"Bad Work is Better Than No Work": The Gendered Assumptions in Welfare-to-Work Training Programs

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In 1996 The U.S. Congress passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), more commonly known as the Welfare-to-Work bill, in an attempt to reform the welfare system in the United States. As a result, "work first" initiatives were enacted in most states with the primary focus being centered on getting welfare recipients to go to work - any type of work (Castellano, 1998). This legislation has had significant impact on adult and vocational educators in the United States as a plethora of reports, guides, and research articles have been produced for the purpose of helping adult and vocational educators develop educational programs in line with this new "work first" focus. What is lacking in the research literature, however, is any critical examination of the gendered assumptions embedded in this "work first" orientation. In this article, we examine how notions of work, normative femininity, and the self-sufficient liberal subject converge in a welfare-to-work educational program in the Midwest, producing a particular gendered ideology that offers little emancipatory potential for the women enrolled in the program. We also offer suggestions to vocational and adult educators on how to make these programs more "gender-sensitive" as conceptualized in the work of Jane Roland Martin (cited in Reed and Johnson, 2000).

Shifting Ideologies in Welfare Reform

The 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act significantly changed how the United States provided social assistance to poor families. Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), which was created in 1935, was replaced by Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), a system of block grants given to states to help them get poor families off welfare and into work. Other changes included the imposition of a five-year limit on receiving welfare

assistance, the option to implement a "family cap," and the right for states to deny payments to unwed minor mothers who do not live with an adult. These sweeping changes in administering aid to needy families signified a concomitant shift in ideology. Welfare was no longer considered a safety net and a universal right, providing for the basic needs of all citizens; instead a market-approach to welfare was adopted in which individuals are entitled to welfare benefits only if they are involved in activities that will lead to work, such as short-term job training programs (Albelda, 2001). Breitkreuz (2005) explains the difference between welfare based on social citizenship and market citizenship:

> Welfare [under a market citizenship model] is more likely to be understood as a contingent and temporary benefit to sustain a person until s/he can obtain self-sufficiency through employment. The result is that economic security for citizenship is increasingly reliant upon an individual's attachment to the labour force. The requirement to be attached to the labour market in order to have any kind of income security is called market citizenship, and suggests a significant departure from a more inclusive notion of citizenship, otherwise known as social citizenship (p. 152).

This shift is particularly problematic for low-income women given the realities of the new economic market (characterized by globalization, deindustrialization, and a move to information technology) coupled with the new glamour-worker model of feminine subjectivity (Harris, 2004). Today, women comprise 43 percent of the workforce; hence, our post-industrial, global economy is dependent upon the labor or women (Fitzgerald, 2004). Yet, women are still found overwhelmingly in gender-stereotypical jobs that are low-skilled and low-waged (Harris, 2004). Poor women, particularly those that have been moved off welfare and into work, are the workers most likely to find themselves in short-term, temporary jobs that provide no health care benefits, no avenues for promotion, no job security, and no protection from exploitation of all kinds (Abramovitz, 2000; Albelda, 2001). The ideological shift in the welfare reform to a "work first" ideology in which work is linked to productive citizenship ensures a surplus of low-paid workers, mainly women, who have no choice in an age of "a bad job is better than no job" to compete with one another for these low-waged, low-skilled jobs. In turn, this competition lowers wages and decreases the power of unions in negotiating contracts ensuring fair pay and safe working conditions (Fitzgerald, 2004).

With the demands of a new economy, a new ideal of the woman worker has emerged that is congruent with the liberal feminist emphasis on work as a means for financial security and personal satisfaction. Typified by Miranda, Charlotte, Samantha, and Carrie of the popular television show *Sex in the City*, the glamour-worker is highly skilled, delays motherhood, is easily able to move from job to job unencumbered by family responsibilities, has her choice of what job to take, and displays a consumer lifestyle. Riding the coattails of feminism, young women are being groomed to take their place in the new economic order. Success in the workplace, they are being taught, is derived from working hard, making the right choices, and pursuing the right avenues to get ahead (Harris, 2004). Those that make the right choices can expect to find themselves in high-paying, exciting jobs; those that fail to do what it takes to get ahead (e.g., delaying motherhood) can expect a very different type of work-life. Hence, today there are two types of women workers:

> Low-paid service providers ... who do the cooking, cleaning, and caring-for-others work that has always fallen to working-class women, and well-prepared professional women who have joined men in high-income professional and managerial jobs. (Johnson, cited in Harris, 2004, p. 43)

Of course, women are encouraged to pursue the latter, and when they do not, they are castigated for making irresponsible choices. As Harris (2004) states," making it in new times appears to be contingent upon personal responsibility and effort" (p. 8). It is no surprise then that in today's climate when women look to the government to provide help with their basic needs, they are constructed as opportunists who must be taught how to break the cycle of dependency. This dependency has been termed "behavioral dependency" by welfare reformers, a term used to describe welfare recipients as possessing a "cluster of severe social pathologies including: an eroded work ethic and dependency, the lack of educational aspirations and achievement, an inability or unwillingness to control one's children, as well as increased single parenthood, illegitimacy, criminal activity, and drug and alcohol use" (Abramovitz, 2000). The conception of dependency as negative is key to the ideological shift in the Welfare-to-Work legislation in that dependency upon society implies an individual character flaw or worse, a defective, deviant personality ((Breitkreuz, 2005). The PRWORA law sends a powerful message to poor women who do not work, who are not successful, and who do not acquire glamorous jobs. They have only themselves,

their families, or their deficient neighborhoods to blame and their lives will change only when they decide to take personal responsibility in getting some kind of work. This ideological shift allows society to remain blameless, and thus, not responsible for women who overwhelmingly constitute the poor (Breitkreuz, 2005).

Supporters of the PWROA boast that this ideological shift has accomplished it goals of breaking the cycle of dependency. In 1996, 4.4 million people received welfare. By 1999, that number had dropped to 2.6 million (Pavetti & Acs, 2001). However, missing in the celebration of the success of "welfare-to-work" was any acknowledgement that poverty has increased while welfare caseloads have decreased. Of course, welfare reform, with its emphasis on getting any kind of job, has never had as its underlying mission the eradication of poverty. Sobering statistics released by the Census Bureau in 2004 indicate that poverty has consistently increased since 2000 with 5.4 million more people in poverty in 2004 than in 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). Wolfe, (2002) who studied the 4 tier system in the state of Wisconsin notes that over 90% of welfare recipients who left welfare live in poverty. Pavetti & Acs (2001) indicate that welfare recipients are getting jobs; however, employment is sporadic and temporary, and according to the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 39% of welfare recipients returned to welfare within one year (cited in Pavetti & Acs, 2001). Because the large majority of people living in poverty are single women with children, one cannot overlook the implications of the supposed success of the welfare to work legislation on the lives of women. In the remainder of the article, we turn to the stories of women who participated in a welfare-to-work program to better understand how prominently gender plays into their own decisions about work, welfare, being a good mother and how to live a life of dignity and how their experiences as gendered beings are often in contradiction to the implicit and explicit gendered assumptions in the educational program they were attending.

Methodology

This research is based on a case study conducted from 1999-2000 in a welfare-to-work program housed in a technical school located in the Midwest. The program was called LOW (Life Off Welfare) and its aims were in line with the "work-first" approach of the PRWORA. Students attended a two week orientation/life skills class, participated in a battery of basic skills testing, and prepared for the GED and possible

placement in the vocational education program. The length of the participants' involvement in the LOW program ranged from two weeks to six months. After six months, students had to go to work or gain admission into a short-term certification program at the technical school. Data was collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis. 25 women, ranging from ages 18 to 49, were students in the program; fourteen were interviewed for the study. Of the 14 women interviewed, 8 were White, 5 were African American and 1 was Hispanic. Each woman was interviewed at least two times; several were interviewed three times. Interviews lasted approximately an hour and took place either in the break room or in an empty classroom. The administrator and the two teachers in the program (all White women) were also individually interviewed three times. Overall, 50 interviews were conducted, field notes from 30 days of observations were written, and 88 documents related to the program (e.g. curriculum guides, attendance policies, dress codes, and disciplinary procedures) were analyzed.

Making Mothers Workers: Productive Citizenship and Labor Attachment

Like most mothers everywhere, the participants in the LOW program believe that the caring and nurturing of their children is the most important responsibility they have. Candy, one of the participants in the program, had to make a decision about work and being a mother that ultimately caused her to turn to the welfare system to help pay her bills:

> When I was a stripper, it was excellent money. The most money I ever made in my life. The most I made was $1400 one night. I just go up and talk to a man at a table and he just gave it to me. I would wait for people to come up to me. I couldn't hustle. I wasn't very good at hustling. But sometimes it was good for my self-esteem because there are all these people telling you how pretty you are.

However, as soon as Candy became pregnant, she quit her job because she did not think her occupation was appropriate for a mother. Similar to Candy, Sue, Lizzie and Katherine want to make decisions about work within the context of their responsibilities as a mother:

> I need something that can support me and my three kids and if that is nine months of school here to get me a good job when I get out, fine. I bite my tongue, and find the strength to do what I've got to do. (Sue, 34, Hispanic)

> I want to do something good, something meaningful. I don't want to work at McDonald's or Wal-Mart. I want to have a job that I have skills in that I can go and find another job if I lose that job. Where I can make money to support myself and my children. (Lizzie, 24, White)

> I need to make $5 or $6 an hour. They still give minimum wage for low paying jobs. I can't live on, say, $3 an hour. I can't live on that. I can't raise any kids on that, there just ain't no way (Katherine, 41, White)

Yet, what was apparent in the LOW program is that decisions about being a productive worker had to take precedence over being a mother. Hence, the students' mothering identities had to be erased and replaced with employable identities (Bloom and Kilgore, 2003). To accomplish this shift in identity, the LOW program had to focus on the future dividends that occur when women become workers. This included not only the ability to buy things for one's family but also the acquisition of positive self-esteem that accompanies being financially independent. This emphasis on the future and satisfaction being tied to a job presents a problem to the women in the LOW program who have immediate concerns about food, shelter, medical care, childcare, and what they can give their children for Christmas. But these concerns, by necessity, are overshadowed by the main concern of their welfare-to-work program. Steeped in the "work first" approach to welfare reform, the LOW program reflects the ideology of the welfare legislation. Poor people must demonstrate personal responsibility (i.e., get a job) and make sacrifices (e.g., leave your eight-year-old daughter at home alone), and the reward will be self-sufficiency, personal satisfaction, and positive self-concept sometime in the future (Cancian, 2000). As the LOW participants were told repeatedly, "any job is better than no job," and being a mother was certainly not considered a job option for these women. Jody and Tracy, the teachers in the LOW program, explain how good citizenship is linked to an attachment to work, not mothering:

> The way I look at it. They must all contribute to society. They have a choice, so, if they do not want to go through the steps to better themselves for a better job, they need to go to work, whatever they can find to do. Hopefully, it will be something they enjoy, but even if it's minimum wage, they need to be working (Jody).

> When you are the low man on the totem pole, an you have to pay your dues and sometimes that means that you have got to the first one there and the last one to leave. Sometimes that means you take the hours that nobody else wants. Sometimes that means you are making less than everyone else (Tracy)

Absent in the LOW program was any consideration of the impact that such work (or being "low man on the totem pole") would have on the day-to-day responsibilities of mothering, for example, child care. Like most welfare recipients, Sheena, a 39 year-old African American woman, has to work a job that requires her to be away from her children, particularly at night:

> Right now, I'm making too much of bad work, but it's helping me pay my bills. Rent and stuff, and it's taking care of my babies. I work at a janitorial service. I go at night and I clean this building. I clean the outside. Somebody else cleans the inside, and if they're not there, I do their part.

With sporadic childcare, Sheena's children are left vulnerable to a host of problems that occur when children are left alone and unattended. What happens to Sheena's children while she is working at night? How can Sheena provide the basic needs for her three children on a part-time job that pays minimum wage? What happens to Sheena's job when she must miss a day because her child is sick? Having no health benefits with her part-time job, what happens to Sheena's children when they suddenly contract the flu, or even, worse? These are the kinds of questions missing from discussions of welfare-to-work, but these are precisely the kinds of questions Sheena faces everyday in trying to be a good mother while also being a good worker. While middle class women have the luxury of weighing the pro's and con's of working outside the home, these women are required by law to place work above their children. Noting this contradiction between how "childcare issues" are manifested in middle class ideology of rearing healthy children and the rhetoric of the welfare-to-work legislation, Deprez (1998) states:

> It seems particularly odd to me that at the time welfare for poor women and their children is getting the old heave-ho, right-wing papers such as the *Wall Street Journal* are on a crusade to encourage middle class women to stay home and take care of their kids because it is good for the children to have a mother at home for the first few years. And also because it is "natural instinct" for women to care deeply about their children. Well, I guess they think poor kids and poor women are exempt from these realities. Perhaps they think it is perfectly okay for poor children to come home to an empty house, but rich kids and nannies are in danger (p. 25)

In addition to being concerned about child care responsibilities while they work, the women in the LOW program were also concerned about health care. According to Christopher (2004), only 25 percent of individuals who leave welfare find jobs with

health insurance. Knowing that once they get off welfare they will lose health benefits for their children and themselves, finding a job with benefits is extremely important to these mothers. Interestingly, not one of the women spoke about benefits in terms of retirement, paid vacations, life insurance, or any other commonly thought about component of job benefits. Healthcare was their only concern as explained by Evelyn, who suffers from Chrones disease:

> I will not take a job if there are no benefits. I don't care if it pays the highest salary in the world if it does not have medical, I am not taking it. If something happened to me, where would my children be? My health and my children's health are more important than the highest paid salary because without it, the job is just not worth it.

The irony is that to become financially independent and to have the kind of healthcare benefits Evelyn and other welfare recipients desire, "the women not only had to obtain and keep a first job, a second job, or even a third job, but they also had to do the impossible, negotiate improved salary and benefit arrangements in workplaces that rely on a steady pool of low-paid workers (Riemer, 1997).

While the LOW program centers on providing job training for entry-level work, and the teachers continuously regale the students with moral lessons on how working hard at a job will eventually lead to better wages and better working conditions, the statistics on such jobs and what happens to welfare recipients once they find a job does not support their claims. While many families are leaving the welfare roll, studies indicate the majority of these families are still at or below the poverty level (Albelda, 2001)**.** Unlike the teachers and administrators in the LOW program, the students have experiential knowledge that preparing people to flip burgers does not translate into a better future for themselves and their children:

> Society defines work as anything that makes money: flipping burgers, Taco Bell. Honest money is work to them. But to make in this world you need some education, you know. Just to send somebody out there to flip burgers and still live on nothing is just not right. (Candy, 24, White)

> If I went to work, I just, I mean anybody can go to McDonald's and flip hamburgers. That is not what I want for myself and my daughter. (Janice, 37, White)

> I don't like McDonald's and all them people. You don't get paid that much to put up with all that crap. It's hard work for low pay. I've got friends that work there, and she said you're looked at like a little cockroach. (Lizzie, 24, White)

Questioning whether the sacrifices one must make in the present actually render rewards in the future, some LOW participants eventually quit the program. Understood as a necessary part of self-selection, the teachers and administrators subscribe to the idea that those who quit do so because they do not have the right attitude, the right disposition, the right stuff to make it as a productive member of society. Marilyn, the administrator, explains:

> We still say it is better if students de-select themselves because ultimately if we have to get through the program and then be a reference and help them find employment, we need to know that they have been serious and worked hard and that their heart is in this. If they kind of fall out due to poor attendance, or whatever excuses come up, then they really did not want to be here anyway.

However, Barnes (2001) suggests another reason why women make this decision; that is, they do not want their mothering identity to become secondary to their worker identity. Barnes argues that poor women with the sole responsibility for child rearing are astute in practical, day to day, survival strategies. They want to be good mothers, but they know anecdotally the reality that going to work does not necessarily mean a better life for their children. They realize that welfare benefits and ties within kinship networks provide the greater security for them and their children. They may ideologically embrace the concept of hard work but realize the impracticality of acting on these beliefs due to the loss of welfare-related benefits such as health care for their children, inadequate childcare, and unsteady employment. Fernandez-Kelly (1994) contends that, contrary to prevailing sentiment, welfare dependency is less an exemplar of cultural deficiency than an economic exercise in which the recipient makes rational, logical choices about cost and benefits associated with employment verses public assistance.

Learning to become a Lady: Making Gender Explicit

While one of the gendered assumptions of the welfare to work legislation is that poor women's productivity can only be measured by attachment to labor, the Welfare-to-Work legislation was also replete with other gendered assumptions, particularly in the pathologizing of single women as immoral, lazy, promiscuous and irresponsible and

in situating marriage as the ideal relationship for all women (Jimenez, 1999; Kornbluh, 1998; Michael, 1998). According to Jimenez (1999), the Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Act was the "climax of a 20-year campaign stigmatizing and stereotyping welfare mothers by conservatives to move them into the dishonored category of unworthy poor" (p 281). This categorization of poor mothers began with the 1935 passage of Aid to Dependent Children, later renamed Aid to Families with Dependent Children. Believing that the public would be incensed if federal aid was given to mothers, many of whom were divorced or single, designers and supporters of the first welfare bill created a plan for providing financially for children, not their caregivers (Jimenez, 1999). Thirty years later in 1967 Congress passed the Work Incentive Program with the intention of moving AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) mothers into the work force by requiring them, even if they had small children, to participate in job readiness training programs (Michel, 1998). Hence, as feminist scholars have argued, one cannot talk about welfare without making gender explicit for "welfare is quintessentially a women's issue, because women's poverty has everything to do with their socially assigned (and usually willingly assumed) responsibility for children, the lack of childcare, and enduring patterns of gender (and racial) discrimination in education and employment" (Michael, 1998).

An explicit component of the 1996 Welfare-to-Work bill was to encourage marriage and discourage having children outside the confines of marriage. Hence, 300 million dollars was allocated for states to use in promoting the merits of marriage (Christopher, 2004). One witness during Senate debates succinctly explains the ideological underpinnings of the new bill: "Let us back up and not try to pretend that the solution here is training and putting a lot of people in the labor force, it has got to be marriage and reducing out of wedlock births (cited in Jimenez, 1999). Not only does this celebration of marriage and the benefits of the two parent family reflect a "paternalistic, male moral order where male breadwinners function as heads of households (Bloom and Kilgore, 2003, p. 370), but it also stands in stark contrast to the lived realities of the many women in welfare-to-work programs, as evident in the participants of the LOW program. Of the 14 participants, two were currently married; the majority of them had been married at one time. However, marriage was not the panacea that these lawmakers proclaimed. Kippy, a 22-year-old White woman, was

taken to the hospital during the study. Her husband beat her so badly that he ruptured her eardrum. Candy's husband has never worked, Lizzie's ex-husband beat her one night, causing her to have a miscarriage, and Rita in a class discussion about the importance of obeying the boss cogently noted: "I was in a marriage and every time I did not obey, I got beaten." Once divorced, these women receive little help from their ex-husbands as explained by Lilly, a 26 year old recently divorced woman: "He's supposed to pay child support and they are looking for him, but they can't find him. He'll be running around on the street, just bouncing around." Although "dead beat dads" are certainly negatively portrayed in public discourse, the reality is that these dads are never subjected to the kinds of public scrutiny and regulation that "welfare mothers" endure. Indeed, as several studies of welfare-to-work programs reveal (Bloom & Kilgore, 2003; Sandlin, 2003), the curriculum and practices of these programs make gender explicit in one very significant way: white, heterosexual, married women are the norm that poor women need to emulate socially.

Seeking to counter the image of the immoral, promiscuous welfare mother, discussions about how to present oneself as a lady (meaning a White, heterosexual, middle to upper class woman) were regular parts of the LOW program. One component of the curriculum was the teaching of "proper etiquette." The book *Everything Etiquette* was prominently displayed in the classroom. During one three-hour class, the entire time was devoted to topics covered in the book: dating etiquette, etiquette at home, how to teach your children proper etiquette, meal etiquette, and party etiquette. Tracy, one of the teachers, explained to the women the importance of these topics:

> Have you ever been in a situation where you didn't know what to get somebody, or how much to spend? That's hard. Things like simple courtesy. This is empowering information. Writing to senators, dinner parties, personal hygiene, eating like a human being, the rules for inanimate objects - these are tips you can't live without.

During one class period, the students watched a film on a formal dinner party. The film instructed the viewers on such items as what eating utensils to use, the way to dress, how to show that you are finished with the meal. On another day, they were instructed on the proper way to make introductions. Tracy explained that this was very important information to know in the workplace. For example, she told the

women that whoever has the highest rank, for example one's boss, should be introduced first: "you should never introduce your friend to your boss; you introduce your boss to your friend." They were also instructed on how to get into a car when wearing a dress: "you open the door, and then you sit down, and then you move your feet in. But you always keep your feet together."

Certainly, one could question why the teachers spent time discussing cocktail party etiquette as part o the formal curriculum. However, the teachers were, in fact, doing exactly what the policymakers of the Welfare-to-Work act wanted them to do. They were establishing a particular standard of femininity that situated white, middle class, heterosexual married women as the norm to which all should aspire. Part of the welfare reform was to use $300 million for efforts to promote marriage and family stability. One could argue that the women were being taught the "rules" by which women should abide to catch a husband and make him a happy home complete with a beautifully set dining table.

However, in discussions of work, gender manifested itself in a different way. These women were certainly not being groomed to be the "well prepared professional women who have joined men in high-income professional and managerial jobs" (Harris, p. 43). Clearly, they were being prepared to be part of the surplus labor of workers who take orders from others. More than likely, that superior at work would be a man. For example, anytime an authority figure in a work setting was referenced, the person was referred to as a "he" as illustrated in this discussion of how to write a cover letter:

> Cover letters are often perceived as last minute additions that have to be completed before your resume can be sent. But that shouldn't be the case. It should be something that's real methodical, planned out, and that you, kind of like the icing on the cake, but it's the very first thing an employer reads, that's his first perception, his first impression of you. To understand the importance of cover letters, just put yourself in the place of a senior executive in a major corporation. You're busy. You have a few cover letters with attached resumes. You pick up the first cover letter and quickly read, Dear Sir, I am interested in employment with the XYZ Corporation. The second letter, to whom it may concern; this is no longer acceptable. Then you pick up the third cover letter. "Dear Mr. Hanson, you were recently quoted in Business Week as saying that your company objective is to first or second in market share in all your market

> segments by the fourth quarter of 1999. I congratulate you and your company on its aggressiveness and confidence.

Perhaps this understanding that these women will work for a man is why so much time was spent on how to look and act like a "lady." One of the employability skills taught during the LOW program was the importance of personal appearance and knowing how to dress properly (i.e., appropriately feminine). In the student handbook under "Guidelines for LOW participants," one guideline specifically addressed dress code: "dresses, skirts, and shorts must not be shorter than finger-tips length (when hands are down at side)." To aid the women in gaining knowledge about the proper way to dress, the LOW program had an agreement with a local thrift shop to provide an outfit that would be appropriate for an interview. The teachers and administrators helped the women find professional clothes, which translated for many into a feminine style they resisted. Sue said, "they're trying to make me dress like a girl. I like to dress like this." She pointed to her clothes, jeans and a long sleeve shirt.

In many ways, the gendered lessons they learned while participating in the LOW program were contradictory. On the one hand, they were to strive to be like the teachers, who were White, middle class, married women who recognized that being able to use the right fork, buy the right gift, and make introductions the right way was a form of cultural capital that had served them well in the context of their own personal and professional lives. On the other hand, these women received a strong message that they would never be in the same personal or professional standing as Tracy, Jody, or Marilyn because they were being trained to be part of the low-cost surplus labor that poor women provide. They would be the ones taking the orders, not giving them. Hence, the cultural capital of knowing how to set the perfect table for a dinner party reaps no rewards for the LOW participants, other than to remind them that they will never achieve the status of the ideal woman or the ideal woman worker.

Gender Made Visible: The Possibilities for Enacting a Gender-Sensitive Curriculum

The ideal implication of this research is that this legislative act would be rewritten so that women's experiences and ways of being are validated rather than ignored or pathologized. Yet, the likelihood of that happening is not great given that Congress

recently passed an update to the 1996 legislation, and few politicians, Democrats or Republican, have welfare reform on the forefront of their political agenda; thus, our research points to a more practical application. A simplistic read of our analysis of this one specific welfare-to-work training program is that the teachers and administrators are to blame for the reproduction of raced, classed, and gendered ideologies that ultimately victimize the very persons that the LOW program was designed to serve. Yet, Tracy, Jody, and Marilyn are also part of a gendered work system that situates them as the enforcers of a law they did not write nor do they personally support in its entirety. They were given a curriculum to follow that was very similar to programs throughout the United States (e.g., Bloom & Kilgore, 2003; Sandlin, 2003; 2004). Since teachers and administrators are the ones at the local level implementing the welfare legislation, they become instrumental in challenging some of its basic assumptions. Thus, we believe that some critical consciousness-raising at the local level needs to take place to transform teachers in adult education programs from technicians to change agents. A good way to begin this process would be to incorporate what Martin (cited in Reed and Johnson, 2000) has called a gender-sensitive approach to curriculum planning and implementation. Martin notes:

> "in a society in which traits are genderized and socialization according to sex is commonplace, an educational philosophy that tries to ignore gender in the name of equality is self-defeating. Implicitly reinforcing the very stereotypes and unequal practices it claims to abhor, it makes invisible the very problems it should be addressing" (p. 166).

What then would a gender sensitive Welfare-to-Work program include?

- The history of work since the Industrial Revolution: students need to understand how men and women have been situated within the discourse of work very differently. This should include current information about continued gendered segregation of occupations and jobs.
- Mentor programs that include women who have been successful in fields traditionally considered male: women must see that women can be successful in male-dominated and male-identified careers, but they must realize that making it in these careers is different for females than for males and that race, class, and other personal factors greatly impact job access and success.

- Career exploration programs that include frank discussions of gender-role stereotyping, cultural expectations, and sexism in other institutions impacting work, such as the family, the church, the military, and the sports arena.
- Female guest speakers who have knowledge of and experience in unions, collective bargaining, and other forms of workplace activism.
- Information derived from both legal sources and guest speakers about the realities of sexual harassment in the workplace, avenues for reporting it, and how to protect one's self from it.
- Inclusion of films, such as "North Country," "Women of Steel" and "Norma Rae," which give women a realistic view of the obstacles women face in the workplace.
- Analysis of the assumptions and structures inherent in the world of work that prevent men and women from enjoying a satisfying life outside of work
- Staff development focusing on gender for teachers and administrators involved in

Welfare-to-work programs.

What is means to be a woman, to be a mother, to be a worker is greatly shaped by not only gender but race, social class, sexual orientation, marital status, and a host of other salient features of personal identity. By making gender explicit in the curriculum, policies, and practices of welfare-to-work programs, the complexity of living gendered, employable lives can be acknowledged by all involved in such programs, including the teachers, administrators, and students. Perhaps such changes might lead to a more collective challenging of the very assumptions of the current market-approach to welfare that continues to exploit the labor of poor women while demonizing them socially as women who have failed, because of their own bad choices, to become the ideal woman, worker, and mother.

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