kids. I didn't want them to feel like it's OK to stay at home. I have a daughter and I really don't want her to feel like that." Lena does not want her daughter to repeat her mistake of becoming dependent on a man, but even more so, she does not want her daughter to have the feelings of despair that Lena associates with this type of reliance. Lena's perspective is a striking feminist response to her former husband's notion of traditional roles for women. She refused to accept his definition of dependent, domestic femininity. Lena, more importantly, did not want her daughter to ever be in that position.

Lena looked forward to her time spent at school, but unlike Kesha who rated her job performance a 10, Lena rated herself a 6 on a 10 point scale. Her rationale for this rating was directly related to her husband and family: "Well, basically, havin' to take care of the kids, listen to him always fussin' about me leavin'… interfere with my studyin', things like that." It is clear that the emotional abuse Lena has endured has negatively impacted her self-esteem as evidenced in her low job performance assessment.

In summary, Lena was unable to overcome the control and verbal and emotional abuse by her husband in order to work. During the brief periods when she was able to attend school, she enjoyed her classes but admits that she did not perform well and attributes her poor grades to her husband's interference with her schoolwork. He often

refused to allow her to go to school and therefore, she missed a number of classes. Prevented from attending school or working outside the home, Lena focused on her status as mother and her desire to set a good example for her children.

4.2.3   Variation, contrast, comparison

Lena was married for 11 years and has been divorced for 7. Kesha was married for 10 years but has been separated for 3. Work, for Kesha, was an intermittent escape from the relationship. She stayed in the relationship because of the children. Kesha suffered both physical and verbal abuse for 2 years. Lena suffered 11 years of control, verbal and emotional abuse, and her husband prevented her from working at all. In Lena's case, because she was unable to hold a job or attend classes for very long, she was unable to reap the emotional benefits of working that benefited Kesha.

For many women, the type or degree of abuse is *not* the most salient factor in determining success/failure in the workforce. Both women suffered control and abuse, but Kesha suffered physical injuries as a result of battering, and was able to work. Shania, another welfare recipient, was battered and, as a result of injuries to her face, filed a PFA. She also reported being able (and rather heartily encouraged) to work. Nina, who suffered physical abuse "almost every day," also had a PFA against her partner and was also able to work. This finding is especially counterintuitive based on research on the link between abuse and work. Having ruled out type or degree of abuse as the main underlying factor, what is the source of variation in women's success or failure at work? I will explore this variation throughout the chapter.

4.3   THE VALUE OF WORK

The differences in what work means to these women are based on two main factors: (1) their ability (or inability) to work, and (2) their partners' employment status.   The employment status of her partner seemed to make a big difference in whether or not she was encouraged (or permitted) to work.   If he didn't have a job, even if he was controlling and abusive (and in Kesha's case, jealous of her for having a job), he did not prevent her from working.   If he was working and the family was financially stable, based solely on his paycheck, he had the *luxury* of preventing her from working.   He was able to enforce her domestication.   The woman's ability to work or attend school impacted what work means to her.   If she was able to work, work meant something to her (e.g. escape from abuse, accomplishment, financial independence).   If she was unable to work, her focus shifted to one of her other roles (for example, the role of mother).

For Kesha, work meant "escape" from abuse – both a physical and emotional break from the violence. This finding confirms the findings of other researchers (Lloyd & Taluc 1999), who concluded that some women who experience domestic violence use work as a way to escape the abuse. For Lena, because she was so often prevented from working (or forced to quit), work was not a viable escape for very long. Lena is on the outside of that work experience looking in. She views working as a way to set a good example for her daughter. Although Kesha also has children, she does not express a desire to be a role model because that is simply not her current focus. Kesha remains

focused on physically leaving home and "escaping" and performing the responsibilities of her job. What accounts for this difference?

Lena's focus is on the longing to get and keep a job. She isn't able to view work as escape because it has not been something she is able to do for very long. Instead, work means something else to her. She is unable to work; she therefore focuses on what *could* be and what working *could* mean to her and her family. She focuses on hypothetical explanations rather than concrete ones. Since she is not typically in the workforce, her energy is focused on ways that she is unhappy about not being there. This unhappiness with this aspect of her life translates into what she does not want for her daughter.

Lena articulates the life that she wants for herself and her children – especially for her daughter. She no longer identifies as a "worker," but rather, as a mother. Unable to fulfill her role of worker, she concentrates her efforts on being the best mother (and here, role model) that she is able to be. As one door (employment) is continually closed by an abusive partner, she focuses her energy on a role that she feels more capable of fulfilling. She looks to providing for the welfare of the next generation for satisfaction.

With some distance from Lena's role as worker, it looks even better to her. She wants to convey a message to her children that it is not acceptable to be in a position of dependence. She is not in a job from 9 - 5 and so she has time to reflect on her subordinate position within the relationship. She is aware that her subordinate position in the relationship directly impacts her ability to work and bring home a paycheck.

Lena's experiences with work-related abuse were quite different from Kesha's experiences. Lena's partner simply refused to let her go to work, or he would convince her that her children needed her to prevent her from leaving. One difference between

Kesha's and Lena's situations is that according to Lena, her husband was extremely insecure and jealous. He used various methods of control to prevent her from working (and eventually being self-sufficient and able to leave him). In contrast, Kesha's partner was "lazy" and did not work. The abuse Kesha experienced was unrelated to her working. These different circumstances may explain, to some extent, the contrasting assessments these women offer of their job performance. While both women enjoyed the time they were able to spend work/school as a haven from an abusive partner, one was more able than the other to realize the benefits of that haven. For one, the role of workers was more salient; for the other, the role of mother took precedence (by necessity). Although (and *because*) Lena was often unable to work, her story is especially illustrative of the high *value* that this group of women attach to paid employment.

4.4 GOALS, ASPIRATIONS AND MOTIVES

The variation in the meanings of work is structured by these women's individual experiences in addition to their shared experience as Work First enrollees. By "meaning", I am referring to the active, conscious ways that women reflect on interactions or events in their lives and ascribe personal significance to those events. Even though they come from superficially similar circumstances- all were welfare recipients enrolled in an employment training program designed to assist them in making the transition from welfare to work – they exhibited much variation in the meanings they attributed to work.

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Analysts of the welfare state have focused on the gendered division of labor as a source of unequal treatment by the state (Abramovitz 1996; Fraser 1989; Palimon 1988). The United States has developed a 2-tiered, gendered public assistance system (Nelson 1990). The first tier is contributory and is tied to workforce participation (e.g. Social Security). The second tier is not contributory and is tied to family size and income. This lower tier is highly stigmatized because many Americans blame this group for their own plight (Weir, Orloff & Skocpol 1988). Men who claim benefits tend to do so within the first tier, based on their status as paid workers. Based on the gendered division of labor in this country, women who receive benefits, tend to do so, not as paid workers, but as wives or mothers (Harrington Meyer 1996; Monson 1997). Women receive support from either tier, based not on their role in the workforce but on their link to a male breadwinner. The stigma of means based assistance is at the root of the unequal treatment by society of women who collect welfare. This topic will be discussed at length in chapter 4.

People may tend to dismiss the meanings women attribute to work as trivial and irrelevant to women's success or failure in the workplace. For example, caseworkers at welfare offices may dismiss them because their workloads necessitate that they process people "in terms of routines, stereotypes, and other mechanisms that facilitate work tasks" (Kingfisher 1996; p. 19). Additionally, workers may dismiss clients' excuses and may attribute their problems to negative stereotypes about poor people or to poor personal choices (Brush 2003).

Rather than simply ignoring or dismissing the meanings women attribute to work, caseworkers may also focus on and label women's actions in the workplace. Kingfisher

observes that welfare staff tend to categorize clients as "good" (those trying to make something of themselves) or those getting a "free ride" on public assistance. The welfare staff treats each group differently; those women placed by social workers in the "good" category often receive more assistance with their cases (1996). The impression a client conveys to a caseworker helps determine the level of services she receives.   In a disturbing examination of the racial differences in women's welfare-to-work transitions, Brush notes that racist practices by welfare staff partially explain the overrepresentation of Black women in welfare to work programs.   "Unflattering racist stereotypes caricaturing Black welfare recipients as sexually promiscuous, drug addicted, and lazy may induce welfare workers to see and treat them as more in need of the moralistic incentives provided by work requirements" (2001, p. 79; see also Davis 2006).

In her examination of Wisconsin's paternity and child support policies, Monson (1997) found that the eligibility for public assistance included cooperation in establishing paternity and securing child support. As a condition of benefit eligibility, women welfare applicants were questioned far more extensively than men about their sexual activity. Pearson et al point out that in addition to the gender inequality inherent in the implementation of these state policies, recipients who are victims of domestic violence must cooperate with paternity establishment and child support enforcement and face further contact with their abuser or do without public assistance (2001).   And paradoxically, men's violent and irresponsible behaviors are reinforced by their being exempted from child support enforcement efforts.

When women share their feelings about the meanings of work, their stories dispel the lazy "welfare queen" myth. I have witnessed and will share evidence to contradict

the stereotype of women leeching off of the government system. These women view their jobs as enjoyable and most long to utilize work in order to get off welfare. If caseworkers took time to hear these women's positive feelings about work, maybe more of their clients would be categorized as "good," and receive more assistance from their office. An alternative explanation to this labeling problem is a lack of effective communication between caseworkers and clients. The majority of the women I interviewed reported high levels of dissatisfaction with government assistance. It is probable that these attitudes translated into a negative presentation in the social workers' office. Ethnographers such as Kingfisher, Hays and Nelson (2005) suggest this vicious cycle leads to caseworkers' missing clients' positive feelings about work and result in further negative stereotypes and less attention to their cases.

Meanings of work also provide us with a deeper, richer understanding of women's goals, aspirations and motives for working. Why do women work? By examining the meanings of work, especially in the lives of economically marginalized and battered mothers, we uncover women's motivations: rebuilding self-esteem, gaining financial independence, and acting as a role model for their children. Variation in women's meanings of work illustrates the roles with which they are able to identify. For example, a woman who is unable to work often identifies most with the role of mother, and the meaning of work is focused on what it means to be a role model for her children. There are different consequences for her performance of femininity depending on the level of accountability her partner maintains (West & Zimmerman 1987).

In addition to dispelling the myth of the welfare queen and affirming these women's goals for a better future, examining the meanings of work reveals the

complicated relationship between work and abuse. For example, much of the variation in women's meanings stemmed from their success or failure at work. This success/failure was most often related to the actions of an abusive partner. By uncovering what work means to them, we gain insight into how women cope with an abusive relationship and ways that some women are able to use work to escape or to combat abuse.

Women from somewhat similar circumstances often reported differences in their goals, aspirations and motives for working. They also experienced different levels of success at work, and subsequently, differences in what work means to them. I found it relevant to identify each respondent's personal evaluation of her work performance and what factors impacted that rating. I asked the women to rate their work performance on a scale of 1 to 10, and to offer an explanation for *why* they felt they deserved that rating. Did she feel that her partner's supportive or unsupportive feelings toward her work impacted her performance? What other factors impacted her rating? In addition, I hoped to better understand how well or poorly, by their own assessment, these women were executing their jobs, and reasons for that level of implementation. These women's assessments did not always correspond in transparent or logical ways to the positive or negative feelings they had about work. Women who reported being unable to work (most of the time) due to an abusive partner, often reported very high ratings on work performance. It is surprising that women who are "escaping" a violent home can pull things together enough at work to feel they perform at a high level. This contradicts research findings that women experiencing violence at home are predicted by others to perform poorly at work (Murphy 1993; Raphael 1995, 1996; Brush 1999). I report and interpret these results in this chapter.

4.5   WHY DO WOMEN VALUE WORK?

4.5.1   Financial independence (n=9)

Nine women described work in terms of financial independence and self-sufficiency. I am referring here to a group of women who cannot or *will* not rely on their partner for assistance. Financial independence for these women also referred to freedom from TANF and the loss of privacy and dignity that sometimes accompanies government assistance. These women explained that work meant having the financial freedom to enroll their children in activities or take them out to dinner. They view their lives and their families' lives as happier and more successful with them in the labor force. Iverson and Farber found that women generally view work as beneficial for their families and believe it will afford them greater opportunities and allow them to be good role models for their children (1996).

Kyra talked about why she enjoyed being employed. "I love being independent. I love doin' for myself. I bring home a paycheck. I like buyin' for [her daughter] from my money. I just like doin' for myself." Although she values her employment, she sometimes fears for her safety because her partner stalks her and keeps tabs on her at all times. He works directly across the street and therefore, it is tough for her to escape him. He harasses her while she is at work, and calls her names and belittles her. He often accuses her of infidelity. Kyra reasons that one of the explanations for his behavior and

insecurity may be their age difference – he is 18 years older. She claims that he fears she will leave him for a younger man.   Still, she remains in this on again/off again relationship. She is frustrated when he acts this way because she says, "he is not usually like that."

Kyra does not like to rely on him for any help with her daughter. She is proud that she is able to support herself and her child with this job, and she is unwilling to sacrifice that simply because he is attempting to control her. Kyra has no financial expectations from this man, the father of her child. It is ironic that her partner is attempting to thwart her progress at work, when her desire to work and be financially independent is the very thing keeping him from having to support her and his child. He is seemingly unaware of this connection between her employment and his financial obligations.

What she will not tolerate, however, is having to depend on him or rely on him to help her raise their daughter. Kyra is a typical example of a woman who is using work to gain financial freedom and independence without viewing it as a way to escape either the relationship in general or the abuse in particular. Kyra talked about taking him to court for child support, but dismissed that idea. She would rather make it on her own, without any help from him.   In their interviews with poor women in Philadelphia, Edin and Kefalas (2005) found that although the middle class may frown upon the idea of young, single, unwed mothers, their respondents viewed pregnancy as a time to prove their maturity and responsibility. Kyra reminds me of these women. She had her daughter while she was in high school, and the pregnancy was, according to Kyra, "sort of" unplanned. Like the women in Edin and Kefalas's study, Kyra describes using birth

control, but not regularly, and wanting to have a baby. What she does not seem to want or need, however, is a male breadwinner. Kyra does not want to get married in order to establish either her financial security or her ability to raise a child. Edin and Kefalas (2005) found that young women from Philadelphia were forgoing marriage (to unsuitable partners) simply for the sake of being married. As shown in Kyra's example, the women I interviewed confirm this finding, and reinforce it by turning to employment as an alternative to financial dependence on (abusive) men.

Some women believed that, simply put, work equals money. They discussed the meaning of work, for them, in terms of financial solvency. If they worked, they had more money to do things with and for their children. This was especially salient for the women with teenagers who often asked for money for activities such as movies and concert tickets, and designer clothes and shoes.

If they worked, they would not be homeless. These women saw their employment as directly tied to their family's housing situation. For this group of poor women who were living from paycheck to paycheck (or welfare check) the loss of their residence was always a concern. This was especially true for women who described their partners as [financially] unreliable.

Financial independence means, not only being financially free from a partner, but also being free from the grip of the welfare system. If they worked they would not have to be on welfare, or they relied *less* on government assistance. (I will revisit the meaning of welfare in the next chapter.) Several women reported that because they were working, they were asking their caseworkers to take them off [of assistance], "little by little." They were gradually working their way to a life without welfare. Because these women

were participants in a Work First program, it is difficult to say whether or not the desire to work in order to be free from the requirements of welfare came from themselves or whether they were regurgitating the rhetoric of the Work First instructors. Either way, the desire to be free from the invasiveness and demands of government assistance seemed to be a positive impetus for maintaining employment.

As illustrated in Kyra's account, some women simply wanted to be able to provide for their children and not have to rely on a partner to make purchases. From diapers to movie tickets, it was vital that these women provide for their children without help from their baby's father. Some reported having to beg for what they needed from the child's father. Others explained that he did not have any money to give to help with the expenses of raising a child. Still others made it clear that they longed to be free from their partners' criminal activities (e.g. drug dealing) used to provide for them and their children. Work, for these women, meant a *legitimate way* to support their families.

4.5.2   Sense of self-esteem and self-worth (n=6)

Work means "I am capable and I can do something worthwhile." A second major meaning of work reported by my set of respondents was that working provided them a sense of accomplishment. This was especially noticeable when it had previously been lost because they had been denied the ability to work. Many women reported higher self-esteem as a result of working. A good self-image is important for all women, but especially for those who have been victims of abuse.

This feeling of pride in one's work is not unusual. In a study of inner-city welfare recipients (Anderson et al. 2004), researchers discovered these women's positive experiences after leaving TANF. Most notably, they observed the high value that women placed on their jobs, even in positions that were generally considered marginal. Additionally, the women in Anderson's study, like the general population, derived emotional benefits from working. For example, several participants expressed the pride they experience by working and subsequently setting a good example for their children.

Six women articulated that work meant enhanced "self-esteem" or feelings of self-worth. Half of these women had 5 or more children, and nearly all (n=5) had at least one child age 5 or under. Despite *(or because of)* the demands of caring for many very young children, these women gained self-esteem by working. Working provided women with an opportunity to make adult contacts and demonstrate abilities beyond their roles as mothers. They discussed self-esteem in two main ways: (1) enhanced self-worth as a result of working and earning money for the family, and (2) enhanced self-worth as a result of not sitting at home all day, "doing nothing".

The women who derived high self-esteem from working and earning money to provide for their families also reported having a supportive partner. These men do not seem to be acting out "compensatory masculinity" or "enforcing domesticity." According to the women, their partner encouraged them to work, but not for their own self-fulfillment, rather, to financially assist or support the family. By equating work with high self-esteem as a result of being able to contribute financially, the women may be echoing their *partners'* sentiments about working to provide for the family.

All but one of the women who derived self-esteem from simply getting up, going to work, and being responsible, had partners who were obstacles to their working. In fact, these women whose partners were obstacles to working reported being unable to work throughout most of the relationship. They lamented the fact that they were often prevented from work. Beth explains, "I get depressed because, you know what I mean, I wanna do somethin'. You know? Even if it's for 4 hours, 5 hours. You know what I'm sayin'? I wouldn't mind doin' something."

They were, essentially, sitting at home and feeling bored, depressed and lazy. Their discussions of work showed me that for them, work meant pride and self-respect and they felt their best at the times when they were able to surmount the obstacles in their lives (namely their partners) and work.

Valerie accurately summed up the feelings that she shared with others about gaining self-esteem and self-worth through working, and subsequently, losing those feelings when they were not able to work: "It keeps a pattern in your life. It keeps a lifestyle, a certain, it keeps a certain pattern. Hopefully, I hope I go back to work one day because when you don't work, your life is chaos. Unless you're a really disciplined person and I'm not. I'm not and without workin' I'll sleep all day, stuff like that. All them little things just makes your life miserable." Valerie's experience is illustrative of Wilson's (1997) work on the underclass in inner-city neighborhoods. Wilson claimed that employment provides strcture and discipline at the individual and community levels. Valerie equates her loss of self-esteem with her inability to work. She explains that work keeps a structure in her life and without that structure, she remains isolated (and "miserable").

Lynch and Graham-Bermann (2004) studied the potential for work to be used as a positive resource for women who reported experiencing partner abuse. They found a positive relationship between work and various aspects of self-esteem. My findings support their assessment that paid work provides alternative, positive feedback about the self (166). Although research has shown that abuse negatively affects some women's ability to find and maintain work (Browne, Salomon and Bassuk 1999), for others, like the aforementioned abused women, work provides a boost to their self-esteem and self-worth.

4.5.3 Being a productive adult and parent (n=7)

4.5.3.1 Responsibility.

Several women convey the idea that working means being a responsible adult. These women use the term "responsibility" to mean the sense of duty they have to themselves as well as to their families. They explain that "responsibility" means something more than simply financial duty. For these women, being responsible meant going to work everyday and subsequently maintaining a schedule and a pattern in their lives. The women believe that being responsible means that they meet societal expectations of maintaining employment and performing well on the job. In the accounts that the women shared with me they spoke of work as a structured, regular way to provide for themselves and their children. Patricia describes (with disgust) the alternative lifestyle to working: "If you don't work, you don't ever do nothin'. You just sit around and eat, drink and smoke." Most of the women for whom work meant responsibility were denied the ability to work for a period of time. Patricia, for example, was prevented from working by an

abusive partner. Others were unable to work for brief periods for health or other reasons and lamented losing the structure that working provided in their lives. It was the time spent at home that made them realize how much they missed the daily routine of working in the paid labor force.

For others, working meant living up to the expectation of responsible behavior that was instilled in them as a child. Ellen, for example, reports that her parents always encouraged her to work because, in their opinion, it gave her, "a sense of responsibility." Although I interviewed other women who told me that their parents cultivated a good work ethic in them from a young age, Ellen was the only woman who views her work as a career rather than a job. She equates a strong work ethic and a career path with responsible behavior.

4.5.3.2 Being a Role Model

This group of women who desire to be effective role models for their children also vary in their focus. No one mentioned the desire to leave an abusive partner in order to be a good role model. They did cite other reasons, namely mothering, working and self-esteem. Some women, like Valerie, above, aspired to be a good mother to her children. Karen believes that by working, she will set a good example for her children to emulate. Others, like Lena, simply wanted a better life for their children and for them to have a greater sense of self-worth and self-esteem. This group of women is commonly self-judgmental (about not leaving their abusers) but all had very different ideas about what it meant to be a role model.

As evidenced by Lena's account, working or attending school can mean being role models for children. The women who I interviewed expressed a concern that their

children not make the same mistakes they made and suffer similar consequences. They felt that their children looked at them differently when they were working because the children could see that their mothers' efforts constituted a valuable contribution to the family. Lena felt that going to school enabled her to carry on more intelligent conversations with her children. She believed that by learning, she had more to bring to parenting tasks.

Unlike the stereotypical view of the "welfare queen," these women wanted to model for their children that work helps avoid depending on welfare (often times an abusive system) or on abusive men. They shared a sense of the importance of instilling a strong work ethic and leading by example. Lena recounts with pride that her oldest son is in his second semester of college; she attributes his success in part to her model.

The women who reported that they longed to be a role model for their children were not caring for infants; rather, all three women only had children 7 or older. In fact, most of these women's children were teenagers. It becomes more important for women who have children who are beginning to become employed, to be a role model for their young adult children. Women who had younger children and infants did not voice this same concern about being a role model for their kids.

For each of these women, their partner was an obstacle to their working. All who expressed this concern to be role models were already out of the abusive relationship. Karen was unable to work until after she was out of that abusive relationship. Once it was over, one of the chief concerns, she shared with me, was securing and maintaining employment, and setting a good example for her children to emulate. Again, this

response from the women may have been due to pressure from employees to adopt Work First values about employment.

Interestingly, none of the participants in this study talked explicitly about setting a good example by leaving an abusive partner. In a society faced with intergenerational transmission of violence, it is disconcerting that not one woman mentioned that she wanted to be a good role model to her children by leaving her abuser. Exposure to violence in the home teaches children that violence is an acceptable means to resolve conflict (Ehrensaft & Cohen 2003). Additionally, this social learning approach shows that by the time these children (who have been exposed to domestic violence in the home) reach their teens and begin dating, their expectations about interpersonal relations have been well established (Connolly & Goldberg 1999). The focus for these women is to be a role model with regard to their status as *workers* rather than their status as *women in relationships*.

Valerie expresses concern that as a single parent, unable to work, she is not a good role model for her children. Their father was a drug dealer and in Valerie's terms a "street thug" and was eventually killed in the course of his criminal activity. She worried that her son needed a "man's guidance" and she was unable to provide that for him, so she sent him to live with his uncle. She believes that her children have a better life and better aspirations for the future, by not falling into criminal activity like their father, or welfare dependence and "laziness" like their mother. Again, this is an example of a woman who has been unable to work (mostly because securing childcare is too difficult), shifting her central identity away from her role as "worker" towards that of "mother".

4.5.3.3 Escape from abuse (n=6)

Escape, as a strategy for survival, can be viewed both as a very literal, physical escape from a violent partner, and as a mental or emotional break from abuse. Employment provides a place for some women (like Kesha) to regroup and break from the routine of control and violence. Using work to establish financial independence is strategic for welfare recipients, especially those in abusive relationships, because they may have more power both within the relationship, as a result of their earnings, and the power, if necessary, to leave or *escape* the relationship.

In her research on work/family balance, Hochschild (1997) initially assumed that compared to the workplace, home was a more enjoyable place to be. She discovered that for many, the roles of work and home life had reversed. Work offered a sense of accomplishment and stimulation, and home, with too many demands and not enough reward, was not a place to relax. Like the women in Hochschild's study, who viewed work as an escape from family life, for some of these welfare recipients, work was a physical escape from *violence* in the home. Time spent at work was time that their partner was unable to verbally or physically assault them (at least for those women who partners did not monitor or harass them at work). In this context, work was quite literally an *escape* to the safe haven of their place of employment. Kesha, for example, not only viewed work as an escape, but once there, she dreaded having to return home to "put up with" her partner's violent behavior.

The violence in these women's lives was physical, emotional, and financial. It is not surprising that the sub-group of women to whom work took on meaning primarily as an escape from abuse, experienced some of the most serious violent acts and injuries of

all of my respondents. For example, one woman, in the middle of a fight with her fiancé, threatened (and attempted) to kill herself by slashing her wrists with a kitchen knife. Four women reported that their partner either tried to kill them or threatened to kill them. Two women discussed ways that they thought of killing their partner to put an end to the violence, and one actually was "about to try to kill him" but was interrupted by a visitor at the door. For this group of women, the violence had escalated to, in most cases, a life or death situation. In fact, Jean describes only feeling safe now that she knows her former husband is incarcerated. Work, for these women, meant "escape," and in these extreme cases, escaping to work may have been a literal life-saver.

These women's experiences with violence vary with the complexities of their experiences, including the behaviors of their abusive partners. It is useful to offer explanations for the violence through the use of models, but the current approach does a disservice to the women. Rather than trying to fit all of these women into one specific model to explain their abuse, I propose that each of the following three models, to varying degrees, explains the complexity of this set of women's experience. Instead of matching individual women to the expectations of particular theoretical expectations or models of intimate partner violence this method involves exploring the extent to which different models capture important dimensions of variation – either across the group or within the changing experience of one woman.

One model of intimate partner violence, termed the "backlash effect" (Dugan et al. 2001), hypothesizes that intimate partner violence occurs or worsens when a woman takes some step towards independence from the relationship such as finding a job, threatening divorce, or filing for a Protection From Abuse order. This may increase the

stress or conflict in the relationship and therefore increase the battering. The woman's partner now feels threatened and agitated and may initiate or intensify his use of violence. This model is apparent to a high degree in Lena's (thwarted) attempts to work or attend school: "He was fine as long as I wasn't working. I started to go to school and he got very angry about that. He didn't want me to do anything outside of the home." Lena finally gave in to her husband's constant harassment about going to school and she quit. In Kesha's case, the violence intensified when she was working (and while her partner was unemployed). Therefore, to some degree, her actions (working) in combination with his plight (not working) increased the stress in the relationship and prompted an increase in violence.

The "exposure-reduction" model is another model researchers use to explain variation in intimate partner violence across respondents and over the life course of a single respondent. In this model, the policies or programs (work) that reduce contact between intimate partners reduce the opportunities for violence or abuse (Dugan et al. 1999). By getting women out of the setting where battering occurs, the violence will decrease simply because they have less contact and fewer opportunities to experience the abuse. This seems to be the case for Kesha and others who said that work means escape. The exposure-reduction model explains Kesha's situation to a high degree. In Lena's case, she was rarely away from her abuser because he did not want her to work at all. In the brief time periods where she was able to attend school, she secured credits toward a certificate to be a medical secretary. During the times she was at school, he was unable to physically abuse her. While he was at work, he was unable to abuse her. However, since he sometimes harassed her and called her at school, and since he appointed people

to watch her and monitor her behavior while he was working, she was never truly out of his sight. On first glance, it may seem that this model explains Lena's account to a lesser degree than those like Kesha who were successfully utilizing work as escape from abuse. However, because work was a means of escape for Lena, and because her abuser knew that, he kept her under tighter guard, and she was prevented from *escaping* to work.

Using work to establish financial independence is strategic for welfare recipients, especially those in abusive relationships because they may have more power both within the relationship, as a result of their earnings, and the power, if necessary, to leave the relationship. The exchange model (Gelles 1983) suggests that if a woman is employed, she increases her economic resources and thus her leverage and power in the relationship, and as a result the violence against her will decrease. For Kesha, this model both explains her strategy for working and earning, and also exposes her partner's fears about her attaining financial independence and terminating the relationship. The exchange model also applies to a much lesser degree in Lena's case. She was often unable to hold a job and therefore, unable to gain power through her own earnings; she has little to offer in exchange for safety and power in the relationship. Lena's lack of power in the relationship can be viewed as a result of her inability to work and achieve the financial credits necessary to leave the relationship. This model explains both cases – each woman has a different level of economic resources to convert to relationship power – and that variation is associated with different patterns of abuse and meaning.

Although work meant escape for these women, this haven was often only a temporary solution. All but one had to quit school or work, at some point, or was fired from a job because of the actions of their partner. These actions included refusing to

provide childcare (and/or leaving the children at home alone), physically preventing her from leaving the house, and the most common complaint, harassing her at work. The woman's partner coming to her work was cited as the most detrimental action and very often resulted in her quitting or being fired from that job. Therefore, for all but one of the women who viewed work as an escape, the benefits were temporary.

Ann, the one woman who worked in spite of the high levels of violence, was *encouraged* to work by her partner. In fact, she reports that nearly all of the fights between them were about her not working *enough.* Ann is also the only one of the women (for whom work meant escape) who remains in the relationship. She is also the only one out of these 6 who did not file a Protection From Abuse order. Unlike the other women, Ann described ways that she would also physically abuse her partner. Also, Ann seemed to view work more as an escape from her children than from her partner.

Ann's case is interesting because she and her partner were both focused on finances, but for different reasons. He viewed her working as a way for them to pay rent and save for a house. She viewed work as a way to earn enough money to afford a stereo system and a high definition television. Ann struck me as very focused on securing material goods for herself and her home. She described her husband as the "more responsible" one in the relationship – very concerned that without her paycheck, they would never afford to own their own home.

Work, for this group of women, was an escape from a violent partner. Some women were more successful than others in utilizing this meaning. For women like Lena, who were unable to escape the violence, their partners thwarted their efforts to

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work, in part because they knew it was an escape. By sabotaging their work efforts, abusers were able to thwart women's (however brief) relief from violence in the home.

4.6   MORE VIOLENCE AT HOME (N=3)

"Work means I have to fight him in order to leave this house" (Candace). I have demonstrated the positive meanings that women associate with work. They also expressed some negative meanings associated with going to work: namely an increase in partner violence. Candace explains that any time she wanted to go to work she would have to fight with her partner. In Candace's example, work affects violence: Candace is experiencing a safety crisis as a direct result of her attempts to go to work.

Another way that battering impacts women's transition from welfare to work is by battering and abuse affecting women's work. A man threatened by his partner's attempts to gain independence through waged work may resort to violence to prevent her successful transition into the labor force. Raphael (2000, 2001) examines the ways that men use threats of violence, violence itself, and other, non-violent forms of abuse to sabotage women's efforts to comply with the requirements of welfare reform and build their capacity for safety and solvency through work. He may take or wreck work or school materials, bother her at work when it wasn't allowed, beat her up the day before an interview or a big exam, or perform any number of acts of sabotage to prevent her success in work or job training.

In three cases, the women were abused for attempting to work or were prevented from going to work/class. The violence increased as a direct result of their attempts to

keep a job or stay in school. These are cases in which federally mandated requirements put women at risk for further abuse. For these women, using work as a strategy was not an option, and the meaning of work translated into very negative consequences.

4.7   CONCLUSIONS

For the majority of the welfare recipients I interviewed, work meant something positive: escape from an abusive partner, higher self-esteem, the ability to be a role model for children, financial independence from a partner or from TANF, or an established sense of being a responsible person. These women valued their employment for some or all of the aforementioned reasons.   The jobs that all but one of the women held were low-skill, mostly monotonous, low-wage jobs. Still, the women enjoyed the opportunity to work, as well as the jobs themselves.

The women who were unable to work, or to continue working, expressed feelings of loss, dependence, worthlessness, and anger at being unable to work. This further illustrates the important role that work played in these women's lives. One woman reported feeling motivated by her partner's abuse. She was able to finish schooling and was impelled by the notion that he was trying to prevent her from achieving her goals.

Traditional conceptions of masculinity and femininity impacted some women's work experience. These women reported that their partners' believed they should be at home, caring for the children, and be economically supported by them. These women all disagreed with the idea that they should stay home and be dependent on their partners.

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Some of the women were more successful than others in combating these traditional expectations.

Other men believed that their partners *should* work because they were provisionally unemployed. His employment (or lack thereof) played a large part in whether or not she was "permitted" or possibly even encouraged to work. Whether he was unemployed by choice or not, his motives for supporting her employment seemed, to her, to be largely financial. According to the women, their partners were uninterested in the meanings of work. They were not interested in her job skills or satisfaction. Even though these men were physically and/or emotionally abusive, their lifestyle was often dependent on their partners' paychecks.

I have also illustrated cases in which women described work as a trigger for more violence. For them, work meant having to endure more physical or emotional pain simply to provide for their families or to meet state-mandated requirements. I have highlighted these women's specific experiences with abuse in chapter three.

In this chapter, I have identified the meanings of work for this group of women transitioning from welfare to work. Understanding what work means to them is critical to assisting them in their journey into the workforce. We must be sensitive to the obstacles faced by women experiencing partner abuse, and identify ways to assist them without placing them at further risk for abuse.

As I have illustrated above, these women are not lazy, they are not trying to remain on welfare forever and they are not having more children in order to secure benefits. These women say they enjoy their jobs, and want to work. For some women, being a role model for their children is the most important goal of being employed. For

others, work means escape, however brief, from violence at home. Some women believe that work means financial independence – not relying on the support of a partner or the state. These women have shared complex pictures of their lives and their experiences with work. If we hope to dispel the negative stereotypes of welfare recipients and aid in their long-term transitions into the paid workforce, it is critical that we listen to the complexities and varied meanings that these women hold about work.

5.0   THE MEANINGS OF WELFARE

In this chapter, I examine the meanings of welfare to poor women in order to understand the roles that welfare played in their lives and especially in their transitions into the workforce. How does she feel about receiving welfare benefits? What are the pros and cons of welfare, for her? How is abuse affected by welfare and how does welfare affect abuse? I use answers to these questions from the interviews to describe and explain the variation in the meanings, costs, and benefits of welfare in this group of women. Valerie and Ellen represent 2 ends of the spectrum in terms of successful navigation of the welfare system. Ellen is transitioning from welfare to work with minimal state assistance. Valerie is close to her lifetime limits on state assistance but she shows no attempts to escape welfare dependency.

5.1   TWO PICTURES OF MEANING

5.1.1 Valerie

"I know I could work if I had to, and regardless of babies, you know, how
many kids I have, if I really had to get out and work, if there was no

welfare, I would do it. It makes you lazy. It makes you real lazy and irresponsible, cuz you know you're gettin' that check. Once you get into a certain lazy pattern in your life, it's hard to change."

Valerie is a single, black, pregnant mother of five children ranging in ages from 4 to11. The father of her children, who was arrested for abusing her, is in jail on drug charges. Valerie reasons that it simply became easier for her to stay at home and watch her children than to work. She believes that Clinton's reforms of the welfare benefits on which she relies are a good thing for women or at least for her– that they provide some incentive to get off welfare and get a job. Valerie explains that the work requirements are the only thing that has forced her to, as she says, "get up and work." She now has a little bit of work experience to put on her resume, and is grateful for that. She sees the problems with her lack of motivation and yet cannot force herself to make a change. "A lot of times, like when I'm pregnant, ain't nobody goin' to hire me, but then again, that's still my fault. So, why would I have a sixth child on welfare, you know? Dumb stuff and it's all my fault. That's the truth. And I mean, the welfare, it's ruinin' my life a little bit…A LOT, maybe."

Valerie's Uncle got her a well-paying job at an insurance company and she felt good about her financial success: "I was makin' pretty good money as a young adult – maybe 19 at the time. NO, I was maybe 20, 21, and makin' pretty good money. I had a nice apartment and a Mercedes Benz. I had it nice. I was workin' two jobs – there in the daytime and then at McDonalds at night to pay the car loan and my apartment. I was just hangin' out. But then drinkin', started goin' out all the time. I just started gettin' tired of

havin' to be at work very early." Valerie reports partying too much and losing her motivation to work. Eventually she lost her job and began collecting unemployment.

> "That was the biggest mistake of my life. I should've never stopped. After I got fired I should've got another job. That break, that livin' easy, and not, I mean, just gettin' a check – that unemployment check. I got into that pattern of not wantin' to work anymore. That's when I got with a guy – my first one's father. He was a big drug dealer, and he took care of me. He's like, 'You don't have to work.' And that lifestyle became more richer than what I was, well more comfortable than what I was used to on my own. I just got real spoiled. That was the biggest mistake of my life."

The 1996 legislation, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), features both short-term and lifetime limits on receiving welfare benefits, including both cash and Food Stamps. Valerie believed that the only thing that was going to help her to get her life together would be the end of her benefits eligibility when her lifetime limits were up. She received a notice that she was within one year of her 60-month time limit and she believes that being sanctioned will be the only thing that will help her to change and get some kind of structure in her life. Valerie was remarkably candid about her lack of motivation to make changes in her life. She was one of two participants who reported being notified of the imminent end of their time limits. It is possible that the impending end to her benefits prompted her to evaluate honestly her life and her options for the future. Valerie felt that she was capable of working, but simply had not yet been forced to do so: "When I first got the letter, I worried for a minute. Then I threw the letter away. I said, 'Oh, well. When they make my lazy ass get up and

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go get a job then I'll go get one.' And I think that'll be the first start of me tryin' to get my life back. Once I do, *am forced* to the limit where I have to work, I know I will. [Rather] than to be out beggin' and to have my kids poor or lose custody of them, I would go work. Cuz I know I'm capable of workin'."

Valerie exemplifies Lawrence Mead's critique of the old welfare system. In *Beyond Entitlement* (1986), Mead argues that the "permissive" logic of the old welfare system had turned the poor into a vast population of nonworking freeloaders. Rather than alleviate poverty, Mead argues that the perverse incentives of welfare benefits increase welfare dependency, decrease the work ethic and reinforce social deviance associated with poverty. In fact, opinion polls show that the majority of Americans believe that welfare mothers are lazy, fraudulent and sexually promiscuous (Hays 2003). Valerie, a pregnant, single mother of 5 children, at first glance, fits the stereotype of a "welfare queen" who presumably breeds in order to milk the state for more benefits. Americans fear the parasitic condition of dependency and Valerie's rhetoric and experiences with government assistance represent everything that Americans fear and hate about welfare and welfare recipients.

Despite the mixed racial composition of welfare recipients in this country, welfare mothers and their children have been overwhelmingly depicted as black in the media and throughout our culture. Politicians have cast black mothers as villains and have blamed them for nearly every social problem in this country including violent crime, drug abuse, and the decline of the family (Neubeck & Cazenave 2001). As a black woman on welfare, Valerie fits the profile of an irresponsible, immoral individual who is threatening the foundation of our society.

The individualistic logic of demonizing welfare mothers and labeling their behavior as deviant is problematic for several reasons. First, as I hope to illustrate throughout this chapter, there is actually a wide variation in mothers' experiences with welfare. Second, by demonizing welfare mothers, we are ignoring the broader social foundations of poverty and welfare use. If we want to stop the feminization of poverty, we must look beyond the individual women, to larger social obstacles. Welfare recipients are not the primary causes of the rise in single parenting or the increase in the number of children living in poverty; they are its consequences (Hays 2003).

Valerie cites financial dependency on her (abusive and criminal) partner as one reason for her withdrawal from the workforce and subsequent dependency on the state. She was an independent worker with a well-paying job, new luxury car and nice apartment. After falling into a relationship with a drug-dealer who earned enough through illegal activity that she need not worry about sustaining employment, Valerie grew accustomed to a lifestyle without work. She now laments her choice to be financially dependent on a partner – especially now that he has been jailed for his criminal activities.

Although Valerie acknowledges that she is capable of working, she chooses to stay home and care for her children. Bureaucratic and childcare hassles have left Valerie frustrated with the system and she simply finds it easier to relinquish her role as a worker in favor of her exclusive role as a mother. Overall, female labor force participation has increased dramatically in the past 30 years. As a result, subsidizing poor single mothers so they can stay home and care for their children while more and more married mothers are working for pay has become less popular (Kimmel 1995). Valerie has chosen to opt

out of the workforce (until she is forced to opt back in) – an unacceptable choice in a society which demands that all able-bodied poor men and women get a job.

Consistent with the difficulties that Valerie has expressed regarding dependency on welfare, she supports welfare reform, namely the work mandates. She is about to reach her lifetime limit and her benefits will be cut off, a set of sanctions she supports. This type of support for welfare reform is the most striking indication that poor mothers are not the social "outsiders" portrayed by the PRWORA (Hays 2003). Contrary to the stereotypical portrayal of welfare recipients, these women have many of the same values as the majority of Americans – even the "tough case" of someone who admits to having a weak work ethic.

5.1.2 Ellen

"Well it helps when I need it. It's helpful in a sense that if I had to pay cash for food right now it would be *very hard* to maintain. It just would. But, um, I'm doin' pretty good without cash [benefits] and that's somethin' that I wanted to do, you know [have her caseworker stop her receipt of cash benefits], because I don't like [she pauses] I don't know, overall I don't like it." Ellen, a single, black mother of 3 children, ages 9-13, works several jobs: she is a bookstore clerk, a minister, and an aspiring recording artist. She considers herself first and foremost a recording artist and views her other jobs as financial and spiritual supplements to her overall well-being. Ellen understands that welfare is something she needs right now to support her family, but she, like most of the

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women I interviewed, longs for a time when she is no longer receiving government assistance.

"And I wish that I wasn't … I wish that I was in a position that I didn't need the assistance as far as the food stamps. But I am in that position, right now and it's um. I'm glad that it's there for people that really need it. But at the same time, I'm looking forward to being in a place where I am totally self-sufficient and I am able to provide everything my family needs on my own without that help. You know, it's good if you need it, but, I don't want that. You know what I mean? I wanna be able to do that [provide for the family] on my own." Ellen, working as a recording artist, was the only woman I interviewed who had a career. The majority of participants in this study worked in low-wage jobs with little hope for advancement.

"If I just couldn't find a job, I would. I don't even want to think about it. I would have to go back to welfare cuz I don't wanna do that. I would do *whatever* it took. I really would. Not *whatever*, I take that back. I wouldn't do whatever, but I would find a job. It's not a pride issue. I would find a job to make sure my kids have what they need before I went back to welfare. Definitely." I got the impression from Ellen that she may have been trying to tell me that although she may have been a sex worker in the past, she would no longer do "whatever it took" to support herself if it included selling sex. I did not ask her specifically if she had been a sex worker, but the way she said and then retracted "whatever it took" led me to believe that at one time, she may have done "*whatever*" including selling sex for money. This practice is not unheard of among welfare recipients. Edin and Lein (1997) found that faced with monthly budget

shortfalls, between 2 and 19% of the more than 400 welfare recipients interviewed sold sex, drugs or stolen goods to generate extra money.

Ellen has seen the advantages of working and being able to provide for her family on her own, and she wants to maintain those advantages and not fall back into the cycle of dependence. Ellen sets long- and short-term goals for both herself and her children. She is currently working several jobs and continues to receive food stamps and medical benefits. She proudly reports that she is doing well without cash assistance. "I'm looking for the day when I won't need [welfare] – that's one thing. But I'm grateful that [welfare benefits] were there when I did need them, I really am." Ellen spoke at length about the benefits of a safety net for people who need "a little help" getting started with work but cautions that goal-setting is important for people who want to move towards financial independence.

Ellen ended a relationship with a controlling partner, and she is not prepared to begin another relationship "any time soon." She does not have the desire to devote energy to another relationship: "I don't have to worry about, you know, who I'm coming home to or, if I'm coming home to anybody or, just the pressures of a relationship. My lifestyle has changed totally. You know, I just, I won't be dating. I won't be. You know, until I'm married I won't be with anybody and that's just how I live at this point. The only other, like, personal responsibility is my children. And I'm obligated to them; I'm not obligated to a *guy*. You know, unless he's my husband and if he's my husband then he's gonna take on help with the responsibilities even with the children and you know what I mean, so it would still be peace. It wouldn't be like I'm taking on another kid."

Ellen is adamant about her freedom from dependence on a partner. She equates being in a relationship with a man with having another (demanding) child. Her experience further elaborates Edin's (2000) findings that suggest that mothers often refuse to marry the fathers of their children because they are unreliable breadwinners or have serious drug or alcohol problems. Ellen differentiates between relationships and marriage: if she were married, her husband would help with the responsibilities of being a parent and keeping a house. Ellen makes a distinction between being intimately involved with a man to whom she is "obligated" and (who clearly is not helpful with parenting responsibilities) and being in a *marriage* in which she believes she would share parenting and other duties with a husband.

It is significant that Ellen is able to make this type of decision to be free from dependence on any man, because she is able to work. She has only been able to work with a little cash assistance from the state. Without this safety net, she does not believe that she would have been able to make the break from an abusive partner.

Ellen credits part of her ability to make a successful transition from welfare to work to the flexibility of her jobs and her employers. As an aspiring recording artist she has flexibility regarding days and hours that she works. Most of the women I interviewed, and most poor women in this country who are transitioning into the workforce, do not have the luxury of setting their own hours. Low-paying, low-prestige jobs in the service industry, the most common routes of employment for these women do not typically allow much flexibility – a big dilemma for working mothers of small children.

Ellen is able to work, and in fact, holds several jobs at once. She shuns dependency both in the form of relationships with men, and reliance on state assistance. Her family is her number one priority and she is willing to do "whatever" it takes to get them out of a cycle of dependency. Ellen is making great strides in her transition from welfare to work and is a success story by state standards.

5.1.3 Variation, Contrast, and Comparison

Ellen and Valerie are similar in age (32 and 34, respectively), race (both black) and status as victims of abuse, but they have distinctly different stories to tell about what welfare means to them. Valerie believes that welfare has hampered her ability to work by buffering her from the harsh economic necessities of adulthood. Ellen, on the other hand, views welfare as a stepping stone, a boost to aid her in making a transition out of an abusive relationship and away from financial dependence on a partner. Valerie represents the stereotype that conservative America has feared – in effect, welfare makes you lazy, discourages you from working, and encourages you to have more and more children, at increasing cost to the state. Ellen, on the other hand, represents a "success story" of sorts, and has utilized welfare support to assist her in making a swift and successful transition into the workforce.

Although these women seem to come from similar circumstances, one very important difference is the number and ages of their children. Ellen, who has 3 school-aged children (9-13), reports success at balancing work and family life. Valerie's 5 children are 4 – 11 and she will soon add a newborn to the family unit. The difference

between the caregiving responsibilities of these women is substantial and may contribute to success/failure at work.

Both women caution that welfare can make you lazy, but have different strategies for coping with this possible outcome. Valerie's plan consists of waiting until they cut off her benefits and hoping that will finally motivate her to go back to work. Ellen has taken a much more proactive approach by setting goals for herself and her family and limiting the support she accepts from the state.

Ellen shares some of Valerie's views on the problems women have with leaving welfare: "That's probably one of the reasons why a lot of women won't get off. They don't make a plan of 'where would I be in 5 years', or 'what do I see for my kids', you know. They don't set goals. And I really believe that's it." It seems that Ellen has internalized the rhetoric of the Work First instructors who work with recipients to set and meet goals along their journey from welfare to work.

Both women discuss the difficulties with depending on an intimate partner. Valerie reports dependency on her drug-dealing partner's criminal activity for survival. When her partner eventually went to jail, rather than regain her independent lifestyle, she fell into dependency on the state. Ellen, on the other hand, learned that dependency on a controlling and abusive partner was undesirable and when she ended the relationship with her children's father, she moved to a more independent lifestyle. Ellen still relied on the state for assistance, but only to supplement, rather than replace, her income.

5.2   THE VALUE OF MEANING

The PRWORA has many aims, but one is to encourage marriage among the poor by increasing the costs of non-marriage (in part by restricting the amount of benefits women can receive from the state), removing "perverse disincentives" to marriage (by providing benefits for two-parent families), and creating incentives for marriage and childbearing in the context of marriage. Legislators push poor mothers into the labor market while at the same time, they hold them accountable for childrearing responsibilities. Policymakers describe fatherhood with emphasis on men's biological or financial connections to children rather than on men's social or parenting obligations (Haney & March 2003). In Ellen's and Valerie's cases, one partner is simply unreliable and broke, and one is in prison. Both women were abused by these men. Do we really expect poor women to choose marriage when faced with these types of prospects?

All working parents must find ways to balance work and family. However, this task is especially onerous for poor women who face challenges finding affordable, reliable childcare. The private and domestic character of caring work renders this work devalued or simply invisible. This makes the consideration of work participation by poor women a more complex matter than is often recognized. Simply adding on employment may in fact lead to a double burden upon women whose household obligations still need to be fulfilled. Legislated work requirements affect poor mothers' ability to care for their children and as a result, affect the well-being of both mother and children (London et al. 2004).

The move to help welfare mothers make the transition to "self-sufficiency" (that is, relying on the market and marriage instead of welfare for material support) is based on an inaccurate assessment of their situations. Despite their differences, the women in my sample have one commonality: they are raising a child or children – most of them as single parents. Therefore, by calling it a move toward self-sufficiency, we are ignoring the fact that these women are supporting more than just themselves; they are responsible for their children as well. In Valerie's case, she has simply given up the struggle to fulfill both roles of worker and mother. She has 5 children and another on the way; she is not struggling to be self-sufficient, but rather, to support 7 people. Ellen, whose children are a bit older, works three jobs in her quest to support herself and her family. The problem for most welfare recipients, "is not getting a job, but finding one that pays enough to bring the family out of poverty, offers benefits, and is flexible enough to make room for the circumstances of single parenting" (Hays 2003, p. 55). Failure to assess accurately these women's situations has created unrealistic expectations for poor mothers who, in the case of Valerie and Ellen, are destined either to fail in their attempts to work, or to succeed only by taking on several jobs.

5.3   THE MEANINGS OF WELFARE

All of the women I interviewed explained the personal and financial implications of being on welfare and out of work. They discussed their dissatisfaction with the invasiveness of the system. Many women felt inadequate for not being able to support

their families on their own. They disclosed that welfare benefits became a point of contention in their relationships, and that it was sometimes easier simply to hide their welfare use from their partners. Some women reported problems with caseworkers and with navigating the administrative process of the welfare system. Although these women were dissatisfied with many or all of the aspects of welfare, they all collected benefits for some length of time. The fact that even recipients who were deeply critical of welfare nevertheless remained on the rolls is indicative of the lack of alternatives faced by most of these women.

Most of the women had at least some positive feelings about welfare. They felt that welfare was a big help when they needed it, and some believed they would never be able to survive without it. Some commented on the positive aspects of being forced to comply with work requirements. Several women expressed a satisfaction with the welfare system because it helped women in abusive situations.

Many women cited the hassles and stigma of welfare receipt as major drawbacks to collecting assistance. Several women candidly expressed their concerns about the detrimental and long-term effects of welfare recipiency and about women who abuse the system. In contrast, some women expressed satisfaction with the new requirements and felt that these requirements helped women more than hindered them. Women identified multiple co-occurring costs and benefits of government assistance, therefore these meanings are not mutually exclusive and some report more than one "meaning of welfare."

In order to dispel the myths which plague welfare recipients, it is essential that we gain a better understanding of the variations in women's circumstances. Throughout this

chapter, I will describe what welfare means to these women, including the ways they utilize state assistance and the ways that they are dissatisfied with the system. By uncovering the complexities and circumstances of welfare use, we will be better able to reduce the stigma associated with state assistance. I will discuss the meanings of welfare first in terms of the benefits and then costs for poor women.

5.3.1 Positive Meanings of Welfare

5.3.1.1 A Financial Safety Net (n=15)

Most women valued their welfare benefits and discussed them in terms of a short-term or transitional financial support. Some of the participants believed that they simply could not support their family without some form of government assistance. Childcare and healthcare were the areas in which the majority of the women needed assistance. Others valued the housing assistance they received (although there were many complaints about public housing and the neighborhoods in which affordable or subsidized housing was available).

While some women focused on the way welfare benefits could help them support their families without obtaining living-wage jobs, others, like Valerie at the beginning of this chapter, cautioned that it should *only* be used for a brief period of time. Nadine stressed that welfare should only be used as a safety net, but is inherently a good thing. "Like I said, it's a good thing it's there. I mean, if you got the possibility to get off it and you are able to do the work requirements, that's what keeps you from bein' lazy." She

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cautions that, "you'll just stay on it [welfare] and be lazy and just keep collectin'."

Notice the change that Nadine makes in her discussion of welfare. In one statement, she

is hailing the virtues of welfare benefits; in the next, she switches from a discussion of

benefits to the threat of sanctions. This verbal slip occurs because Nadine has

internalized the cultural imperative that it is the *requirements* of the new legislation that

are the true *benefits*. She advises about how to best utilize the safety net of welfare:

"Like I said, somebody else needs the money and then the minute there might not be no

more welfare then what are you gonna do then? You better take advantage of these free

opportunities to try to help yourself because if you don't have the money for it [basic life

expenses], they [the state] got your back." This strategic planning and utilization of

benefits echoes the observations of others who have interviewed welfare recipients.

(Hays 2003, Edin 2000, Danzinger et al 1999).

Unlike the stereotypical portrayal of welfare recipients (that women seek to stay

on the rolls for their entire lives), these women view their time on welfare as necessary

but brief. They argue that welfare should always be available as a safety net (this net

disappears after a woman reaches her 60 month lifetime limit). It is clear that these poor

women have experienced intermittent times of desperate need and have been forced to

turn to the state for assistance. These women were grateful that it was available when

they needed it. However, they also caution that welfare can contribute to dependency and

should *only* be utilized when absolutely necessary. I will discuss specific instances of

these women's dependency later in this chapter.

5.3.1.2 A Stepping Stone (n=7)

Welfare, for seven women, is a stepping stone on the path to self-sufficiency. They view their dependency on welfare as a temporary stop on their journey into the workforce. Women like Sharice and Shania recognize welfare as a step and acknowledge that they must move beyond this step on the path to a more permanent financial independence.

Sharice reveals how welfare requirements have helped her to become more independent: "Well, it [welfare] has helped me. Basically it's very good if you don't have anybody. But now I'm more independent. They're like, slowly takin' me off, which I don't mind. It pushes me to, you know, get out there and show my kids that Mom is bein' the best that she can. You know, it pushes me more. That's fine with me." Overall, Sharice views welfare in a positive light. Similar to Nadine's dialogue, notice that Sharice switches from talking about the benefits of welfare to the benefits of welfare requirements. In fact she appreciates being "pushed" into the workforce (upon threat of sanctions) because she is able to set a good example for her children through work. Despite the bureaucratic maze, the intrusiveness, and strict requirements, Sharice substantiates the observations of other researchers who found that welfare recipients *like* the TANF reforms (Hays 2003, Edin & Lein 1997). They agree with legislators that people should work and that working mothers are good role models for their children. Contrary to the assumption that the poor reject work, studies show that women on welfare want to work (Johnston-Robledo & Saris 2002).

Several women (n=6) talked specifically about how welfare was a stepping stone toward independence. However, they longed to be self-sufficient and free from dependency on the state. They have called their caseworkers and asked to have their

benefits decreased, little by little. Shania reports wanting to preserve her time limits: "Just so…they say you get a certain amount of days and I don't wanna use all my days when I know I can be workin' cuz I might need them in the future in case I get sick or in an emergency." Patricia echoes this concern for her time limits: "I only get the cash when I don't have a job, cuz it's only 5 years and I'm about to run outta my 5 years."

It is noteworthy that these women are cognizant of time limits and the impossibility of supporting their families on low-wage jobs for which they qualify, and are "saving" their days of eligibility. These are women who have been cycling on and off welfare for months or even years – they *expect* to be back. This is not an unrealistic expectation; studies have shown that one-fifth to one-third of TANF users return to welfare within one year of leaving (Acs & Loprest 2001). Although they view welfare as a "stepping stone" to help them get on track, they expect to be out of work again and they anticipate, once again, needing state assistance. The problem is not these women's realistic expectations about cycling between work and welfare. The problem, of course, is with the unrealistic assumptions about how and why poor women use welfare benefits. Welfare is essentially unemployment insurance and a supplement to low-waged work for women and their need may not be "temporary."

These women reported similar stories of asking caseworkers to ration their benefits, either because they felt that they could manage without them, to lessen their dependence on the system, or to preserve limited benefits for likely times of future need. The aforementioned examples are evidence of the initiative welfare recipients show in their efforts to leave behind them the paltry benefits, stigma, and hard times they associate with receiving needs-based income assistance. These sentiments echo the

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observations of other researchers who found that people living in poverty share mainstream aspirations regarding welfare and work (Edin & Lein 1997).

The problem with viewing welfare as a "stepping stone" toward independence is that in some cases, women never leave that stone. They are unable to take the next step on their journey towards independence. In other cases, they take the step into the paid workforce, and then fall back onto the state assistance step.

5.3.1.3 An Alternative to Financial Control (n=2)

Women in abusive relationships are often subject to financial control by their batterers. It is common for an abuser to isolate a woman from financial resources (Brandwein 1995). Although half of the women in this study filed for Protection from Abuse orders, only two discussed the positive financial aspects of welfare for women in an abusive situation. Patricia briefly mentions that collecting welfare is helpful if your partner "controls all [your] money," but only if he does not know you are receiving benefits.

Kathy elaborates: "If you're in an abusive situation, the good part about it is you get food stamps, because, you figure, if you're in an abusive relationship, a lot of times you don't handle your money. She can still eat. Her and her kids can still eat…." It is noteworthy that Kathy switches between direct address ("you") and the third person ("she") possibly first relating to and then distancing herself from this type of abuse. Kathy, who was physically abused while she was married, claims that her husband feared she would, "end up havin' enough money to leave." I asked if her ex-husband controlled her money, "No, that's the one thing. He would try to. He would try to take my money. If he felt that I had any money – try to get all my money." Although she claims that he

did not control her money, he consistently kept her from going to work and sabotaged every job attempt. Kathy reluctantly decided to go on welfare: "That was my only way of makin' it. You know what I mean? But I would rather work."

5.3.2 Negative Meanings of Welfare

It is noteworthy that those women who described the meaning of work as "escape" from an abusive partner, all described welfare in an overwhelmingly negative way. Stigma, bureaucratic hassle and insufficient funds were the most widely cited explanations for their dislike of the system. This sub-group of women has been successful in their efforts to utilize work as an escape from abuse. They have relied on welfare, but their success at work has changed the way that they view the welfare system.

5.3.2.1 Shame, Embarrassment and Insufficient Benefits (n=11)

Stigmatization, or the devaluation of deviant individuals and groups, entails a negative assessment of personal character. The labeling process associated with stigmatization focuses on one aspect of the deviant's character. Past research documents that recipients viewed receiving public aid as a stigmatizing experience (Rank 1994; Goodban 1985). In the case of welfare recipients, the source of stigma is individual attributions of responsibility for poverty. Stigma is also fostered by the ways in which public assistance programs are implemented, including negative interactions with case workers and long waiting times in welfare offices (Stuber & Schlesinger 2006).

Kingfisher (1996) follows feminist analysts of social welfare such as Nelson (1990) and Fraser (1989) in offering an explanation for the stigma faced by women welfare recipients. She explains that the U.S. welfare system is structurally gendered by being divided into two separate but unequal channels. The first (masculinized) channel consists of the "contributory" programs such as social security, unemployment, disability, and workers' compensation. Recipients from this channel tend to be viewed as entitled to these benefits since they symbolically consist of contributions from previous employment, eligibility is tied not to means tests but to a record of employment, and benefit levels are tied to wages and the combined contributions of the worker, the employer, and the state. This group is not subject to social stigma because they are simply temporarily unable to work. The second (feminized) channel consists of "noncontributory" programs such as AFDC and food stamps and exist through the support of taxpayer contributions. This group, who has been largely responsible for unpaid household and childcare duties that may have kept them out of the workforce, is subjected to public scrutiny and degradation. This second channel is considered "undeserving" and of lower character and solely responsible for their financial problems.

Some of the respondents in my study reported feeling a sense of *shame* about receiving benefits because of their family's negative views about welfare. Jean's father wanted her to keep his last name so that her children would be entitled to receive benefits from his Social Security income. This example is evidence of the 2-channel welfare system, and the prejudices associated with each channel.

Many of the women who expressed that they simply "don't like" welfare are referring to the shame and embarrassment that accompany the stigma of being a welfare

recipient. Ellen, whose "success" story I presented in some detail in the opening of this chapter, describes welfare in this way: "I'm doin pretty good without cash and that's somethin' that I wanted to do you know [she asked her caseworker to reduce her benefits], because I don't like it [being on welfare]. I don't know...overall I don't like it. And I wish that I wasn't on it. I wish that I was in a position that I didn't need the assistance as far as the food stamps. I'm looking forward to being n a place where I am totally self-sufficient & I am able to provide everything my family needs on my own without that help. You know, it's good if you need it, but, I don't want that." It is difficult for Ellen to articulate the contradiction: she appreciates that welfare is there when she needs financial help, but overall, she is embarrassed that she needs to accept government assistance.

One widespread myth about welfare recipients is that they can live quite well on the benefits they receive. Nearly half of the women I interviewed complained that the money they receive is insufficient. One of the participants moved up her interview time for this study by a week because she needed the food voucher that I dispensed to thank participants in the study. Beth explains, "I wish I could work. Cuz, I mean, it don't last me. I didn't even have enough to get here. I had to trade my daughter her bus pass and give her 2 dollars, cuz I needed the voucher. I told you. Cuz I've been short of food cuz I can't work. It's not enough. I mean, I'm thankful for it but it's not enough." Beth who has suffered from numerous health problems and has recently been diagnosed with cancer, is unable to work, and has little choice but to accept the paltry benefits offered her by the system.

Ann, who lives with her fiancé and is raising her own daughter and five of his children from a previous relationship, is incredulous: "Get this: I get $315 a month [total cash benefits]. That's not even enough for a one-bedroom efficiency. How can somebody live off that? And then what they want you to do is they want you to go on it so they can send you to the projects. I'm not about to go live in the projects." Ann believes that welfare is a conspiracy, designed to socially isolate and contain the poor within public housing. This perception is especially telling of the stigma associated with this form of state assistance.

Candace, exasperated by the hassle of collecting inadequate benefits shares this sentiment: "It's not…why do it?! You're sittin' on your butt not doin' anything and it's *pennies* for what you can't do anything with." Candace poses the question: "Why do it?" The answer? For the majority of these women, they have few alternatives – at least in the short term.

5.3.2.2 A Bureacratic Hassle (n=4)

The relationship between clients and caseworkers is often fraught with frustration on both sides. Recipients feel frustrated in their attempts to navigate the system. Caseworkers are constrained by federal and state rules and regulations, underfunding of casework in most jurisdictions (which results in large, burdensome caseloads for individual caseworkers), and the challenges of changing their practices due to the demands of welfare reform. Caseworkers are often forced to distance themselves from the welfare recipients in order to handle the bureaucratic system of rules and regulations. Ironically, as reported by Kingfisher (2001) many caseworkers share life experiences and class

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position with these poor women. Kingfisher reports that welfare caseworkers face a number of frustrations at work, including large case loads, low status and autonomy, and day-to-day pressures of dealing with clients.

In her 1996 study on welfare recipients and their caseworkers, Kingfisher reports that workers tended to use shortcuts in order to ease the burdens at work. Caseworkers stereotypically categorized bad clients (mostly all of them) as manipulative and deceitful, lazy, and unclean. Clients referred to as "good" were those whom caseworkers perceived as trying to better themselves and improve their financial circumstances. By grouping clients into "good/bad" or "deserving/undeserving", caseworkers place the blame squarely on the poor for their plight. The effect of this type of categorization is an unfair dismissal of needy women and their needs.

Beth describes her frustration with her caseworker of many years: Beth's adult son agreed to provide childcare during the day, but she had problems obtaining her subsidy and could not afford to pay him up front out of her own pocket. As she explained, "Well, with my childcare, the caseworker was giving me a hard time with the childcare. You know she was giving out, you know, the prices that are supposed to be that she said yes to. When he was supposed to get for 14 hours, she would give me for 4 hours. It made it bad too because I don't want him thinking that I was takin' it, ok? It became a problem. She stressed me out BAD. 2 years. She stressed me out real bad." It is difficult to gage the entire situation based on Beth's account, but it appears, at the very least, as though there was a communication breakdown between Beth and her caseworker. This barrier strained the relationship between Beth and her son, and caused Beth undue stress as she attempted to navigate the welfare system.

Ann also reported the hassle of navigating the system in order to secure childcare: "I was on childcare partnership, and um, I was workin' and well, I wasn't getting child support. I filed for child support and we went to court and he [her child's father] had to owe me [sic] $350, but I never received it. So, childcare partnership had to go by, how much I was getting, you know, what the paper said even though I wasn't gettin' it, and here I made too much to try for a partnership. So I had no babysitter money. So I asked welfare, if they would pay for my babysitter. They said, "no" that I had to more or less quit my job and go back to school for them to get me a babysitter. I had to get on cash assistance. The only way I could get on cash assistance was I had to quit my job because I made too much." In her attempts to fulfill her work requirements, Ann made too much money and was unable to secure a childcare subsidy. Without this subsidy from the state, she could not afford to pay for childcare and was forced to quit her job.

Childcare was cited as an obstacle to work (and subsequently getting off welfare) for more than half of the mothers I interviewed. Because all women generally bear a disproportionate share of childcare responsibilities (Hochschild 1989), policy changes that affect women's labor force participation have a direct effect on their ability to care for their families (London, Scott & Hunter 2002). Childcare subsidies by the state have been a savior for women who had been unable to afford to pay for childcare on their low-wages from low-paying jobs. However, for many, the process of securing these benefits proved to be a huge hassle; one that left women like Valerie and Ann so discouraged that they gave up on the system altogether. In addition to this type of bureaucratic hassle, welfare recipients often cite privacy issues as a flaw in the system and a major drawback to collecting benefits.

5.3.2.3 An Invasion of Privacy (n=2)

Two of the women I interviewed expressed their dissatisfaction with the surveillance involved in the administrative process of obtaining benefits. Sharon explains, "I didn't like that they nose into your life and they wanna know everything about you. That's like, even childcare, you know, they all want you to go down and file for [paternity establishment and enforcement of child] support and stuff like that." Patricia shares these feelings of frustration and believes that the caseworkers are "nosy" and they make the whole process a big hassle. "You have to go through a ring of things just to get a measly $200 in food stamps. They always want you to come to the office to fill out this and do this and do that. Why don't you just mail these papers and call me on the phone? And when you have a job, welfare is so much worse. When I didn't have a job, they freely give you your money. When you have a job, you have to do the monthly reporting form, the childcare papers. You gotta have a receipt for almost everything you do!" Patricia adds that this is all dependent on your caseworker: "Most caseworkers don't make you do all that. If you get one that's just rude and you don't do it, you don't get no check at ALL. NOTHIN'." Patricia reveals that when she had a job, the bureaucratic hassle was much worse. She asserts that the state makes it easier to stay at home and collect welfare – not the intended message of welfare legislation.

Both Sharon and Patricia described welfare as an invasion of their privacy. However, Sharon was primarily concerned about the invasive requirements regarding paternity establishment. "That's like, even childcare, you know, they all want you to go down and file for support and stuff like that. It's like, like I says, we both have our own

monies and we – even both of us, we could not afford it, if, say I was to marry him and didn't have some kind of help, like especially childcare. Because kids gotta go to daycare in the summertime and that'll cost ya your whole pay. So I mean, between that and the healthcare, forget it." It is clear from her statement about marriage that there is still a financial disincentive to marry. Additionally, Sharon is uncomfortable collecting formal support from this man – they keep their finances separate. Although Sharon never said so, I believe that her desire to maintain separate finances stems from the episodic abuse that has occurred throughout the 20 years they have been together. Sharon's concern about privacy regarding the relationship stems from her desire to keep information about her finances (and the help she receives) confidential from her intermittently abusive partner.

While Sharon's concerns about privacy are based on her intimate relationship, Patricia's concerns about privacy are more general and stem from her disgust with the bureaucracy of the system. She cannot understand why caseworkers require so much detailed information for such little money. Patricia believes that the paperwork requirements are a disincentive to work. She explains that when she is unemployed, "they freely give you your money," but when she has a job, she must maintain detailed records, keep receipts and fill out more paperwork. Patricia's concerns about privacy stem from her caseworkers demand to know "everything" about her life - especially when she is working. Patricia believes that caseworkers are asking poor women to sacrifice privacy in their lives for state assistance.

How can caseworkers convince clients that they recognize them as independent while also demanding compliance to an impossible set of rules? (Hays 2003). We are

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sending welfare mothers a conflicting message: value paid employment as an individual choice when actually it is presented as a demand with threats of punitive consequences. Both Sharon and Patricia comply with all of their caseworkers' invasive questions and paperwork because they realize that noncompliance equals loss of benefits.

5.3.2.4 Child Support Requirements (n=4)

Several aspects of the child support process are problematic, primarily that it alerts the abuser to her location and it may force contact with the abuser in court situations and beyond. This contact may bring up feelings of anger in the abuser or even a longing for more frequent visitation with his children and therefore more contact with her. In order to receive public assistance, applicants are required to cooperate with the state in locating fathers and establishing paternity (if necessary) in order for the state to collect child support payments. Women who seek to secure child support from abusive partners are often setting themselves up for further abuse (Roberts 1999). Under the new welfare requirements, women are required to sue for child support in order to maintain their benefits. If they fail to do so, they forfeit their welfare benefits. The Family Violence Option provides an exemption from child support enforcement for women at risk for domestic violence. However, in studies of this issue, women have basically valued the money over their safety, which partially explains why so few domestic violence exemptions are requested or granted.

In her study of information-collecting practices in child support cases, Monson (1997) found that the primary focus of the caseworkers' interviews with men was their employment and income, whereas the focus of their interviews with women was their

sexual activity. This biased interviewing technique demonstrates the gendered nature of public assistance practices; not only was there a gendered double standard for interview protocols, but caseworkers used the interview process and subsequent benefit eligibility determination to discipline men and women into gender conformity. It also shows that women's complaints about the invasiveness of the system are well founded.

Good cause exemptions are granted to women who are in an abusive situations and for whom the process of securing child support would be dangerous Although the numbers of welfare recipients who report abuse in surveys is high, few women request exemptions. One reason is that they may not be informed of this option to apply for an exemption (Roberts & Finkel 1994).   Another reason is that their economic concerns may override their fear of additional abuse. They simply want and need the child support (Pearson et al. 2001).

Kyra reports that her current (abusive) boyfriend did not know she was receiving state support, but, if he knew, would not like it: "He would probably be kinda mad, I guess. Cuz he probably thinks I was getting him [manipulating him in order to secure money for child support] the whole time and I kept telling him I never got no money. You know, I just thought he didn't need to know that." For Kyra, it was important to hide the money she received from welfare, in order to continue to receive money from her boyfriend, the father of her 2-year-old daughter. Kyra feared that if he knew she was receiving assistance – a fact that complying with the requirement to cooperate with state efforts to pursue child support could reveal to him – he would either refuse to help her out financially, or be angry that he was being deceived, or both.

I asked Kyra whether or not she was receiving child support, and she seemed conflicted about filing for formal support: "Yeah, he does it every once and a while – if I constantly ask, and I don't like beggin' nobody for anything. I was gonna sue him, but then I thought I'll give him another chance. And then, since this chance isn't working out again, I'm just gonna go ahead and sue him." It seemed as if she had been reconciled to his intermittent contributions for his daughter, but made up her mind to sue for child support after hearing herself talk about it in this interview. Kyra is still in this relationship that she does not characterize as abusive, but includes actions by her partner such as physical and verbal abuse, stalking, and control. In this and other cases of abuse, attempts to secure formal child support payments, although required by the state, may indeed subject the woman to further abuse (Roberts 1999). Kyra's story illustrates the dilemmas faced by poor women who are experiencing abuse: they must choose between their needs for safety and financial assistance.

Others echoed this sentiment, explaining that because they were on welfare, they were forced to comply with state regulations and file for child support from their partner, the baby's father. In Shania's case, her partner did not want her to collect welfare, "because they make you sue" for child support. Sharon's partner did not like that caseworkers "nose into" their lives and make you file for support. He wanted her to get off welfare so that he could stop paying child support. Her welfare receipt was the source of many arguments between them – he did not want to be forced to pay child support and therefore wanted her to stop collecting benefits (women are required to sue for child support in order to receive benefits).

5.3.2.5 Dependency/Laziness (n=4)

Part of the rhetoric preceding the passage of the PRWORA legislation was that government support created dependency. One-fifth of the women I interviewed expressed the view that welfare made people lazy. I began this chapter with a quotation from Valerie's interview about her dependence on welfare. She explained that welfare was a crutch and it was actually hurting her rather than helping her. She had become so accustomed to staying home and receiving assistance that she lacked the motivation to go out and work.

Many of these women have been collecting welfare for years and they are wary of the system that they believe creates dependency and invites fraud and abuse. Nadine cautions: "I mean, if you got the possibility to get off of it and you are able to do the work requirements, that's what keeps you from bein' lazy. You know, that's the project here [at the Work First Program]. The cons, you'll just stay on it and be lazy and just keep collectin'." Nadine's outlook is an example of the mixed feelings these women have about welfare. Yes, welfare means opportunity and survival, but for some it also means dependency and laziness.

These women vary in the actions they take to combat dependency. Ellen, for example, cautions that welfare makes people lazy and dependent, but offers solutions to prevent that outcome: namely goal-setting for herself and her family. Nadine (above) also discusses dependency in the abstract: welfare can make "people" lazy, but she does not include herself in that category. Valerie is the only woman who reckons that she is lazy as a result of welfare. The others who discuss welfare as an impetus for laziness all do so in the third person. None admit to personally falling into this trap.

5.3.2.6 Sabotage (n=5)

Five women reported that their partners had positive attitudes about welfare and were happy they received assistance. They enjoyed "helping" to spend that money and even attempted to force the women to put them on their check. Only one of these five women, Nina, reported that her partner deliberately attempted to sabotage her benefits by lying to her caseworker. Nina reports that when she refused to put her partner on her welfare check, he harassed her and tried to sabotage her benefits. "Basically he wanted me to put him on with me and I told him no, I wouldn't. He even almost tried to mess up my welfare. He was sayin' that since I have this house, people were livin' there and they were givin' me a hundred dollars a month. So he went and told this big story about this and they called me in and they was like, well, we gonna cut you off from welfare and this and that." Eventually, Nina was able to rectify the situation when she explained to her caseworker that she had acquired PFA papers against her partner and that he had fabricated the entire story. Nina was the only participant who reported that a partner attempted to sabotage her welfare benefits.

This type of sabotage is a fairly common tactic by abusers (Raphael 2000). Men can threaten to sabotage not only welfare benefits but also housing by getting his partner into trouble with the housing authority. The "one-strike" rule by the public housing authority makes women ineligible for public housing if there is any drug-related activity on the premises, even if she had nothing to do with it and didn't even know it was going on. Not only do abused women use welfare, but women in abusive relationships utilize

welfare as a way of escaping the violence (Brandwein 1999). A partner may attempt to take back that freedom by sabotaging her welfare benefits - her means to escape.

For Jean, the bureaucracy of welfare meant the sabotage of her attempts to flee her abusive partner. Jean tried to get out of the violent relationship by moving into a women's shelter. She recalls that it was a welfare caseworker who told her partner where she was staying. "My family didn't even know I was there. What happened was, because I was on welfare at that time, she [the caseworker] was giving him information [about her residence] cuz only welfare would have known where I was. Then, later on he told me about it. That's how he tracked me down." Jean blames her welfare caseworker for sabotaging her attempts to escape an abusive partner. Bureaucracy and access to private information may be putting women in jeopardy.

5.4   CONCLUSIONS

Welfare both undermines and reinforces masculinity and femininity as mutually exclusive, complementary categories. Welfare has traditionally reinforced domestic femininity by coercing women to retreat from the workforce and back into the home and into conventional female mother and homemaker roles. This gender polarized separation of work and home life is especially good news for men who are no longer forced to compete with women for jobs or promotions. In addition, men receive free labor at home in the form of childcare and housework. Brush (2003) examines welfare through a gender lens by employing Bem's (1993) concepts of gender polarization, androcentrism,

and biological essentialism. She explains that welfare reform reproduces gender polarization by dictating that men are workers and women are mothers. Furthermore, men's roles as waged worker and provider are primary. Women may be expected to work, but if so, their waged work is secondary to their obligations to meet their husbands or partners' sexual, emotional and domestic needs. Brush contends that biological essentialism is discernible in welfare reforms focused on regulating sexuality and fertility.

Welfare can, in fact be used to reinforce the homemaker/breadwinner version of family life. In some cases that lifestyle serves a greater purpose for an abusive partner. The woman is forced to stay at home and he can watch her the entire time (Logan et al 2006). Candace reported that her ex-partner thought welfare was "cool". She explained that he liked it and felt it was better for a woman to stay home and collect welfare than to be working. He was controlling and physically abusive to her while they were together and after they broke up. Men who seek to control their partners' every move are supportive of welfare. It allows them to be able to maintain constant supervision over their partner. He has no worries about what she will be doing or who she will meet or speak to at work. Candace reports that her ex-partner has a new girlfriend who is now on welfare and stays at home. Candace recently found out that her ex is now abusing his new girlfriend.

Welfare may undermine masculinity by replacing, albeit with meager financial benefits, the traditional male breadwinner role. By receiving government assistance, women and their children can live without dependence on a male partner. This financial support is especially liberating for single women or for women trapped in unsatisfying or

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abusive relationships. New welfare requirements also undermine traditional feminine roles by forcing them out into the workforce and away from traditional duties of wife and mother (Brush 2003).

Jean recalls her partner's sense of entitlement to her benefits: "He would take some of the money off of me or he wouldn't leave until it was all gone and he would, um, be gone for weeks, or whatever. He felt like, when I had a son by him, it was his money, too." In this example, welfare undermines traditional male breadwinner roles. Jean's partner felt that if she was receiving an income, he was entitled to her financial support and his financial obligations were alleviated. At the same time, he would call her names like "welfare ho" and belittle her for receiving state assistance. This is another example of the "compensatory masculinity" perspective (Melzer 2002) in which men, having failed at societal expectations for them to be breadwinners, attempt to compensate for their perceived shortcomings by asserting their dominance at home via verbal abuse and other forms of intimate partner violence.

The message welfare reform sends to these women is that they must stand up and take "personal responsibility" and make the right choices. However, the "choice" about whether or not to work is not really a choice at all. Rather, it is a demand that welfare caseworkers back up with threats and sanctions. Although most women view welfare as a "stepping stone" many of these women have cycled on and off state assistance and based on statistical evidence, are likely to return. The 60 month lifetime limit is clearly unrealistic for many poor women - especially those faced with obstacles like abuse.

Valerie would argue that women return to welfare because they become accustomed to a certain lifestyle of dependency. Others cited obstacles such as childcare,

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abusive partners, and unrealistic or inflexible employment mandates for their return to welfare. Despite all of these seemingly insurmountable hurdles, the women I interviewed remained optimistic. They valued their paychecks and independence over insufficient benefits that came with a shameful price tag.

In this chapter, I have identified the meanings of welfare for this group of women transitioning from welfare to work. Understanding what welfare means to them and the hurdles these women must overcome is critical to assisting them in their quest to break the cycle of dependency on the state or men. We must be sensitive to the variations in women's experiences with welfare and dispel the myths regarding broad stereotypes that doom all poor women and their children to a stigmatized existence.

6.0   SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1   METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

6.1.1   Beyond tactic-based scales

Based on the literature on tactic-based scales, such as the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS), it is clear that there is a need for a more contextualized examination of women's experiences with violence (Dobash & Dobash 1997, 1998) By defining violence in terms of physical acts, feminists argue, researchers lose the power dimension that is inherent in acts of partner violence. Through semi-structured qualitative interviews, I have been able to capture that power dimension and uncover the context of women's experiences. Furthermore, I have uncovered women's assessments of the degree to which the violence was related to work.

Studies on the effects of violence and work have yielded conflicting results. For example, Browne, Salomon & Bassuk (1999) report that women experiencing recent abuse have one-third the odds of maintaining employment as do women who did not have these experiences. However, Lloyd & Taluc (1999) report that women who are abused are as likely to be currently employed as women who are not abused. One explanation for these conflicting results may be that standard instruments used to measure violence

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may not be able to capture the effects of violence specifically intended to obstruct women's working (Brush 2003.) In this study, I asked questions regarding work, violence and welfare, in order to make connections between those three facets of the work-first enrollees' lives.

Another problem with studying the connection between partner violence and work is that, until recently, we have been ill-equipped to capture the ways that partners use insidious tactics to sabotage women's work efforts. The Work/School Abuse Scale, or W/SAS (Riger, et al) and the Work-Related Control, Abuse, and Sabotage Checklist, or WORCASC (Brush 2002) are useful means to examine the effects of tactics specifically employed to derail women's experiences with work. This connection is extremely relevant when studying a population, such as this one, who is enrolled in a work-first program. I used the interview technique to expand our knowledge of a population to which Dr. Brush had administered the WORCASC. It was useful to gain an even greater understanding on the effects of, not only a woman's work efforts, but her use of government assistance, on abuse.

6.1.2   Definitions

One of the methodological problems with the current studies that measure the connections between work and abuse is the failure to consider alternative definitions or labels. By allowing the women to share their experiences in an open-ended manner, I was able to uncover the ways that these women denied or confirmed their partners' behavior as problematic. I realized very early in my interview process, that many of

these women, who had discussed experiences with abuse, did not define those experiences as such. The same remained true for the label "obstacle" as well as "support". These women did not define those terms in the same way that I, as a researcher, had intended them. This can be extremely problematic if you are administering a checklist, scale, or interview protocol with any "loaded" terms like "abuse" or "obstacle" (which I mistakenly thought was fairly benign). By using this type of interview, I was able to identify these times during which the women's definitions did not meet with my conventional labels. For example, I was able to note the woman who told me that she had no obstacles to work, and yet her partner caused her to be fired because he was constantly bothering her at work when it was not allowed. In a scale or checklist, this information would go unnoticed and unreported.

6.2 TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES

Another important finding from this study was the way that men used traditional conceptions of gender to control their partners' behavior. Some women reported that their partners would not allow them to work, because, according to them, women should stay at home and care for the children. Others reported that their men wanted to be the provider for the family and did not believe that their partners *had to* work. Still others abandoned their childcare responsibilities, forcing women out of their jobs and back home to care for the children. These tactics were typically employed in order to exert control over the women and force them to remain at home (where they could be easily monitored).

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In their discussions of the meanings of work, women who were unable to work shifted their focus from their role as worker to that of mother. By sabotaging women's work efforts, men are contributing to these women's emphasis on motherhood when they talk about what work means to them. Women being "forced" back into the role of motherhood is further cementing the caring role as women's work.

Mothering takes place within "specific historical contexts framed by interlocking structures of race, class, and gender" (Collins, 1994, p. 56). Welfare is devaluing the work of mothers and not allowing women to choose to care for their children, instead forcing them to work in low-wage jobs and place their children in sub-par childcare centers. Women of color, often victims of racialized patterns of poverty, have seldom had the opportunity to devote themselves exclusively to mothering. Historically, black women have had to simultaneously manage work and mothering duties to a greater degree than white women. The women I interviewed who were unable to work shifted their attention to their role as mother. That shift may have been less of a stretch for black women who have culturally viewed work and mothering less as dichotomous positions and more as all-encompassing life duties.

6.3   SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Throughout my interviews I noted several recurring themes, namely: dependence, escape, competence and structure. All of these themes influenced women's sense of agency and

self-esteem. I will discuss each of these as they relate to women's complex experiences of abuse, work and welfare.

6.3.1   The Elements of Abuse

Dependency on a male partner either socially, if a woman is controlled and isolated, or financially, if she is prevented from working, can trap a woman in an abusive relationship. For some women, work becomes a way to "escape" the violence at home. Going to work provides a *physical* escape as well as a *mental reprieve* from an abusive partner's actions. In this ideal scenario, a woman is able to "escape" the abuse, while also gaining work experience and social connections. I have shared stories of women who report increased self-esteem and overall happiness as a result of working.

For other women, the obstacle abuse presents is insurmountable and they are prohibited from working outside the home. Their sense of agency has been stripped by a controlling partner and they, subsequently report feeling useless and depressed. Not only are these women subjected to abuse and control, but they do not reap the financial or social benefits of working. Having been prevented from fulfilling their role of worker, these women often turn their focus to that of "mother." This is the one role that they are able to perform (within the home) and so therefore, all of their attention is switched to that role.

By examining the issue of domestic violence, we can no longer view women on welfare as lazy or helpless, but rather as women struggling to live and work in the face of chaotic violent relationships. Responses to abuse are varied, but one consequence is

consistent: intimate partner violence is disruptive to the lives of women. Poor women are especially affected by relationship violence since they have so few financial and (if her partner controls and isolates her) social resources. It is essential that researchers focus on this population in order to tailor useful strategies for assistance.

6.3.2   The Meanings of Work

Women reported direct effects of work on their self-esteem. These women explained that working, not welfare use, was the key to achieving independence and financial self-sufficiency. One of the long-term goals for the majority of the women was to be free from dependence on anyone, namely: welfare or a male partner. These women are cognizant of the hindrances of dependency in any form, and they are optimistic about freedom from such constraints.

The structure of paid employment is difficult for all mothers of small children who must juggle the demands of waged work and childcare. The problem for many of the women I interviewed is that they often lack the resources to secure reliable care for their children. Many women described the actions of their children's fathers as unreliable and therefore, not a viable option. What is the solution? If the government expects these women to work, it must assume some of the childcare responsibilities or hold men accountable somehow. Yes, women are able to receive a childcare subsidy, but often times this is not enough, or the bureaucratic hassle to get it makes it an unattractive option.

I have shown that contrary to popular wisdom, the *meanings* that these women and their partners attach to work have an effect similar to more tangible obstacles and supports. The feelings that these women attributed to their partners, translate into very tangible obstacles or supports (depending on the direction of his feelings). Moreover, these meanings that women and men attach to her work, provide clues to future actions, as well as some context or explanation for behaviors regarding work.

Regarding the women's performance evaluations, I expected to find that women with the greatest obstacles to work would rate themselves lowest in terms of job performance. I was surprised to find that this was not the case. Nearly all women rated themselves highly (7-10 on a 10-point-scale) in terms of their job performance. Even women who fought with partners in order to be able to go to work, felt that once they were there, they executed their job extremely well. This is an illustration of the increased self-esteem which accompanies women's competence and successes at work.

6.3.3   The Meanings of Welfare

Because of the threat of sanctions, the structure of the welfare policy provides an "incentive" to women and their partners to comply with work requirements. Many women have remarked on how they appreciate this requirement because it has "pushed" them to take a more active role in making the transition from welfare to work. It is clearly in their partner or husband's best interest to support their employment if he wants her to continue to receive benefits. Some women reported that their partners were very cognizant of the financial ramifications of noncompliance.

For others, welfare benefits became a point of contention in their relationships, and it was easier for some women simply to hide their welfare use from their partners. Child support was a major source of conflict between couples – especially in light of the new requirements that women sue for support. Several women were concerned for their safety as a direct result of the conflicts with their partner over child support. This requirement is problematic since it places some women at risk for abuse.

I expected to find a certain level of dissatisfaction with the structure of the welfare system, namely the legislated work requirements and time limits, but my findings were mixed. Some women appreciated the push (to get off welfare) of the time limits and others feared an uncertain future without a financial safety net. Women described the stigma associated with welfare receipt and the invasion of privacy and constant monitoring by caseworkers. They reported having a difficult time navigating the system, which became infinitely more complicated *when the women were working*. Some women discussed problems with caseworkers who did not understand the complexities of their situations. Overall, because of the stigma and the hassles of welfare, being forced to rely on state assistance was detrimental to the self-esteem of these women.

Most women longed to be off of welfare and in a permanent job. They felt like failures for being dependent. The hated being unable to support their families and provide their children with the things they needed or wanted through their own labor alone. They talked about the meager benefits and their desire to be free from the dependency on welfare (for so little money). Some women pushed toward their goal of independence by asking their caseworkers to reduce or eliminate their cash benefits. This was an excellent example of women's agency in escaping one form of dependency.

Other women resigned themselves to the fact that they lacked the competence to make the transition from welfare to work. One woman reported that welfare made people lazy, others reported that since they were prevented from working, welfare was their only option. This sense of a lack of choice or agency contributed to women's feelings of low self-esteem.

There is a complex power relationship between abuse and welfare. For some women, welfare can be used as a way out of an abusive relationship. For others, welfare can be a source of conflict and increased violence. Feminists have voiced concerns that women who have been victims of abuse will be revictimized by the surveillance and control of the welfare system. The majority of the women I interviewed voiced their aversion for the state's practices of monitoring and control, however, many felt obligated to accept these rituals of power, however unpleasant.

The work of Michel Foucault is important in order to uncover "the particular regimes of power and knowledge at work in a society and their part in the overall production and maintenance of existing power relations" (Weedon, 1987: 107). Foucault claims that power is not enforcement, but ways of making people *by themselves* behave in other ways than they would have done. Programs like the Work First program which these women have all experienced, provide the knowledge of work expectations for women, setting the stage for control. Requiring poor women to perform certain work obligations, in order to meet the requirements of welfare policies, requires considerable monitoring and surveillance and results in women becoming complicit in their own domination.

6.4   ATTENTION: CASEWORKERS

Welfare recipients are not all alike. Before you judge the "goodness" or "badness" of a client, take the time to understand the circumstances of her situation. Is she able to secure safe and reliable childcare? Is she currently or has she ever been in an abusive relationship? Take a minute to ask your client what work means *to her*. By incorporating a client's goals and aspirations into a plan for waged work, you may find that her chances for a successful transition from welfare to work are infinitely more possible.

6.5   ATTENTION: POLICYMAKERS

The stereotypical "Welfare Queen" is a myth. Women transitioning from welfare to work do not wish to stay on welfare forever. (Don't flatter yourselves that state assistance is that attractive!) Insufficient benefits, bureaucratic requirements and invasive questioning often amount to more hassles than help for poor women. These women value the benefits of paid employment. They enjoy their jobs and want to be free from welfare.

For women who are trapped in abusive relationships, the benefits are mixed. Working may either be an "escape" or an impossible challenge. Some women are able to escape the violence at home by going to work. Others are under such tight control by abusers that work is simply an unattainable goal. Many women report that their abusers

sabotaged their attempts to work, and others explain that they were simply not permitted to hold a job.

Taking away a safety net is not the way to "force" poor women off welfare. Instead, it places women and their children at risk of poverty, homelessness or even further abuse (if they are forced to choose dependence on an abusive partner). Abuse and its consequences have no time limits. Poverty has no time limits. What are the options when their time runs out?

6.6   ATTENTION: WELFARE RECIPIENTS

Based on my interviews, I see that you are focused on long-term goals of "getting off" welfare. In fact, some of you are so focused on your attempts to leave the rolls that you forget that this is a journey. There is a reason why many women fail in their attempts to transition from welfare to work. Interestingly, nearly half of you used the "stepping stone" metaphor to describe welfare. You likened welfare to a "step up" when you needed financial assistance. Yes, welfare is a step. The problem is that many of you fail to see that there are many stones along your path from welfare to work. It is unrealistic to think that you only need to stand on one stone to make it to your destination. In order to complete your journey, you need to move from one solid, concrete stone to the next. Many women get stranded on one stone (like welfare) or they unrealistically surmise the length of their journey. Small consistent steps are necessary to be successful in your journey from welfare to work.

6.7   LIMITATIONS

One of the problems with this study is that I did not have access to the male partners. Therefore, I was forced to rely on the women's assessments of their thoughts and behaviors. I would be especially interested in learning about the men's traditional views of gender. I am curious to know how rigid those constructions of masculinity and femininity are, and how he came to those conclusions. In the interviews with the women, they were eager to share information about how their partners constructed notions of femininity, but not as forthcoming with views about how their partners constructed masculine roles.

I would be interested to compare and contrast the accounts of the men and women to see how similar or different those accounts sounded. My guess is that the men's accounts may be less inclusive than the women's, and the men may add information about violent tactics employed by the women.

Recall is an issue for women who are attempting to remember relationships that may have ended years ago. I tried to limit problems with recall by helping the women to remember what other events were happening at the time of the relationship. This aided the women in recalling specific details of the accounts.

Another limitation of this study is the small sample size. Ideally, I would have loved to have interviewed all 40 women from Brush's original study. However, this population was difficult to track since they frequently move, lose their housing, lose their phone, etc. This process of attempting to track prospective interviewees was frustrating, and reminded me that welfare caseworkers face this difficulty with this population on a day-to-day basis.

6.8   RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

It is essential that researchers give special attention to the meanings that men and women attribute to work, welfare and abuse. As evidenced throughout my interviews, these meanings can translate into very tangible obstacles/supports for women, and should be acknowledged. In addition, some women may label or define things like "abuse" or "obstacles" in a different manner than a researcher or caseworker. It is vital that researchers continue this qualitative interviewing technique in order to grasp the ways that women (and men) describe experiences with abuse/work and welfare.

I recommend a deeper analysis of the traditional formulations of masculinity and femininity in order to uncover specific ways that they affect women's work and welfare use. In this study, I found that men's traditional conceptions of women's roles did negatively impact her ability to work. Unfortunately, in this study, I was limited to women's assessment of their partners' traditional views of gender. It is imperative that we interview men in order to gain an understanding of their views.

6.9   GENDER EXPECTATIONS ON WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF WORK, WELFARE AND ABUSE

Male partners' expectations about gender roles clearly impacted these women's levels of success/failure at work. Men who held very traditional values about gender typically were the most restrictive in terms of "allowing" women to work. They were also the most specific about who should be able to care for their children (in most cases – only the children's mother).

The organization of work and family is profoundly gendered. Many of the obstacles faced by women transitioning from welfare to work are a result of the unrealistic familial expectations society has for these women. The women I interviewed discussed, at length the problems they had finding reliable childcare and getting hours that work around their children's schooling. The bigger picture is that we are holding women responsible for all of the childrearing responsibilities and expecting them to work full-time (at a low-paying job that probably will never get them out of poverty.) Simply adding on employment may lead to a double burden upon women. Sociologists need to further this investigation about gender and the family. These expectations for women within the family are clearly burdensome and may be the cause of much of the failures in transition from welfare to work.

Some men exhibited what Melzer (2002) identifies as compensatory masculinity. When men feel that their masculinity is being threatened (for example, if their female partner is acting breadwinner of the family) they may assert their masculinity in other ways – namely through violence. In this respect cultural notions of male breadwinning and female domesticity can put women at risk for violence. Additionally, many women

reported that male jealousy was at the root of the incidents of violence and control that they experienced. Expectations for women's sexual fidelity are quite clearly scripted. Men are not held to the same standards. Women may suffer from violence and control as a result of these cultural expectations. Men typically are not victimized for sexual infidelities.

Women are typically the recipients of TANF – temporary aid to needy families. This form of assistance is stigmatized. Public opinion polls have cast welfare mothers as sexually promiscuous, lazy and fraudulent. Demonizing welfare mothers is problematic because they are not the primary causes of the rise in single parenting or increase in the number of children living in poverty; they are its consequences.

These gender expectations have permeated women's experiences with welfare. They report problems with caseworkers, embarrassing invasive questioning, feelings of shame – all because they are receiving financial assistance from this stigmatized channel. The women I interviewed echoed these feelings of shame about collecting welfare benefits. Part of the psychological damage these women experience is based on this separate and unequal division of benefits.

It is clear that gender expectations (about work, domesticity, sexual fidelity, etc.) organize women's experiences of work, welfare and abuse. In order to change women's negative experiences, we must challenge the unequal institutionalized gender expectations for women and men in the workforce and at home.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

I have asked you to participate in this study because you have described (in the interviews with Lisa and me last summer) experiencing a relationship with a partner who has acted in a violent or controlling manner. I am trying to learn from you and women with experiences similar to yours about how your relationships impact other parts of your life including work and welfare use.

1. First, as a result of the actions of anyone you've ever been in a relationship with, have you ever filed a Protection From Abuse order? [if no, skip to question 4]

2. When did this relationship occur? Are you still in the relationship? How long were you/have you been in the relationship? Is this man the father of any of your kids?

3. Could you tell me about what happened that made you file a PFA?

[probes: Where did the incident occur? Was the incident related to her working? How did you come to the realization that this was a problem? At what point in the relationship did this happen? How long did the problem continue?]

4. Did any partner that you've ever been in a relationship with do anything/say anything to try to prevent you from going to work?

5. What kinds of things did he do/say? How often would he do/say these things? Where would he say/do these things? When would he say/do these things?

6. What would happen as a result of these actions?

7. When did this relationship occur? Are you in the relationship? How long were you/have you been in the relationship? Is this man the father of any of your kids?

8. Were you able to keep working despite these actions? [if yes, skip to question 9] What was that like? [probes about different actions she may have had to take to continue working]

9. If not, how did you feel about that? [probes about her feelings about being kept out of labor force]

10. How did he feel about your working?

11. What makes you think he felt that way? [probes about things he may have said or actions he took]

12. What, do you think your partner would say, were the pros and cons of your working?

13. What, do you think your partner would say, were the pros and cons of your being on welfare?

14. What type of job did you have? What kinds of responsibilities did you have?

15. How would you rate your job performance on a scale from 1-10? What makes you feel like you deserve a ___?

16. Did the actions of your partner affect your job performance? In what ways?

17. How did you feel about working? What would you say are the pros and cons of working, for you?

18. What kinds of things contributed to your feeling that way?

19. How did/do you feel about welfare? What would you say are the pros and cons, for you, of being on welfare?

20. What kinds of things contributed to your feeling that way?

21. What do you think the consequences would be if you were to quit work?

[If not still in that relationship:]

21. After that relationship, were you able to go back to work/continue to work? [probes about whether it was easier to work after the relationship was over] If no, why not? If yes, how did that go for you?

22. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your working?

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