

“I’m just walkin’ in this world, and it’s just me”: Public Assistance Recipients’
Perspectives on Low Wage Employment and Public Assistance in Cleveland, Ohio

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, who encouraged me through school culminating in this thesis. I owe them more than I could possibly articulate. Additionally, I would like to dedicate this to the all women who participated in this study for their insight and candor.

Acknowledgements

Dr. Cynthia Deitch has been a tremendous support as my thesis advisor. Her direction and support has added to the composition of this thesis in numerous ways. I would also like to thank Dr. Ami Lynch who served as the reader for this thesis. She has been a wonderfully helpful throughout my time with the George Washington University, and I would rather not think about where this project would be without her.

Abstract

“I’m just walkin’ in this world, and it’s just me”: Public Assistance Recipients’ Perspectives on Low Wage Employment and Public Assistance in Cleveland, Ohio

This research project examines the points of view of 25 African American, low-income, public assistance recipients regarding employment, public assistance, and their home city of Cleveland, Ohio. The aim of this work is to present the thoughts and feelings of the working poor participants while trying to gain better insight what influences their perspectives.

The first chapter presents the introduction and methodology of this research project. It outlines the theories and historical perspectives that contributed to the development of this project. The second chapter provides a literature review on poverty and public assistance, and the perceptions and connotations surrounding the women who participate in the system; it also contains a brief history of Cleveland. The third chapter presents findings regarding the study participants’ views on Cleveland, the demographic information, and the views of the relationships between Cleveland and employment or work. Chapter four details the participants’ views on their parents’ employment and their own employment, which is broken down into their perspectives on service work, their ability to gain employment, and the difficulties associated with both. The fifth chapter illustrates the participants’ views on public assistance. This chapter’s sections contain participant’s perspectives retirement, public assistance, and their views on the accountability of women and of the systems in respect to receiving public assistance. Chapter six includes findings on Ohio Senate Bill 5, participants’ feelings on small businesses and corporations, education, benefits and maternity leave, and criminal

records. This project concludes with a summary of research findings and current legislation that could have long-term effects on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and the potential effects on TANF recipients.

The feelings of the participants are varied, including passionate indictments of Cleveland's role and responsibility to its citizens and the working poor to well thought out and comprehensive arguments for and against public assistance. While similar studies have consistent findings, this study with its innovative methodology provides valuable insight into the daily situations of the participants and target population for this study.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of this research project is to gain an understanding of the situation of working poor women in Cleveland, Ohio. Women, and those working with an income below the poverty line (\$19,090 for a family of three) (HHS, 2012), are strongly impacted by shifts in the economy, and Cleveland Ohio has a crippling unemployment rate (close to 10% in 2010) with 34% of Cleveland residents living in poverty (Exner, 2010b). I interviewed 25 women to investigate their perceptions surrounding their specific situations and how they view larger social structures including the government of Cleveland, public assistance, and employment. This project includes participants from the Greater Cleveland area, which is defined as Cleveland and the surrounding metropolitan area. The women present generalizations and perceptions about their situations and opinions relating to assistance programs from the local, state, and federal governments. While several studies confirm aspects of the information presented by participants, it is often difficult to corroborate with literature or studies focused on Cleveland specifically. The specific research questions are: What are the perceptions that working poor women have of their situation? What are the roots of these perceptions? And, how are these perceptions reflective of the economic and public assistance situations within Cleveland? This project is grounded in the intersectionality of race, class, and gender and the class theory stemming largely from black feminist thought, as explained below. Traditionally, working poor women have been largely underserved and under researched (Gruber, 1997). This project aims to identify the feelings of working poor women in Cleveland about their specific situations regarding employment, public assistance, and the city of

Cleveland. The participants identify feelings of frustration about the lack of employment opportunities that exist for them, isolation, and frustration with their living situation. Though many of the participants take responsibility within the interviews for their situations, which could be attributed to a variety of aspects including perceived expectations of the researcher and personal views held on responsibility, they simultaneously express feeling overwhelmed and hopeless when asked to elaborate on their responses. The participants share their experience pertaining to Cleveland's economy, their employment history, and their relationship to public assistance. An additional motivation for this project is my ties to the Cleveland area and its residents. I would like to contribute to the community, which gave me so much. As a person from a working class family in Cleveland I would like to better understand my community. After living the majority of my life in Cleveland, Ohio, I have an understanding of Cleveland as a failing city with a history of deindustrialization. Additionally, Ohio is a swing state, which has been experimenting with increasingly conservative social policies in respect to poverty and labor. While many of these policies have been failing, they are developing at a rapid pace. The final motivation behind the selection of Cleveland, Ohio as the location for this study is the welfare to work experience is shaped by the local labor market and state and local policy.

Feminist theorist bell hooks argues that class, while influenced by sex and race, is frequently viewed as a completely different construct, and that rather than discuss all three together, race and sex are used to deflect from the issues surrounding class (hooks, 2000). Class-power can employ sexism and racism, but hooks argues that theorists are reluctant to discuss class, arguing continues to argue that the stratification of class within

society results in the further feminization of poverty. Poor women, regardless of race, have seen their privileged counterparts leaving them behind, because women respond differently to rising positions in class and status (hooks, 2000). It is not my intention to argue that class somehow trumps race and sex, but to acknowledge the growing importance and increasing invisibility of class. Bell hooks emphasizes the importance of including poor, black women, who are often excluded from conversations about feminism and theory, which center on white, middle, class women. She argues that theory can be a liberating practice for the traditionally marginalized (hooks, 1991). By presenting knowledge as something that anyone can possess and to which anyone can contribute, she creates an egalitarian process and situation. The participants included in this study contribute to the general knowledge and understanding about women in their situation. They have knowledge and experiences to develop and provide an understanding about unemployment, low-wage labor, and public assistance. In addition to creating this understanding, the women are participating in a potentially liberating experience.

Patricia Hill Collins argues for the development of black feminist thought which specifically focuses on the development of theory around the experience of African American women. In *Black Feminist Thought*, Hill Collins argues that African American women who are classified as the working poor are managing factors such as the movement from domestic service work (the traditional notion within an employer's home) to clerical work, and the problem of work with wages too low to support a family (Hill Collins, 2000). Hill Collins's work on service work and low-wage labor speaks directly to the issues discussed within this research project. African American women have a specific reality that pushes them into low-wage employment without the ability to

provide for their families. The women included in this project are African American and did not address race explicitly, rather it was implied based on their situational experiences.

Intersectionality is a complex lens through which to view social programs and issues. Without intersectionality of race, class, and gender, we cannot fully understand the realities of unemployment and public assistance. Weber (2010) and Wright (2008) argue that the power relationship that creates exploitation results from and reinforces unequal distribution of productive assets in society. Their assessment of exploitation as a result and reinforcement of the unequal distribution of assets is echoed in the findings of this research project. The women within this study echoed this through their shared experience of low-wage employment and inability to survive without public assistance programs.

Finally, this project draws on previous research on the relationship between low-wage labor and public assistance. Several studies of welfare reform and how it has impacted the low-wage labor market, including how these two structures impact and influence one another (Collins & Mayer, 2010; Hayes, 2003). Collins, Mayer and Hayes argue that welfare reform and changes intersect with challenges for poor, single parent families, destroying their rights, interfering with their ability to care for their families, and undermining their civil rights and labor protections. This study demonstrates the connection between low-wage labor and public assistance, and emphasized the importance of that relationship.

The second chapter provides a literature review on poverty and public assistance, and the perceptions and connotations surrounding the women who participate in the

welfare system. The third chapter focuses on the findings about the city of Cleveland. More specifically, it focuses on the participants' views of Cleveland, demographic information, and perception of the relationships between Cleveland and employment. Chapter four highlights the study's findings on employment. This chapter details the participants' views of their parents' employment and their own employment, which is broken down into their perspectives on service work and gaining employment. The fifth chapter illustrates the participants' views on public assistance. The sections in this chapter include participant's perspectives of retirement, public assistance, and the accountability of recipients and systems. Finally, this thesis concludes with chapter six, which includes other notable findings. This chapter includes findings on Ohio Senate Bill 5, participants' perspectives on small businesses and corporations, education, benefits and maternity leave, and criminal records.

Methodology

When I began this endeavor, I was completely preoccupied with the concepts of class, labor, and gender. This is where I am comfortable; this is where I am home. Cleveland, Ohio is also my home. Prior to conducting my research I made many assumptions about this project based on my experience in Cleveland. I grew up in a working class family, which for me meant blue-collar working poor, but the participants presented themselves proudly public assistance free. My parents were machinists, and my parents' home is in a neighborhood with a low income tax rate. However, once I began doing research on the sample, I realized my participants would not wholly share my experiences. In the interest of full disclosure, it should be stated that I am a white woman in my mid-twenties pursuing a Master's degree in women's studies with a concentration

in labor. I always felt the neighborhood I grew up in was a multicultural environment with white, African American, Latino, and mostly white recent immigrant families. Based on this experience, I made the assumption that other Cleveland neighborhoods would similarly diverse. I was very wrong.

I began this process by examining the relationship between the social constructs of class and gender. Recognizing that race cannot be extricated from these constructs, I acknowledge the inevitable truth that persons of color are often trapped by class and institutionalized structures (Ken, 2010). Traditional practices in research methods with interviews and field research raise questions about the role of race, gender, and class in the relationship between the researcher and subject, objectification with respect to the research subject, the influence of power and assumptions about approaches to the research (Sprague, 2005). I acknowledge my role as researcher and my status within my relationship with the subjects. My goal is to interview women of a lower than average socioeconomic situation, asking them about their views of their situations and perceptions of the root causes.

I created a brief semi-structured interview survey comprised of open-ended questions that were divided into several sections: historical context to work and Cleveland; personal relationship to labor and employment; relationship and views on public assistance; views of their specific situation at present; and demographic information. See Appendix A, for the full survey and each chapter as a brief summary of questions, which generated the findings for that section, as approved by the George Washington University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The questions were developed after extensive reading on low-wage employment and public assistance. The questions

are organized into sections focusing on Cleveland, discussions of family and neighborhoods, relationship to employment, unemployment, public assistance, responsibility for their current economic situation, and demographic information. The interviews were scheduled to take one hour, but as I quickly found in practice, subjects not comfortable with me could speed through the interview, and those very comfortable could spend up to an hour and a half in discussion. The comfort level was determined by how they feel about sharing personal information with a researcher, my race and demeanor, and my age.

I partnered with the Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry of Cleveland, which had received a grant from Cuyahoga County to create a back-to-work program, Fast-Track to Employment. The Fast-Track to Employment Program Enhancement Manager, Annette M. Manco Brady, provided a brief summary of the program:

The Fast Track to Employment (FTE) Program will present the entire program to mimic an employment experience for all program participants or “employees”. Employment readiness skill acquisition is at the forefront of preparing participant “employees” for real world job seeking; interview preparation, employment ethics, employment communication and job retention skills. This will be done from the onset through the following program expectations: intake ‘interviewing’, a strict dress code will be required, (business casual attire), photo identifications, daily requirements of clocking in on the onsite time clock, assignment to ‘work teams’ and a primary focus on employment retention through effectively guiding “participant/employees” through appropriate job preparedness,

employment expectations and video interviewing for practice (O'Donnell, 2011a).

This program provides these services to unemployed citizens, who have a limited employment history, from one of Cleveland's east side neighborhoods. To qualify for the program, the individual has to be a parent, referred by his/her caseworker, and currently receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) cash assistance.

I conducted 25 interviews with women participating in the Fast-Track to Employment over a three week period in the summer of 2011. The interviews ranged in length from ten minutes to one hour and forty minutes, as previously mentioned, depending on the subject's comfort level. The first few interviews were exceptionally brief. The participants simply answered my questions and gave brief answers when pushed to elaborate. I sought to develop a congenial relationship with my subjects by auditing the employment program. I would participate in conversations with all the participants in the program, including those not involved in this study. The quotes from any conversations held with general participants of the program were not included in this study, no matter how interesting or relevant they were. The interviews followed a format that included a brief introduction to this project, information about my background, an explanation of the consent form, the interview, and concluded with any questions the subjects may have had for me. Each subject was asked to provide a pseudonym by which they will be referred to throughout my research. They range from tongue-in-cheek wordplay on names to full fake names. No participant was permitted to use her own name or a nickname.

The population of interest for this project lacks a standard means of tracking for follow-up information by other researchers or myself; these women will come and go from the public assistance lists and programs. They may also feel some sort of shame associated with their situation, which would make them less likely to participate in a follow-up. They may view an outsider negatively, particularly a researcher. However, due to my ties to the community and my professional relationship with Cleveland's Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry, I was considered with a more positive regard. A large concern while moving forward on this project was my relationship to Cleveland. At no point is my intention to absolve or convict the city of Cleveland. I fully disclose my romantic notions of the city, which I hope did not find their way into this project. Throughout this project, evidence will be presented which show Cleveland in both positive and negative lights. Additionally, the state of Ohio will be painted with the same brush. Many of my subjects were not enthused by their experiences with Cleveland and Ohio, particularly those participants who had experiences in different cities and states.

As previously noted, race plays an important role in class and gender studies. I would be remiss not to note my concerns about writing about race as a white person. My instincts are to use the most politically correct language (even though it is frequently dated or not employed by the population). However, for this study, I have chosen to employ language that reflects the language used by participants to name their own experiences. As depicted in Table 1 below, I will use "African American" to describe the race/ethnicity of my subjects as a whole because that is how the majority of my subjects identified, and, for the same reasons, will use "Lower Class/Lower Middle Class" to describe socioeconomic status. While conducting the interviews, my original prompts of

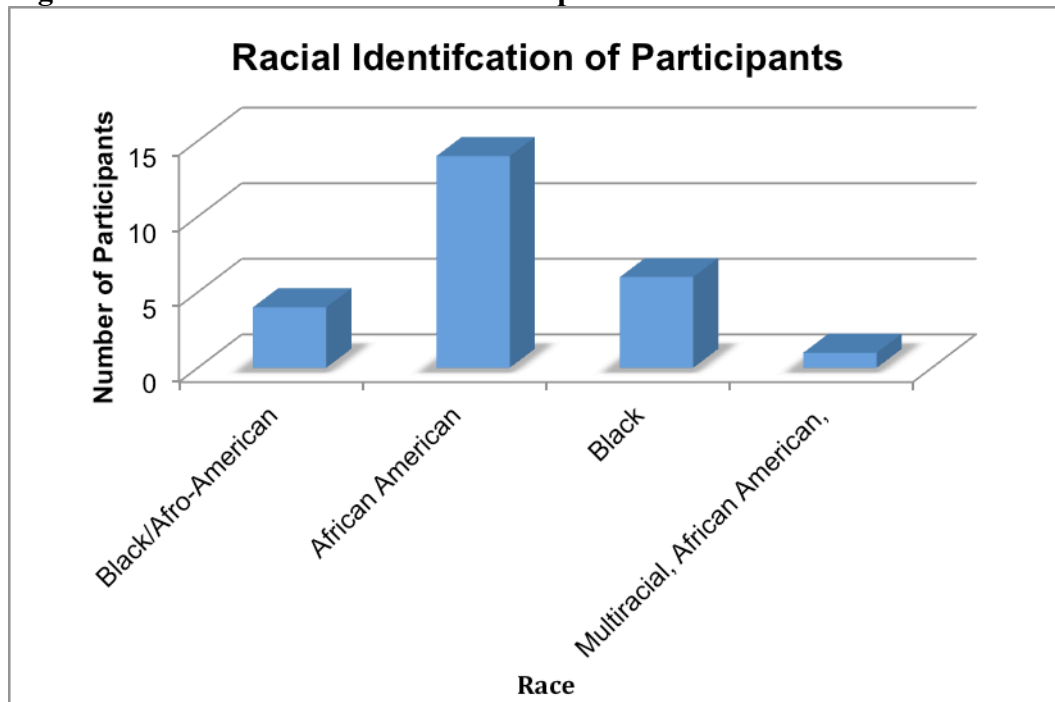
socio-economic status of upper class, middle class, and lower class created some confusion for the participants. During the first few interviews, I include subcategories of lower-middle class and upper middle class, to elaborate on the stratification of the middle class. Additionally, during the interviews, I ask the participants to describe what the socio-economic classification meant in relation to the context in which they were employing it. This provides interesting results; while many of my participants view themselves as some form of middle class, they contextualize middle class to include some public assistance. Notably, this does not include cash assistance. SNAP Benefits and Section 8 Housing does not impact their view of class. Table 2 provides data on the demographic information of participants on age and number of children. Again, terms used reflect the language of participants.

Table 1: Race and Socioeconomic Status by Participant

Participant	Race	Socioeconomic Status	Age Started Working
Alynn	Black/Afro-American	Middle Class	Unknown
Lisa 2	African American	Lower Middle Class	14
Tammy	African American	Unsure	16
Shawntee Williams	Black/African American	Middle Class	14
Ivory	African American	Lower Class	8
Chloe Williams	African American	Lower Middle Class	17
Sherrie Wilson	African American	Lower Middle Class	18
Candace	Black	Lower Middle Class	16
Leda	Black	Lower Class	15
Aspen Rose	Black	Lower Class	15
Olivia	African American	Poor/Lower Class	18
Lauren	African American	Lower Class/Poor	15
Keisha	African American	Lower Class	15
CJ	African American	Middle Class/Lower Middle Class	Never Employed
Karen Rodgers	Multiracial, African American, Cuban, Irish	Lower Class	15

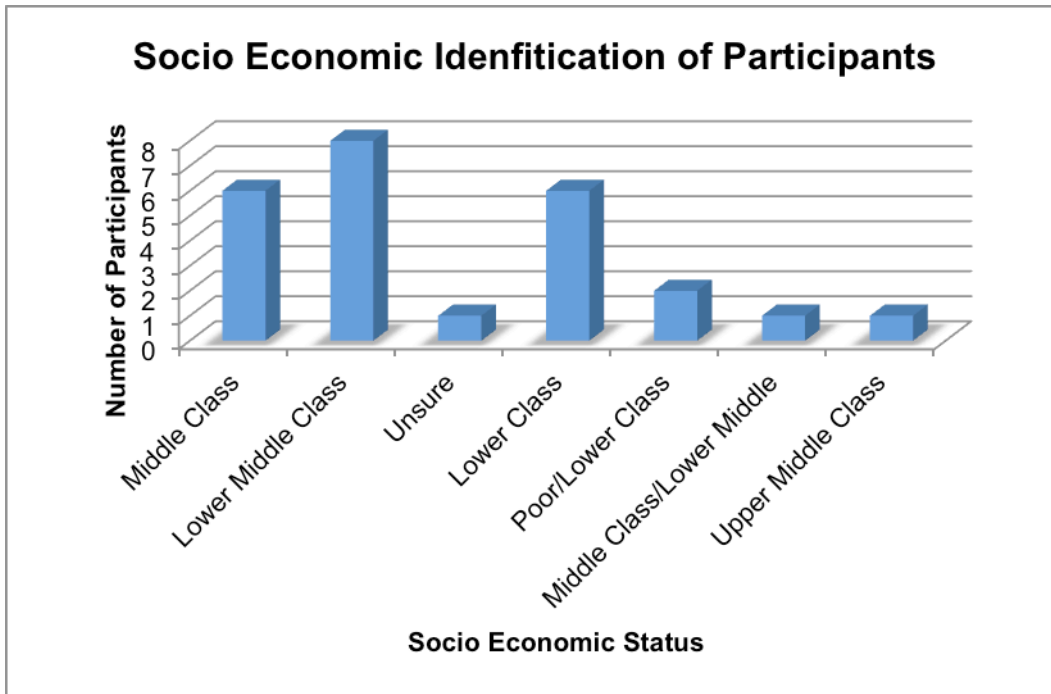
Tonya	Black	Middle Class	18
Shay	African American	Lower Class	16
Seven	African American	Middle Class	10
Monique	Black/African American	Lower Middle Class	14
Patrice	Black/African American	Lower Class	15
Tasha	African American	Lower Middle Class	16
Lisa 22	Black	Middle Class	Unknown
Angel	African American	Upper Middle Class	18
Diamond	Black	Lower Middle Class	Never Employed
Amber	African American	Lower Middle Class	17
Summary	African American	Lower Class/Lower Middle Class	

Figure 1: Racial Identification of Participants



n=25. Four participants identified as black/Afro-American, fourteen participants identified as African American, and six participants identified as black. Only one participant identified as multiracial, which included African American, Cuban, and Irish. Since the majority of participants self-identify as African American, I will employ that label throughout this paper.

Figure 2: Socio Economic Identification of Participants



n=25. The socio-economic identification of participants was slightly more complex. The statuses are listed as they are brought up by participants. Six participants identified as middle class, eight as lower middle class, and six as lower class. Additionally, two participants identified as poor/lower class. One identified as middle class/lower middle class, and one as upper middle class. There was one participant who was unsure. Most of the participants fell into middle class, lower middle class, and lower class, which is why for this paper, I will employ lower middle class to describe my participants' socio economic status.

Table 2: Age and Number of Children Statistical Analysis

	Age	Number of children	Age Started Working
Average	27.1	2	14.4
Median	24	2	16
Mode	22	1	15
Range	18 to 44	1 to 6	8 to Never Employed

The representation of my subjects by in this study is very important to me while developing this project. Class and race are presented social constructs. My subjects often refer to class as cultural and socioeconomic status, with little distinction. This is particularly evident when subjects contextualize their meaning behind their classifications. I also recognize the issues inherent with labeling, which is why at every

step of this project my subjects were instructed to classify themselves. Of course, this is also problematic, because the labels inherently are constructed by society, which then influences the selection of the labels. However, labels are necessary to describe my subjects and the findings generated through this project (McCall, 2005).

Following bell hooks, I recognize there may be practical advantages and disadvantages for the selection of working poor women in Cleveland, Ohio (1993). I have access to the population and conducted the research quickly. While conducting interviews, I was mindful of the time constraints and the effects of a lengthy interview process on the subjects. Monopolizing the subjects' time could lead to boredom or hurried answers in an effort to end the interview. This is not true for all the participants particularly those with brief interviews of 10-minutes. These participants rush through the interviews with very little elaboration. This project pulls participants from a small community and the subjects could skew the data by sharing information with one another (Scully, 1990). I attempt to allow my subjects to verify how they are represented in the project by transcribing our interviews and emailing them to the subjects for review. I did this in three segments, and asked the participants to read their transcriptions and confirm that they felt accurately represented. I sent follow-up emails to the participants requesting their acknowledgement of receipt of transcriptions. Unfortunately, there was not a high return rate on these transcriptions, with only two participants returning the transcriptions. Were this a larger sample over the course of multiple years, I may have mailed hard copies as well to my subjects, but because of time constraints, I did not.

I would also like to take a moment to acknowledge my prejudices as a researcher, including one I was unaware of until I conducted the research. There were two specific

instances where I had a reaction to information shared by my subjects surrounding issues of criminal convictions and political ideology. One subject, Chloe Williams, discloses her criminal record, which she believes to be the cause of her unemployment and receiving of TANF; this, coupled with the fact that she comes from a place of privilege, immediately caused me to have a negative reaction. However, I do not articulate this to Chloe. The second instance comes from differences of political ideology between one of my subjects and myself. While questions surrounding politics are not included in the survey, my subjects raise political issues. I attempted to keep my political ideology to myself, but given the topics of this study and my general demeanor, my political sympathies were hardly a secret. Karen Rodgers shocked me by disclosing that she is a Republican and believed in small government because she has multiple Master's degrees. We had a fruitful conversation about political ideologies, which will be discussed at length in Chapter 5.

Chapter 2: Literature Review, Historical Policy Context

There is a great deal of literature on poverty and the working poor in the United States. This section will briefly describe the demographics of poverty and social welfare programs in Ohio to contextualize the climate and programs at the time of the study. Individuals living in the city of Cleveland had a median income of \$25,977 (Exner, 2010b). Poverty in city of Cleveland was roughly 34% in 2010; it should be noted that the poverty rate in Ohio was 15.8%, which is only slightly higher than the national rates of 15.3% (ACS, 2011, Exner, 2010b). Cleveland is a city in decline, which is evident by their population size of 386,815 people in 2010 down from 81,588 in 2000. The racial

makeup of Cleveland is white 37% and black 53% with a Hispanic population rounding out the remaining 10% (Exner, 2010a). The Greater Cleveland area includes East Cleveland, which is a separate city, but several of this study's participants lived there. East Cleveland's population is smaller at 17, 843. The racial makeup of East Cleveland is not very diverse, with black persons constituting 93% and whites and Hispanic persons making up the remainder (Exner, 2010a).

The basic national statistics on women and welfare programs in 2008 are as follows: women in poverty without health insurance 28.0%, women in poverty without nutritional assistance (Food stamps) 52.0%, and women with children in poverty without cash assistance (TANF) 86.3% (Henrici, et. al, 2010).

African Americans outnumber whites in Cleveland, and women make up the majority of the population in Cleveland. Therefore a large percentage of the recipients of programs such as TANF are African American women. Social welfare programs such as TANF are primarily geared to assist those in the lowest classes, people living in poverty.

Cleveland has a long and complex history, but for the purpose of this project we are concerned with recent the recent history of the 1980 to present. Cleveland is a former industrial city that focused largely on manufacturing and the steel industry. Cleveland was called "The Comeback City" during the 1980s because Mayor Voinovich (who would later become an Ohio Senator) assisted in leading the city out of the major economic problems from the previous decades (Poh Miller & Wheeler, 1997; Keating, Krumholz, & Perry, 1995). During the 1980s and 1990s, Cleveland's city government including its mayors contributed public funds to the redevelopment of the city including the development of Jacobs Field (currently Progressive Field), Gateway (currently

Quicken Loans Arena), and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame (Poh Miller & Wheeler, 1997; Keating, Krumholz, & Perry, 1995). Some of Cleveland's public servants and those of Cuyahoga County have a pretty disillusioning history for their constituents. For example former Mayor Michael White, one of the longest tenured mayors and first African American mayor of Cleveland, has been found to have accepted bribes while in office and many of his associates have been under investigation by federal prosecutors (Tobin, 2009).

Like many former industrial cities, Cleveland suffered from "white flight" where wealthy and middle class residents moved to the suburbs (Glaster, 1990). This left Cleveland with impoverished residents and decaying neighborhoods. In 2006, the Ohio House legislature passed a bill repealing the law mandating city workers live within the city limits (Gomez, 2009). This sent many of those employed by the city to the suburbs. The decline and arguably end of the steel and auto industries have caused havoc on the economic situation in Cleveland during the 1980s and 1990s. Many attribute this to the passage of North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), which allowed for the importing of cheap manufactured goods from overseas (Perkins, 2011). Additionally, as many urban sociologists have predicted, the building of new stadiums, which had an immediate positive benefit, they have done little for Cleveland's long-term economy (Delaney & Eckstein, 2003). Finally, Cleveland's educational system is poor quality, which is rooted in the low property taxes paid by the residents of Cleveland's failing test score are the manifestation of the failing educational system. Currently, Cleveland has recently been causing quite a stir with its

attempts to find a new solution to the problem of failing schools (O'Donnell, 2012) with teachers' unions and city officials disagreeing on what should be done.

Since 1996, the phrase “welfare reform” usually refers to the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), which replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) with Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) was created within the Social Security Act of 1935, which was later amended to AFDC (Peterson, 2002). The state-level block grant established is the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program. The goals of TANF include assisting needy families so children can be cared for in the home, reducing the dependency of needy parents through the promotion of job preparation, work, and marriage, preventing out-of wedlock pregnancies, and encouraging the creation of two-parent families. The recipients who exit public assistance usually gain to low-wage employment (Blalock, Tiller, & Monroe, 2004). The women who exit the job placement programs usually retain employment for a short period of time before returning to different job placement programs, which can be attributed to personal and structural impediments such as irresponsibility and lack of reliable childcare (Blalock, Tiller, & Monroe, 2004). The concept of “welfare reform” was debated largely in the 1990s; the debate included conflicting ideas about “deserving poor” and the moral fitness of poor single mothers receiving assistance (Peterson, 2002; Ellwood, 2000; Will, 1993). Additionally, the reform resulted in a focus on funneling recipients into low wage employment (Peterson, 2002; Ellwood, 2000). Poor women view welfare as a survival strategy not the result of behavioral disorders. They turn to public assistance when other support systems have failed them. The idea that all persons can survive via self-support is

not congruent with the realities facing many poor mothers (Nelson, 2006; Press, Johnson-Dias, Fagan, 2006; Peterson, 2002; Ellwood, 2000; Spalter-Roth, Hartmann & Shaw, 1995; Albelda, 1999).

Additionally, the relationship between care giving and family policies is a difficult one. As seen in aspects of TANF that support “traditional families,” such as two-parent homes and marriage, emphasis is placed on care giving, but this is in contradiction with work requirements and care giving as devalued work in the labor market. Also notable is the discriminatory nature of the low-wage labor market (Peterson, 2002). Frequently, the low-wage employees find their employment raced, gendered, and classed (Collins & Mayer, 2010; Williams, 2006).

Much research is being done on women in poverty during the Great Recession of 2008 (Luciani, 2010; Mulligan, 2009). For many women, the Great Recession has resulted in a variety of hardships including the depletion of savings to support dependents and themselves, loss of benefits, and family supports, and a greater reliance on TANF, food stamps, and public health insurance (Eissa, Jacobson Kleven, & Thustrup Kreiner, 2008). The Institute for Women’s Policy Research (IWPR) analyzed the American Community Survey (ACS) from the US Census Bureau to reveal 15.5 million women living in poverty, this refers to women 18 years or older with incomes of 100 percent or below the federal poverty threshold of \$11,344 for one person and \$27,123 for a family of five (Henrici, Helmuth, Zlotnick, & Hayes, 2010). IWPR finds that the social safety net is need to be strengthened during the economic recession so women do not suffer extra hardship. Their findings indicate women of color and young women are more likely to live in poverty than women of other races and ethnicities. Additionally, nearly one

third of adult women in poverty do not have health coverage. Medicaid, Medicare, and other public forms of insurance make up roughly 48% of insurance for impoverished women. In Ohio specifically, 28% of women in poverty lack health insurance (Henrici, Helmuth, Zlotnick, & Hayes, 2010). IWPR found that most women with children in poverty do not receive TANF support about 12% receive TANF cash assistance, and specifically in Ohio, 86.3% of women with children in poverty do not receive cash assistance. The low enrollment in TANF can be explained by stigma, time limits, and state eligibility (Henrici, Helmuth, Zlotnick, & Hayes, 2010). IWPR found that a majority of women in poverty do not receive food stamps, but coverage is consistent across the US. They founds that two thirds (62%) of women in poverty are not receiving food stamps. Ohio has 52.5% of women in poverty not receiving food stamps (Henrici, Helmuth, Zlotnick, & Hayes, 2010).

Working poor women deal with a variety of issues and factors working in tandem with low-wage work and the fear of unemployment. These issues and factors include rising housing costs (Leavitt and Lingafelter, 2005), raising childcare costs (Albelda and Tilly, 1997; Schein, 1995), and the declining job market in light of the recession and employers' reluctance to take on new hires. Poor living conditions can lead to a host of negative effects and feelings such as living in overcrowded and substandard living conditions, abusive landlords, feelings of powerlessness, and negative self-worth and lack of dignity (Leavitt and Lingafelter, 2005).

The kinds of employment low socioeconomic women, within this study, have included a variety of low-wage jobs: service, care work, and factory work. These low wage employment opportunities usually provide more funds than public assistance,

which is below minimum wage, but alternatively these jobs can be a placeholder until a crisis, such as a medical emergency or illness, pushes the woman back into extreme poverty and back onto public assistance (Collins & Mayer, 2010; Schein, 1995). A low wage job often lacks advancement, makes the woman feel marginalized, vulnerable and powerless (Schein, 1995).

While there has been research conducted on welfare recipients, predominately female recipients, and low-wage workers, there are shortcomings in the existing research on the working poor and more broadly, the working class. In the literature, representations of working class identity are often compared to and simultaneously reinforce the otherness of impoverished women. Examples include work by London, Scott, Edin, and Hunger's article, "Welfare reform, work-family tradeoffs and child well-being" (2004) and Rachel Dwyer's work on class segregation in her article, "The shape of class segregation in the age of extremes" (2012). Academic studies of working class people often allow for the misrepresentation of impoverished women and children because of a lack of inclusion of individuals' situations (Adair, 2005). For example, the National Child Care Information Center issued the "Child Care and development fund: Report of state plans FY 2002-2003" and the University of Maryland's School of Social Work's annual reports on *Life after Welfare Series*, while they attempt to depict welfare recipients accurately, they rely largely on quantitative analysis which is not always representative of the recipients. The more research done with working poor women the more likely the language in the current scholarship will evolve to include reflect the needs of the working poor. The more research done on these populations the comprehensive the information on this population will be. Of course, the researchers

must strive to include their subjects in the research to accurately depict them. This project aims to include the individual's story to provide a more complete summary of welfare recipients' views on employment and welfare.

Exiting poverty relates to this project because that is the end goal of the back to work program I audited. Participants want to find employment and leave the welfare system. Exiting poverty leads perceptions of and ramifications for developing policies to assist the impoverished in leaving poverty. Leaving poverty requires addressing multiple needs including income opportunities, obtaining social support systems, and access to assistance (Schein, 1995). Schein's research does not focus on public assistance, but the researcher is aware of the importance of programs such as TANF in 1995 and similar programs. Also, the amount of information about working poor women in Cleveland is limited, which reinforces the need for research of this kind.

Ohio's Temporary Assistance (TANF) program claims to provide comprehensive assistance in the form of a safety net offering support services for eligible low-income families. The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services through the County Job and Family Services agencies states that it works to fulfill the purposes of TANF, which are to provide assistance to needy families so children are cared for in their homes or in the homes of relatives, end parents' dependence on government benefits by promoting work and marriage, by reducing the number of out-of-wedlock pregnancies, and to encourage the formation of two-parent households (Office of Family Stability, 2007). These purposes are of great concern to me as a researcher. The focus on "traditional" familial structures has many potential drawbacks such as encouraging women to stay in poor or even violent relationships to preserve two parent homes, a focus which emphasizes

heteronormativity and sexism. The focus on forcing women into the workforce often implies women receiving welfare benefits are lazy and unwilling to work. This assumption is race, gender, and class biased because they are based in conceptions about poor, African American women. However, my own views on the shortcomings of public assistance are not the point of this study instead the perceptions of my study participants.

Ohio's TANF has two core programs, Ohio Works First (OWF) and the Prevention, Retention, and Contingency Program (PRC). OWF provides time-limited cash assistance, and PRC provides benefits and services to overcome immediate barriers to self-sufficiency and personal responsibility. Ohio's TANF program has four primary service areas: Family Safety Net, Employment and Advancement, Support and Prevention, and Program Enhancements (Office of Family Stability, 2007). The Family Safety Net includes cash assistance and disaster assistance. The Employment and Advancement services assist with job entry and earnings gained, work participation, work support, childcare, and transportation assistance (Office of Family Stability, 2007). Support and Prevention services focus on unforeseeable events and emergency situations. These services brings participants to non-TANF Family Supports including child support services, and Medicaid; in addition to TANF Services to Assist Families such as short-term assistance, supplemental nutritional assistance, substance abuse treatment, domestic violence support, family preservation/adoption support services, child care services, family reunification services, kinship care/kinship navigator, visitation/medication, Access to Better Care (ABC) Initiative, and Ohio Strengthening Families Initiative. Additionally, the Support and Prevention aspects of TANF provide services to children and youth including Help Me Grow program for children to age 3, the Early Learning

Initiative, before- and after- school program, reducing out-of-wedlock births/teen pregnancy, and youth workforce development (Office of Family Stability, 2007). TANF continues to make Program Enhancements including continuous improvement assistance, which is a performance management system, TANF demonstration program, employment retention incentive, Kinship Permanency Incentive (KPI), deficit reduction act (Office of Family Stability, 2007).

A recent summary of public assistance statistics for Cleveland Ohio from June 2011 (Office of Fiscal and Monitoring Services, 2011) shows that OWF recipients totaled 209,600 and cash payments totaled \$34,829,635 (Office of Fiscal and Monitoring Services, 2011). Food and Nutrition Services Benefits totals \$1,766,976 and the total dollar amount was \$248,783,044. In both cases these are down from May 2011. The number of OWF recipients is down 15.3% from June 2010, and Food Stamps down 1.1% from June 2010 (Office of Fiscal and Monitoring Services, 2011). This does not necessarily mean the economy improved, but instead few families qualified for these programs.

Public assistance programs are societal factors that contribute to the development of cultural norms and the connotations surrounding these cultural norms likewise the cultural norms shape the public assistance programs. This is done through the cultural expectations established. For example, the social construction of mother is filtered through race, class, and gender to frame how a specific mother or type of mother is viewed. Then this connotation is then employed by the public and public officials to create policies and programs, which then reinforce or change the social construction and expectation of race, class, gender, and the example of mother. Additionally, all of these

are raced, classed, and gendered in their construction. Several participants bring up the conceptions and connotations surrounding receiving public assistance, and the participants address the stigma and lasting effects of the connotations such as accepting welfare being equated to being a bad mother or that welfare recipients do not want to work. They simultaneously produce and reinforce one another through their construction. Negative connotations of motherhood, welfare-to-work recipients, and women living in poverty in general develop around a paternalistic and welfare state because it supports social welfare programs, which act to produce and reinforce race, class, and gender, which then acts to produce and reinforce these original negative connotations. This section demonstrates the deep-rooted connections between all these factors and societal constructs in existing theory and research.

Race, class, and gender influence and act upon social welfare programs (Neubeck & Cazenave, 2006; Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001). Frequently, the literature on social welfare programs will discuss social constructs such as race, class, and gender or a combination of these societal constructs, but often the literature keeps them somewhat separate (London, et al, 2004; NCCIC, 2002). I try to take an intersectional approach, in which race, class, and gender overlap and shape our understanding of these connotations. It is misleading to believe race, class, and gender intersect at a specific point, as an intersectional approach might imply. More often than not an author will discuss race and gender and leave class as assumed (Collins & Mayer, 2010) or class and race leaving gender out (Wilson, 1996). Some scholars leave out race when discussing gender and class, letting it be assumed that impoverished communities are inherently communities of color.

Drawing upon the literature available, I attempt to bring race, class, and gender into discussion of the negative connotations of receiving social welfare assistance. While, I had hoped more open discussions of race in conjunction with class, many of the study participants did not explicitly address how race plays a role in class and welfare. I believe my participants, perhaps, did not see race and class as separate, and thus cannot address one without the other and that race is assumed. As mentioned, all of the ongoing, participants in the job training program were African American, and because of the homogeneous racial context of the program race was assumed. Frequently, they were surprised if I did address race or ethnicity and they provided quite brief answers to anything explicitly asked. Examples and exceptions are detailed in Chapter 6.

In 1996, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) added a new welfare program, Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) to Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). This combined all previous federal childcare programs into one grant administered by state governments (Collins & Mayer, 2010). TANF mandates that individuals receiving public assistance through welfare must work¹ (West, 2003; Social Security Act, 1996). This was to combat the “welfare queen” label commonly associated with mothers receiving assistance. These mothers were reclassified as workers (West, 2003). However, the perception of the “welfare” character choosing to remain in poverty remains (Fong, 2007; Gottschalk, 2005; Thomas, 1994). Some researchers argue that these “choices to remain in poverty” can be seen in the argument for birth control requirements and reductions of welfare program benefits,

¹ TANF of the PRWORA requires recipients receiving public assistance must have some kind of employment or employment activity for 30 hours a week (Social Security Act, 1996).

because once the benefit is removed poor women will stop having additional children (Thomas, 1997).

One of the purposes of PRWORA is that children should be cared for within their homes with the emphasis on two-parent households to prevent children from ending up in Child and Family Services. However, with the emphasis placed on welfare recipients finding employment there is a contradiction. Women who are required to seek work outside the home cannot provide constant care for their children in the home nor can they afford to hire in home caregivers (Wessel, 2003). An alternative reading of this policy is that those who cannot care for their children in the home could have their children placed in foster care (Wessels, 2003). Additionally, TANF requires establishment of paternity so the fathers must pay child support (Wessels, 2003) this puts stress of the relationships between mother and father in these situations especially when the mothers normally would not have sought child support.

There have been many studies of the welfare and the working poor, though not always how these two concepts work together. Jane L. Collins and Victoria Mayer conducted an in-depth study on women receiving welfare benefits in Milwaukee and Racine, Wisconsin (Collins & Mayer, 2010). They interviewed 33 women who relied on social programs after 1996 welfare reform. The purpose of the study is to reconstruct the work and family histories of the participants and how these affect their work placement and employment trajectories. This study presents the complexities of citizenship as portrayed by the participants. The authors argue that welfare reform created a system, which allows for the exploitation of welfare recipients by the low-wage labor market. They find that women faced eroding social support for their daily situations including

childcare and other safety nets. Mandatory work placement is a point of concern for the women as well because they lack labor protections and prevents the recipients from gaining success in the labor market (Collins & Mayer, 2010). Additionally, Collins and Mayer find that the welfare recipients who were viewed as successes had more often than not circumvented the welfare system through informal employment. Their research shows welfare rolls decreased in 2008. Essentially, they argue that to be successful on welfare and leave welfare rolls, an individual had to cheat the system (Collins & Mayer, 2010).

Sharon Hayes presents her research on welfare mothers and their caseworkers particularly as it pertains to “success” of welfare reform. Hayes argues, “There are, in fact, fundamental tensions in the values set forth by the Personal Responsibility Act, and there is widespread disagreement regarding just what vision of good society it should serve” (Hayes, 2003, p.12). Hayes conducts her research in the late 1990s and early 2000s over three years in two cities, which she calls Sunbelt City and Arbordale. She interviewed caseworkers at all levels, attended staff meetings, and watched caseworker interactions with clients. She has 600 hours of fieldwork and interactions with 50 caseworkers and 130 welfare mothers. Her ethnographic research depicts welfare, as it exists on a local level (Hayes, 2003). Her research finds that welfare mothers have work ethic, which is contrary to PRWORA’s current policies; she also argues that the rise in the number of people on the welfare rolls after the passage of welfare reform is directly related to the changes in family structure and growing inequalities. Women find themselves the sole breadwinners and care providers within their household, and race, class, and gender impact the kind of employment these recipients can find (Hayes, 2003).

Virginia E. Schein (1995) studied mothers working in poverty; she argues that understanding the women and work begins with a comprehensive understanding of their lives. She argues that the women included in her study are committed to their children and have a difficult time navigating their situations. These participants deal with the restrictions of low-wage labor markets and the difficulties in managing employment and childcare responsibilities. Schein found her participants had a positive outlook on their employment and potential employment (Schein, 1995). Additionally, the women felt that work is associated with control over their lives and image. However, Schein felt their current and potential job prospects were poor. She also found that low-paying jobs are only marginally better than public assistance because of the limited growth opportunities and long-term effects (Schein, 1995). This study was chosen to contribute to this project because it demonstrates and contextualizes welfare before welfare reform while studying locations in the Midwest similar to Cleveland, Ohio.

Sandra Danziger and Sherrie Kossoudji, researchers from the University of Michigan sought to study Michigan's General Assistance (GA) Program recipients over a two-year period (Danziger & Kossoudji, 1994). Their findings indicate that GA recipients' situations are worse after the 1991 reform Governor Engler implemented. Michigan's job market was poor, and the majority of recipients reported health problems as being damaging to their ability to work. While Governor Engler saw the program as a success because the numbers of recipients were down, the individuals unable to find employment were removed from the rolls and left without assistance. Danziger and Kossoudji argue for a needs assessments and appraisals to be done rather than program

terminations (Danziger & Kossoudji, 1994). This study, like the previous, reflects the realities of welfare before the 1996 reform, and also focuses on the Midwest.

Michael Wiseman looks at the decline in Wisconsin's welfare rolls and sought to explain to what this could be attributed (Wiseman, 1995). Wiseman attributes the decline in Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) rolls to three main factors: the restriction of benefits and eligibility, a strong state economy, and large amounts of funds dedicated to job training programs financed by the government. This first factor, the restrictions on benefits and eligibility is an effective way of removing people from the welfare rolls, but there is no guarantee that individuals removed from the rolls will have a better situation. Additionally, the second and third factors are specific to Wisconsin and will not be able to be reproduced in other states (Wiseman, 1995).

Christine L. Williams (2006) conducted a study, which focuses exclusively on low-wage labor, within retail stores. While the work focuses on shopping and how shopping has changed in contemporary society, Dr. Williams observes the labor dynamics within two toy stores. The work is primarily comprised on observations; she does not disclose her identity as researcher to co-workers or management. One of the stores could be classified as high end and one as a box store, which served a lower-class of clients. In her research, Williams is able to discuss the stereotyping and gendered and raced division of labor on the "floor" (Williams, 2006). Additionally, Williams observes the difficulty some of the employees have with arranging transportation and childcare while on the job. It prevents some employees from being promoted and emphasizes the difficulties associated with low-wage employment. Williams was also able to present

brief discussions of unions and labor rights and how those discussions look and feel within this context (Williams, 2006).

The above studies were selected as support for this project to draw distinctions between AFDC and TANF. However, there are also similarities between AFDC and TANF, which are highlighted. These similarities can be seen mostly in ramifications of these programs. Bang Pertersen, Slothuus, Stubager, & Togeby find that public opinions and attitudes towards welfare policy are usually explained by political values and perceptions of deservingness of welfare recipients (2010). Welfare recipients feel that society views them as lazy and a burden; these participants are cognitive of these perceptions of themselves and they develop strategies to counteract those perceptions (Reutter, Stewart, Veenstra, Love, Rapheal, & Makwaimba, 2009). According to research conducted by Henderson and Cook, grandmothers' views create the continuum of beliefs around poverty, TANF, and personal responsibility (2005). They find that the themes that are raised include individualism, structuralism, and fatalistic views (Henderson & Cook, 2005).

To summarize, race, class, and gender constructions has contributed to the conceptualization of motherhood as viewed through unemployment and welfare programs, which are social structures. Additionally, social welfare programs shape low-wage employment for welfare recipients as it is perceived by society at large, and this perception is in turn, raced, classed, and gendered. The findings from other studies on public assistance and low-wage labor have mixed results with representations of TANF and TANF participants as positive and negative. Frequently, women in low-wage employment situations emphasize specific challenges to mothers and women such as

inflexibility to accommodate childcare according to women in Collins and Mayer and Williams' studies (Collins & Mayer, 2010; Williams, 2006). Finally, Cleveland saw an increase in economic development efforts but a stiff decline in these efforts within the last thirty years. This research project will look at the convergence of all of these factors.

Chapter 3: Findings, How low-income women view Cleveland

Part of the purpose of this research project is to look at Cleveland as the participants view the city. Understanding the participants' views on Cleveland will provide a context for how they see Cleveland's labor market, the perceived employment availability, and general thoughts about living in Cleveland. The initial questions about Cleveland include participants' thoughts on Cleveland's economy, the participants' historical understanding of Cleveland's economy, thoughts on prolific jobs in Cleveland, and potential opportunities specific to Cleveland. The participants have varying interpretations of Cleveland and the opportunities afforded to its residents. Additionally, there is a mixed response as to Cleveland's perceived role and responsibilities to its residents. Many of the women feel that they would have a better chance finding employment if they leave the Cleveland area; this is strong with both the women who have lived in Cleveland all their lives and those who left Cleveland for periods of time. There appears to be an idealized interpretation of what life is like outside of Cleveland and Ohio at large, but little practical knowledge of what legal protections and benefits are in other states.

Largely, the participants in this study feel few to no ties or loyalty to the city of Cleveland. A notable exception to this is Ivory, who, despite not any ties to Cleveland felt

loyal to the city. Ivory articulates her feelings toward the city through her drive to create positive change in the city:

Ivory: I don't have strong ties, but I am loyal to my city. If there were any ways to make a changes to my city I would, and I encourage other people to. Get big, and come back and give back to Cleveland because Cleveland doesn't have much.

KO: When you say you encourage people to make a change in Cleveland, do you feel like you're not part of the process that can affect change in Cleveland?

Ivory: I could be because one person could change everything. I could get something started and maybe get people to help out because you know I can't do it alone.

This notion of empowerment is an anomaly among these participants, as will be demonstrated in the other findings section of this paper. All other participants feel no connection to Cleveland, often answering my questions on Cleveland and their feelings in relation to the city with “no,” “not really,” or an articulation of the desire to leave Cleveland.

Demographic information and geo-images of living spaces

The greater Cleveland area stretches from the near-east suburbs, such as Shaker Heights and University Heights to Old Brooklyn, which was once part of Cleveland. The participants largely hail from Cleveland's far-east side. The Fast-Track to Employment program is located in Glenville, a Cleveland neighborhood adjacent to downtown Cleveland. Many of the women interviewed live in the surrounding areas including

Hough, St. Clair-Superior, and Kinsman.

Figure 3: Cleveland Neighborhoods



Figure 3: This image is a neighborhood breakdown of Cleveland, Ohio. The Fast-Track to Employment program is located in Glenville. Notably, some subjects are originally from outside the Cleveland area. This image comes from Neighborhood Link (Neighborhood Link, 2010).

Table 3: Neighborhood Breakdown

Neighborhood	Grew-Up	Lives Now
California*	1	
Central		1
Cleveland		2
Cleveland Heights	1	2
Downtown		1
East Cleveland	1	3
Glenville		1
Hough	1	4
Kinsman	2	4
Lee-Miles		1
Maryland*	1	
Medina	1	
New Jersey*	1	
Pennsylvania*	1	

Richmond Heights	1	1
Shaker	4	2
Slavic Village	1	
South Carolina*	1	
St.Clair-Superior	4	1
Union-Miles	2	
Warrensville		1
West Side	1	

* Indicates an actual state not a street name. n=24 of the participants provide this information.

Four of the participants hail from Shaker, a suburb of Cleveland. This suburb like many in the Greater Cleveland area has drastically changed over the last few decades, specifically with respect to income levels moving from higher incomes to low incomes. Other neighborhoods remain the same, such as Hough, Glennville, and Kinsman. Cleveland is still largely considered by residents to be heavily racially segregated. These neighborhoods have a racialized history; Hough, for example, was the site of a race-riot from July 18-23, 1966, these resulting in 30 deaths and 275 arrests (Miller & Wheeler, 1997; Keating, Krumholz, & Perry, 1995). Hough, Glennville, and Kinsman are largely African American communities. Many of the participants feel that race and class are interchangeable, as noted by participants who make large generalizations about public assistance and benefits, and while I try to look at both they are strongly linked in the minds of my subjects.

Perspectives on Cleveland

Perspectives on Cleveland are largely negative or indifferent. The participants mention feeling frustrated with Cleveland and its lack of employment opportunities. For example, when asked questions regarding participants' feelings toward Cleveland and how Cleveland has changed since the 2008 Recession, some participants feel Cleveland

has limited and depressing opportunities, which became even more hopeless over time. Others articulated things [economic situations] are so bad to begin with, that they see no change before or after the recession, and still others point out that the economic situation is difficult for certain dimensions of the population specifically, poor, African American women.

The participants emphasize that only specific fields presented employment opportunities. These fields are described as limited to the health field and service fields, but upon further questioning and discussion, the participants refer to all positions within a medical facility as the health field including the service positions such as janitorial, food service, and care taking. Popular perceptions by a more middle class public might not consider these positions as the health field, with the exception of some care giving positions, but the participants see any position located in a medical facility as the health field and superior to the more conventional service jobs such as fast food, housekeeping, etc. Participants frequently present mythological themes surrounding Cleveland and employment opportunities. Additionally, there is an almost mystical notion of factory positions, which exists outside the reach of these participants. The participants could provide only brief, often-inconsistent descriptions of factory work, though it is perceived as well paying with benefits and, most importantly, with union protections.

Finally, this section provides an idea of where these participants would like to live other than Cleveland. Interestingly, many of the participants desire to leave Cleveland, but lack an explanation as to why they believe the locations they suggest would provide better employment opportunities than Cleveland. Also, the results are a statement to the discussions occurring between the participants in the class setting. Many of the

participants suggest the same locations and refer to hearing of the opportunities through friends of friends, etc. without an explicit explanation or reasoning behind the selection of these locations.

The 2008 Recession and Cleveland

The 2008 Recession hit Cleveland hard resulting in a large number of foreclosures and bankruptcies (Center on Urban Poverty and Community Development, 2009). Some of the difficulties facing the Cleveland employment market stem from the international trade agreements develop during the 1990s (Perkins, 2011), but recently they stem from the predatory lending practices of banks. However, the participants in this study have a limited to non-existing understanding of the historical framework leading to their current situations. While I am not expecting a comprehensive understanding of the historical framework from the participants, I is surprised by the overall lack of understanding of how structural influences impact the daily lives of my participants. The participants feel they could only fully discuss the specifics of their situations and make broad declarations about the causes of the 2008 Recession from their perspectives.

Many of the participants articulate that they feel Cleveland's economic situation was "bad" or that "it's hard" or "a struggle." The word "struggle" arises at several points during multiple interviews. This could derive from linguistics and cultural dialectic. The response to questions of Cleveland's economic situation and the 2008 Recession's impact on Cleveland's economy was overwhelmingly negative with every participant citing a poor situation. However, the negative responses are attributed to a variety of issues: lack of government response (local, state, and federal), a failing educational system, the recession being specifically to blame, and individuals being complacent with their

unemployment status.

Several participants mention that it is difficult to obtain employment, which is how they are able to measure the difficulty of Cleveland's economic situation. Tonya describes obtaining employment as difficult, but that she is ready to keep trying:

Tonya: It's hard. Getting [a] job is tough. Like, I'm having trouble getting a job with certificates and everything, first day then nobody called back yet, but I'm giving them a chance, I'm just ready to go back to work. That's all...Um, I think it got worse because a lot of people got laid off from their jobs and stuff. I think it got worse.

She concludes by suggesting that the layoffs of her peers are a good indication of how to measure Cleveland's economic situation. Monique attributes the economic situation and evidence of the recession to the foreclosures and the abandoned homes, "like we got a lot of abandoned houses, like people losing their houses, see my neighborhood there is an abandoned house ever other house. Somebody don't live there; the street's just nasty. It wasn't like that a couple years ago."

Patrice also discusses the economic situation in Cleveland as a struggle; she cites the cost of living and the austerity cuts from the government (local, state, and federal):

Patrice: I feel that it's low that it's like a struggle. That it's hard. Especially for the people that I feel are lower class, like myself. Um, because there's more struggle; it's a real hard struggle. Um, dealing with transportation, housing, bills, just that's going up, having to take care of your children like a real struggle, in how this economy is right now...I think it got worse. There was one point in time when there was stuff like

emergency housing, your bills could get, you could get assistance with your bills, basically now there is no funding for anything anymore. You can't get emergency housing anymore, bus fare went up, you know, here we are people trying to get jobs, and it's hard to get a job even if you're doing everything yourself. Even if you're. I feel things have gotten worse from the first recession to currently, yeah.

Patrice summarizes feelings of overwhelming difficulties well, voicing what many of the participants articulate at various points during their interviews: things are bad, individuals have little control, there is little assistance, things remain stagnant, and the situation feels as though everything is against the individual.

From Ivory and Candace's perspectives, the recession has made Cleveland's economic situation worse. Ivory thinks that before the recession Cleveland's economic situation was not very poor, "It's just because of the recession right now. Before it was pretty good about four years ago there were jobs. A little better than they are now, there were more job opportunities for summer jobs for the kids and high school graduates. That was pretty good as far as job wise, but now in the last few years the jobs just disappeared." Ivory points to the easy turnover of employment. An individual could gain employment quickly taking and leaving jobs at will. This is specifically beneficial for young people and mothers with challenging schedules, but as Ivory notes, these positions are currently unavailable. These are exactly the positions, which this study's participants take; unfortunately, these positions do not have the long-term potential needed to assist women in exiting public assistance. Candace believes that the situation has become worse, and also that this will lead to an increase in crime. "And I feel like the crime rate

has gone up because of situations like that and people need money and they do things they shouldn't do to get money.” This perception is not corroborated by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency’s findings that crime rates do not raise either during tough economic situations or in economic expansions (Krisberg, B., Guzman, C., & Vuong, L, 2009).

Two of the participants attribute the difficult economic situation specifically to the various levels of government. This indicates a disconnection between understanding of the government’s role in economic policy and the expectations held by the participants for the government. There is an alluded to expectation that the government should provide for its citizens, and the citizens contribute to this system through taxation, but the participants do not understand the comprehensive system. That is not to say that this is somehow different from the perceptions held by others; many people are misinformed because of media. This goes back to the myths perpetuated by the participants. For example, President Obama is blamed for the rise in gas prices even though the President of the United States does not have direct control over gas prices. Diamond expresses that the situation is difficult, and digresses into the challenges of the cost of living,

Diamond: It sucks...There is...I’ve been trying to get a job since I was 16. And I haven’t been able to yet, and I’ve done resumes before this. I was in another program at North Academy, North Coast Academy. We did resumes the different way and I tried to apply for jobs then and I still haven’t been able to get one yet. Cuz there’s no jobs out here. They say they’re hiring, but then they turn around and say not hiring. Cuz, it’s been, I’ll use gas as an example. Gas prices went up...When Obama first went

into office then after a while he'd been in there it went right back up to where it was. Prices skyrocketed through the roof, everything was entirely too much.

According to Diamond, the cost of living is connected to the current President. Despite its factual inaccuracy, there is the perception that the President has direct control, and that the government is disinterested in the concerns of impoverished communities. The cost of living sentiment is echoed by Angel, "The jobs are real low. Um, the economy is down and out, bus prices and gas prices are crazy... The bus prices, every time the gas goes up the bus prices go up too." There is a feeling of helplessness with respect to the cost of living expenses, which could be an explanation for the participants ready to place blame on a removed government.

The competitiveness for employment appears to be very trying for participants. Several mention that in order to obtain employment, they would need to increase their education specifically a degree of some kind. The few participants felt the possibility of being over qualified for employment said that is unlikely, with the exception of Karen, who holds two Masters degrees. Lisa 2 echoes earlier sentiments about quickly obtaining employment in her youth, which no longer is possible:

Lisa 2: It's basically it's like a competition in Cleveland. Um sometimes you competin' with college graduates or high school graduates and sometimes you competin' with people with absolutely no experience. And um, me personally, I graduated from high school, didn't really go to college, college tried it, but you know college really ain't for everybody. And me personally I'm not saying it's not for me, but right now it's not

fitting into my lifestyle so I had to kind of put that on hold. But um the economy in Cleveland is pretty bad.

The participants articulate a permeating feeling of inadequacy regarding education when applying for employment. Lisa 2 articulates this feeling well by sharing the feelings of competition between herself and some phantom candidate. Leda echoes the feelings of inadequacy surrounding education when applying for employment,

Leda: I think it's terrible. It's hard for you to find a job and then they don't really give you any, what I am trying to say, education. Like programs for education if you want to get your GED. You know it's hard you got to scout around and stuff like that. If you don't have a good education you can get a good job.

This concept that all employable individuals need an education to obtain employment is repeated throughout the interviews. However, few of the participants could provide a clear answer on how exactly an advanced degree provides would ensure or provide them with immediate employment.

The final theme coming from this portion of the interviews is one of complacency. Olivia attributes Cleveland's poor economic situation to the complacency of individuals.

Olivia: It's horrible. It's horrible. I'm not from here. I'm from California. But since I've been here it's like a lot of people here are complacent. Lots of people in their situations are complacent cuz they got complacent in their situations. They don't want to do anything. Or go any further. You know it's like willing to use what I have now just to stay, not to build out

of it, but just to stay at a consistence state of okness. How you want to say it? I don't know I think it's, a lot of work that needs to be done out here. As far as with everything...[Anything that would improve the situation?] Schools the jobs. It's so hard. I've been out here. I finished school not too long ago, pharmacy. It's not easy to find a job in it. So you know, I don't know I guess it's just about trying to work every end that you have... I just thought. There just needs to be jobs. The government because I feel like that is their job. To do that. Private places, yeah it would help, but I feel like it is the government's.

Olivia is very quick to discuss, in the abstract, other anonymous individuals who are, by her account, complacent about their unemployment status. However, upon being pressed, Olivia points to the need for educational improvements to better Cleveland's economic situation. Additionally, Olivia comes back to this concept that the government is responsible to their citizens for employment, but, like those participants before her, is unable to provide suggestions or rationale for how and why the government would take on this responsibility.

A Positive Time in Cleveland's Economy

Participants are asked if they could remember a time when Cleveland's economy was thriving, and if so, when. Of course, not all participants are able to answer, with some only having recently moved to the Cleveland area. Other participants lack a comprehensive understanding of Cleveland's economy. Only four participants say there is never a time they could remember being positive for Cleveland's economy. Essentially, the timeframes presented by the participants can be summarized into two groups: the

1990s stretching into the early to mid 2000s, and 2000s to 2007. Only one participant suggests a timeframe post 2007, which was extended to 2008.

Five participants suggest the 1990s to 2005 is the superior time to live in Cleveland, mentioning lower gas prices and perceived ease for an individual to obtain employment. Diamond is quick to elaborate on the how inexpensive the cost of living in Cleveland was in the 1990s, “Back in the 90s when I was a kid. It was beautiful like everything was so cheap...There wasn’t all this stuff that’s out there now like high gas prices. It took about \$10-\$15 to kill your tank, now it takes about a good \$50. So yeah it’s been a while.” Keisha echoes the concept that the 1990s was an easier time, almost in a nostalgic way, “Like, I could say the 90s. The 90s it was jobs like the beginning of the 2000s. It seems like 2005 is when there was a shutout. A shutout of jobs. There aren’t really anymore jobs out here.”

Six participants suggest that Cleveland’s economy was thriving in 2000-2007. Chloe specifically mentions Lebron James’s (the basketball star who took his talents to South Beach, Florida) exit from Cleveland as having a detrimental effect, because he brought money into the city, “I know that Lebron James brought a lot of money into Cleveland. When he came to Cleveland and played for the Cavs, and now that he’s took his talents to South Beach...I know a lot of money like he took a lot of money with him because there were a lot of investors a lot more things going on downtown that was attracting people to Cleveland.” However, this is limited to investment and endorsement deals and not to employment opportunities for the average Clevelander. She uses him as an indicator of how Cleveland is performing on a national scale. Additionally, Karen mentions having prior success finding employment opportunities throughout her

experience with Cleveland, which is the main reason she chooses for moving back to Cleveland.

Cleveland's Reincarnation

The phrase "Cleveland's reincarnation" takes on varying meanings for the participants in this study. Nine of the twenty-five participants say they see no evidence that Cleveland is doing anything to revitalize itself. One participant says she is unsure. The other fifteen provide varied responses as to what actions Cleveland might be taking to revitalize itself, including no action, or in trying to fix up the city. Patrice feels that Cleveland is doing nothing to better the current economic and underemployment situations and the effects of the recession on residents:

Patrice: I actually feel like they're getting harder, um, rougher on us then getting easier. There's nothing people are doing to you know to push you. We do have these programs like this one, but that's all it is. I didn't have someone tell me about I would have never knew. This is my opinion that they're wanting us to adapt to the recession life, and a lot of us take this as all we can do, we're doing the best that we can do, but we feel belittled in so many ways.

From Patrice's perspective, the city of Cleveland has merged with the county run program in which she participates. Legitimately, both are agents and divisions of the government; however, Patrice's assertion that both the city and the county want everyone to adapt to recession life is hard to back up with concrete evidence, which she does not provide. Patrice's perspective is evidence of her specific situation, but I am reluctant to draw conclusions to the greater population from it.

Multiple participants suggest the casino measure on from the 2010 ballot would revitalize the Cleveland area. Of course, the measure is controversial for Clevelanders, including the participants. Participants who mention the casino included the drawbacks to developing a casino, specifically mentioning increases in crime. While many see the casino as a benefit, Keisha specifically sees the benefits of a casino, “I think that like when they finish the Casino it is going to be like more jobs out there out here when they finish the Casino. And then there would be more jobs out here in Cleveland.” However, Diamond mentions that though the casino could bring employment opportunities, she is opposed to the development of a casino in Cleveland, “Cuz they have this great idea, ok we’ll put a casino downtown that will bring in more jobs you know maybe that will make it a little bit better, but then the crime would go up. Because with a casino downtown and people doing what they’re doing now, it’s only going to get worse.” Diamond is particularly concerned with the rise of crime that is typically associated with casinos such as theft, armed robbery, and assault.

In addition to the casino, Shawntae mentions that Cleveland had built a detention center, which afforded some employment opportunities. She is, however, unsure of whom the detention center was to hold, where it is specifically located, and whether it is publicly or privately owned. Essentially, it appears to be a rumor, or something Cleveland is not emphasizing as positive for city growth. Other interviewees do not mention the detention center and I was unable to determine which she is specifically referring. Sherrie suggests East Cleveland is encouraging the development of the educational system. She specifically refers to a “higher level of education”, which should not be confused with more opportunities for individuals to obtain higher education, but instead to raise the

standards of the educational system. Sherrie notes the development in the educational system was very slow.

Lisa 22 includes the stadiums as one of the possible ways in which Cleveland is revitalizing itself, “A little bit, yeah they fixing it. Browns’ stadium, they doing a little bit where they changed the name. The Indians’ is now Progressive Field so um, they change. I used to work at the Browns’ stadium.” However, Lisa 22 is unable to discuss the long-term effects of stadiums on cities. She briefly mentions she used to work at the Browns stadium, and later in her interview laments that it was boring because there was nothing to do, but mentions nothing about the work being seasonal and temporary, which as mentioned in the literature review would be consistent with academic research on stadiums. The temporary nature of this work would have left her in the same situation as many of other participants who have temporary or seasonal work, leaving them without work for months at a time and unable to collect unemployment benefits. However, there appears to be a connection between “new” and growth, which is not always the case in the long run, as seen through Lisa 22’s experience with the Cleveland Browns’ stadium.

Leda draws attention to the use of wind energy in the greater Cleveland area. She specifically mentions a local electric company, which is increasing their number of hires due directly to their wind energy program, “A little bit with XX [local electric company] they got their wind thing so I think they are starting to hire more people, but not too many.” Tasha echoes the importance of the green economy and clean energy. However, she is vague as to how Cleveland is doing this or which companies were assisting with the development of new technologies.

In addition, to the clean energy efforts, one participant, Karen, has an interest in urban farming. Being unemployed, she has thrown herself into the field even lecturing on the benefits of urban farming to local students. Karen believes that urban gardens and farms are the future and a possible solution to the foreclosure crisis:

Karen: All these urban farms, um, urban gardens that are sprouting up all over the city [are examples of Cleveland's reincarnation]. Ohio State has a really good urban development programs where they do I want to say a 12 week course, I want to say, it 3 months, where they actually teach people to redevelop unused land so abandoned property, foreclosed, redeveloped those into farming areas or pocket gardens or pocket playgrounds just really redeveloping those different areas, and you see it a lot. Slavic Village is one of the most shining examples of that because not only have those programs for pocket parks, pocket gardens, but they also have a lot of neighborhood programs that do things like, little things like go to abandon houses that are boarded up and paint flowers where the windows would be. You know make sure there are no broke windows, makes sure they cleanup derby, just in general having um, I would like to say a reinvestment into the little neighborhood and so to me that is where as a state and a city Ohio started as a agricultural state. I think that is what we'll end up getting back to.

Karen specifically mentions Slavic Village, which was the initial location of Cleveland's foreclosure crisis with a large number of vacant lots. However, Karen's project is still

very new at the time of the interview, and it is impossible to determine the impact and outcomes of her attempts to engage the community.

Olivia suggests that Cleveland is improving its infrastructure, a perception contrary to austerity measures being taken by the majority of the country, including Ohio and the Cleveland area. However, Olivia's perspective reinforces the individualist perspectives presented. Additionally, given the localized areas she is referring to, she does articulate what she is seeing in her neighborhood:

Olivia: I mean, they say they are trying to fix stuff up. I see that as what they are doing with the streets. I don't see them tearing down any of the buildings. You know what I mean. It is very simple to tear down a building you don't have to build something else on there. Just have a space just clean. It looks 10 times better than to have a place or a home that is broken down that can be used for anything. Going in there with drug user or stuff with little kids in abandoned buildings you can't stop people from doing crimes in them. It just an open mind what someone going to try to do there.

Olivia prefers the city of Cleveland's response to the foreclosure crisis and drug crisis in the city limits than other cities. The city of Cleveland tears down abandoned buildings that have been foreclosed on, some of which are used as drug house. This leaves vacant lots instead of vacant buildings, where illegal or socially undesirable activities could take place, a concern for Olivia.

Work and Cleveland

Perceptions of work and Cleveland vary greatly depending on the interviewee.

Largely, the participants view employment opportunities in Cleveland to be very limited, though at times the subjects have difficulty articulating which fields of employment are limited, but instead articulate an overwhelming sense of difficulty in finding any employment. Also, the participants perceive limitations in employment, which may not actually exist. For example, as previously mentioned, idealized factory jobs of a once great steel town still permeate culture. Participants cite the medical/health field, factory employment, and service employment as the fields where employment in Cleveland is limited. The jobs presented as limited to the Cleveland area are often perceived as lacking benefits and protections for employees, though this cannot be corroborated in this study. Additionally, many of the participants expressed a desire to leave Cleveland and relocate for employment opportunities outside of the Cleveland area.

Opportunities in Cleveland

The employment opportunities presented by the participants focus heavily on the service industry. Additionally, several participants do not provide an answer to which fields they thought employment was limited to in Cleveland. There is also a complication in discussing the fields of employment when participants are limited to and tracked into specific fields (Collins & Mayer, 2010). The participants in this study are limited to specific fields to begin with because they have limited education and skills.

Four participants view the health industry as a growing industry where employment opportunities exist in the Cleveland area. They are vague in their descriptions of the employment within the health field, with the notable exception of the position of STNA [State Tested Nursing Assistants]. Lauren immediately mentions STNA positions and then digressed into the overall lack of employment opportunities,

“It’s like a lot people here do the STNA jobs. You know, I’m not really used to seeing a lot of that. They don’t seem to have a lot of jobs here. A lot of things seem to be closing, people losing jobs, unless you go far, far away from here. Then there are jobs. I’m like ok, I can go here and apply for a job, but it’s not like that here.” This is of particular note because STNA programs are frequently associated with for-profit colleges. Additionally, Cleveland has strong employers within the Cleveland Clinic and University Hospitals. The perception that these jobs are prolific results in an oversaturation of the labor market. This results in participants with degrees and certificates they are unable to use as well as debt. This is not a new development as corroborated by Julie Bettie’s study on low-income students (Bettie, 2003). Lauren observes that many places of employment or potential places of employment are closing, though the discussion remained in the abstract. Additionally, Cleveland has a strong medical field for physicians and nurses, but the market for support staff appears to be oversaturated based on participants’ discussions.

Patrice specifically mentions the Cleveland Clinic and other medical centers as the driving source of employment in the Cleveland area. Patrice provides an example of the changes to working in the medical field in Cleveland. She hints at the oversaturation of people in these positions because of for profit schools offering associate degrees:

Patrice: The Clinic and hospitals [have employment opportunities]. I feel they are the biggest jobs; sometimes they just don’t look at young adults unless you’ve been in this field forever. I’ll put an example out there. I went to Remington, for medical assistant. And the hours pay the um, loan, but I got no job, the reason for that is every job I contact I don’t have

enough experience, and I feel that I went to school for the experience and I did the externship, ain't that the experience? I can't be a medical assistant because I don't have the experience. 12 years because back in the day there was more help than there is today, back in the day they probably could have done it for free or probably not it was cheaper, so it makes it hard to even go to school when you don't have funds for it. But the medical field is the biggest field out here I feel.

Patrice discusses her lack of experience, which is a hindrance in her attempts to find that form of employment. The need for experience is explicitly mentioned by Shawntae as well, being referenced to as a deterrent to gaining employment. Essentially, Shawntae cannot break into the field with her degree alone.

Service industry employment is seen as employment opportunities specific to Cleveland; however, the opportunities are divided into fast food/food service and retail. Three participants mention the fast food industry specifically. Traditionally, high turnover in the fast-food industry meant individuals could obtain and leave jobs at will and quickly without lengthy unemployment. However, in the current economy this has become more difficult. Diamond shares the challenges of finding employment in the fast food industry with only a high school diploma:

Diamond: It's almost harder to get a job at fast food restaurant with just a high school diploma. Cuz you used to be able to, a high school diploma used to be able to take you a little bit further than it does now. Now a high school diploma is just something that says you graduated from high

school. It's almost nothing if you don't go to college and continue your education.

This is echoed by Karen, who is particularly overqualified for positions in the service industry because of her two Master's degrees. Retail work is also classified as service work because those employed in this sector are performing services for customers. Chloe emphasizes that Cleveland has a large amount of retail work, but she continues to discuss factory work in Cleveland as abundant, though with anecdotal evidence only.

Cleveland has a history of industrial/factory work; however this has largely dropped off with the international trade agreements between the United States and the international community. The history of factory jobs in Cleveland has left the perception that there are readily available employment opportunities, and these jobs are considered better because of union protections and benefits. Sherrie provides an explanation of how she views factory opportunities, and compares the opportunities in Cleveland and Columbus:

Sherrie: They're limited factories. That's where my work areas is. Um, to make a comparison. Columbus manufacturing has more/bigger manufacturing and the equipment they use is more computerize and conveyor belts. They are much faster pace and the demand is high. Because it is Victoria Secret, Banana Republic, like is, bigger, high-end retail. Here in Cleveland there are more factories. Like you know, machinist and welding. You know it is a totally different you know.

However, Ivory demonstrates an understanding of factory employment in Cleveland. She mentions that factory jobs are decreasing because people are being replaced by

machinery, “I believe that a lot of factory work is getting cut down because machines is taking over those jobs. And I feel that we have office firms or like office workers are coming more. Stepping up over factory work.” Ivory is unable to describe the kind of office work that is replacing the factory work or whether this work is merely a necessary evolution when factory work is no longer available.

Opportunities outside of Cleveland

Many of the participants in this study desire to leave Cleveland. They emphasize the lack of employment opportunities and poor weather as reasons to leave, but when pressed as to why the locations they selected would be better than Cleveland, the participants have difficulty explaining. Many of the participants have not left Ohio at all or if they had, only briefly. Those who have left felt that the chances of finding employment outside of Cleveland is greater than inside Cleveland and many thought outside of Ohio is more promising than within the state. Sixteen of the twenty-five participants specifically mention greater employment opportunities outside of Cleveland.

Table 4 illustrates the break down in locations cited.

Table 4: Desired Location

Location	Number	Percentage
California	2	8.0
Florida	1	4.0
Georgia (Atlanta)	5	20.0
Illinois (Chicago)	1	4.0
Maryland/District of Columbia	2	8.0
New York	1	4.0
South Carolina	2	8.0
Tennessee (Memphis)	1	4.0
Texas (Dallas)	2	4.0
Anywhere	2	8.0
Within Ohio	3	12.0
Akron	1	4.0
Columbus	1	4.0

Toledo	1	4.0
Total	25	

Table 4 presents the percentage of participants who would opt to leave the Cleveland area to seek employment opportunities outside of Cleveland broken down by location. n=25. Some participants provide multiple options outside of Cleveland.

Notably, 20% of those who believe leaving Cleveland provides better chances of employment also believe that Atlanta, GA would offer the greatest opportunities.

However, only Tonya could provide a specific reason as to why she selects Atlanta, “I heard they got a lot of job opportunities down south like Atlanta. Yeah, I heard cuz my brother’s ex-girlfriend just moved down there. She got a job...I think she’s cosmetology, doing hair.” However, others imply places like Atlanta were friendlier to African American populations than Cleveland, and Atlanta is considered a place where African Americans can do well financially. This is echoed in selections such as Chicago, Il. and California. Also, interestingly, Tonya’s reason for choosing Atlanta is not specific to Atlanta as a location, but due to the perception of available service jobs. Candace also opts for Georgia because of the luck a cousin and friend had in obtaining employment after relocation, “I know Georgia like my friend she got a job when she moved down there. Also a cousin of mine moved down there for a job.” There is not a specific reference to a field of employment or why employment could be assumed.

Echoing Candace, Patrice believes she would have a better chance obtaining employment in South Carolina because she has family members who were successful, “Well, not really, but I was more thinking of going to South Carolina. Only because I have relatives there who say that’s its more better, and I hear a lot of people from out of town come here and say it’s better somewhere else than when they come here it fell off.” Patrice also provides a little information as to why people are attracted to Cleveland because of phantom employment, which disappeared after an influx of residents. This

phantom employment refers to factory employment and employment through the hospitals, both the Cleveland Clinic and University Hospitals. However, there is little information to corroborate this.

Lauren, who hails from the Maryland/District of Columbia metro area, wants to move back to that area because she believes it would be easier to find government employment. Lauren argues that she would quickly obtain employment in the DC metro area, “Government jobs. I would just say any jobs. It’s really not a lot here. Their cost of living is much lower. Jobs don’t really pay as much as I thought they would.” Lauren, like Tonya and Candace, choose a location based on the perceived employment opportunities available. Lauren perceives government jobs to be better, more desirable, with more open employment opportunities. However, she does not qualify why the government jobs are more desirable, but my assumption is because of the benefits and security implied by government employment.

Other participants do not select their locations based entirely on the potential employment opportunities. Lisa 2, who works in the school districts in the Cleveland area, had researched Memphis, TN. Lisa 2 wrestles with her current seasonal employment, but highly values the educational system offered in a place like Memphis versus Cleveland:

Lisa 2: I actually thought about moving to um Memphis Tennessee. I really thought about it. I looked up their school systems. It’s alright, it’s a lot better than Cleveland’s. I really have been thinking about it relocating and not just Akron, Canton, Columbus, Cincinnati, but out of state. Because I’ve been lookin’ for jobs since like January while I’m still at

work. And the kind of work I do. I'm a 10 month employee, the summer it's, um, no money. So that's why I'm here trying to find me a part time so that next school year if I don't get laid off I can have that.

Lisa 2 demonstrates more research and a well thought out response to this question because she has already performed the research necessary, instead of how many of the participants interpret the question as a fantasy question. However, Lisa 2 is not fully prepared to relocate at the time of our interview.

Seven provides an interesting reasoning for her desire to relocate to Dallas/Carrollton, Texas. Seven has lived in Texas in between to stints in Cleveland. Seven points out her experience with the educational system in Texas as being inferior to that of Cleveland, but she notes that employment was easier to obtain and the burden of taxation is less in Texas:

Seven: Dallas, Texas, and some little cities outside of Dallas, like Carrollton, Texas. I lived in Carrollton Texas, and it was a lot easier to find a job for me and my mother, and on top of that they don't pay state taxes out there, they just pay federal taxes. You get more in your check and their minimum wage is lower than ours, but you still get more very week or 2 weeks. Them not paying state taxes, so you go to the store and whatever you buy you pay an 8% tax.

KO: Can I ask about infrastructure and public assistance in Texas?

Seven: Um, I'm not really sure; I've never been on it, you know. It's not, as long as you have skills, even if it's just braiding hair or something. It's not that hard to live in Texas.

Upon further investigation, Seven is unable to discuss the public assistance programs in the state of Texas. This echoes information provided by other participants on the challenges in understanding the connection between paying taxes into the public assistance system and receiving benefits from it. Seven benefits from public assistance, but does not want to contribute it to the system by paying taxes. However, Seven argues that it is easier to make a living in Texas with limited skills, implying that employment opportunities available in Cleveland require some sort of skills.

Finally, some participants believe the employment opportunities anywhere are superior to Cleveland. Keisha and Aspen Rose both believe that the employment opportunities outside of Cleveland are easier to obtain. Neither could provide specific reasons for this. The interview with Aspen Rose presents a woman who had very little hope that her situation would improve. To summarize, for three years, Aspen and her husband are out of work; she quit her job so the family would qualify for state medical coverage, because their place of employment does not offer health insurance, and he stops working due to illness. He has been denied for disability at the time of the interview, and they are appealing the decision. Aspen's desire to leave Cleveland stems from a feeling of helplessness, which she has trouble articulating. She does, however, finish out the discussion on leaving Cleveland without providing a location to relocate, because she fears starting over in a new place without a support system, "I'd be up to move, but I'm more scared of going somewhere I don't know anyone."

The findings for Cleveland and the participants' relationship to Cleveland are simplistic in some aspects. As demonstrated in a later chapter, while the participants do not feel very many ties to Cleveland, those who are informed about labor issues such as

Ohio Senate Bill 5, were opposed to the measure, which would strip laborers of rights. During our conversations, Cleveland seems to serve as a representation of the difficulties and challenges each participant was facing.

Chapter 4: Findings, Views on Employment

The questions from this section of the interview are developed to understand the participants' work history, aspirations, and familial work history. It is important to understand how the participants' work history influences their perspectives on work and employment aspirations. Likewise, understanding familial employment histories may provide a context the participants' perceptions of employment. The questions focusing on employment include questions about the familial relationship with employment, how long the participants have been part of the workforce, whether retirement is an option for participants, and what is the participants' ideal employment. Answers about the most recent forms of employment falls largely into two distinct categories: service work and non-service work. Though many of the participants could not see the similarities in housekeeping, food service, and retail work, all three of these as included in the term service work (Collins & Mayer, 2010; Goldsmith & Blakey, 2010; Wilson, 1996). These positions contain service aspects performed by the employee to the customer with an emphasis on customer service.

Parents' Work

The participants share their parents' relationships to employment throughout the course of our conversations. These positions are varied and diverse. Three participants cite deceased parents, two absent fathers, one professional thief, and two parents relying

solely on public assistance. The public assistance the participants refer to is cash assistance; they do not include food stamps or any other assistance as previously mentioned when discussing the construction of socio economic status. The employment of parents fit into several categories: manual/physical labor, service work, professional administrative, governmental, and other.

Parental employment falls into categories of employment that were classified as manual/physical labor includes factory work, mechanic labor, home repair, landscaping, and truck driving, totaling thirteen positions. My category “service work” encompasses customer service, housekeeping, care giving, retail, and food service work, totaling thirteen positions. The professional and administrative category includes administrative work and teaching, totaling six positions, and the governmental category included government, military, contractor, and other public employment including transportation, totaling five positions. The other category includes one missionary and one bail bondsman. Generally, the participants are brief in describing the employment histories of their parents; perhaps citing the specific locations of employment such as a specific fast food chain or a specific hospital, but they did not describe in detail what the specific job entailed. Below are a few detailed descriptions.

Diamond shares that her mother works for a community college as an administrative assistant. Diamond expresses the desire to have similar employment. Keisha describes her father’s employment as a bus driver and her mother’s employment in a mattress factory, “My father drived a bus. A Cleveland school bus and my mother made mattresses... They been workin’ at their jobs for maybe 35 years. My father had

been driving the bus for 35 years; my mother had been makin' beds for 25." She is proud that her parents had been employed for between 25 and 35 years.

Olivia describes her mother's employment as a civilian contractor, "She's [mom] a civilian contractor. She works for the military; she's over in Iraq right now." Olivia describes her mother's employment and the relocating often associated with it as difficult at times; Olivia is residing in Cleveland because her mother was sent back overseas. Lisa 2 uses the opportunity to discuss her parents' employment to demonstrate the work ethic instilled in her from her parents, "Ever sense I was little my mom and dad worked. She was a dietary aid like ever since I can remember. She'd get up at 11 in the morning and go to work and come home at 7 and cook and do it all over again everyday." It is notable that the discussion of work ethic becomes complicated because the level of difficulty individuals contend with would challenge them in ways others may not have been. Thus drawing into question discussions of work ethic as a quantifiable issue. Lisa 2 shares her parents' responsibility in developing her sense of appropriate work behavior and responsibilities. Of course it should be noted that this depiction of appropriate work is based largely on the traditional notions of good employment. People are supposed to work and have regular routines from Lisa 2's perspective.

Sherrie shares that her mother is a missionary working within her community, but Sherrie's mother does not hold a traditional 9 to 5 job, "My mother, um, she was a member of a church. She became a missionary. She did a lot for her community at the time so she didn't have a 9 to 5 job. She just worked through the church." This is relevant to demonstrate the varying kinds of employment held by the participants' parents. Chloe's mother works for, and then as, a bails bondsperson:

Chloe: My mother, she always did like customer services type of work, but she was in the bail bonds industry for so long. She used to work for XX Bail Bonds. She opened up the first company in Birmingham. Um, she just did it by going to the library and researching it. My mother has no degree, but she just went to the library and researched it. Researched the law, took the tests, got approved by the government, the state, but unfortunately XX has some controversy within his office in Cleveland so they made her come back down and to watch her. My mother is 53 so to watch her struggle again all over again is just hard to see that. Because she used to have her own office so the interviewing process is different to her. Resume is different to her having 9 to 5 is different to her. Because bail bonds is 24 hours. It's fast money it's not a guaranteed paycheck. So having a paycheck is different to her now. My mother used to make like what 80 thousand in a year, and now she's back to maybe half of that maybe 45 so it's different to see her struggle at 53. When you should be retiring you know. All that hard to see her work for nothing.

Chloe's mother's experience with fast money and then to have a challenging situation develop is understandably difficult. Chloe provides a detailed account of her mother's position in the company and how it changed over the duration of her career peaking and then adapting to the difficult economic situation.

Two participants acknowledge that one parent was receiving public assistance during their childhood at some point as their sole source of income. Lisa 22's mother receives social security and her father is deceased, "While my mother is on social

security, cuz she's got a bad back. So she can't work, and she's been on that for 4 years, 5 years now. And my dad he's deceased so." Lisa 22 shares little else surrounding her mother's social security, whether their family participated in any other public assistance programs, or the context of which her mother qualified for social security. This can be attributed to the lack of sharing of financial information within families.

Patrice also mentions that her father was deceased and that she does not view her mother as a role model:

Patrice: My dad is deceased; he passed away when I was 14 years old. My mom is a not like my role model, she's not. I understood a lot and at the time I felt like my mom could have worked and she didn't. Some people settle with public assistance, they ok with it. And I figure she was that type of person, she did have 7 kids, and she raised all of us, but as long as I live, my mother never had a job I knew about, except one. I was real young, still shared a bedroom, so that was a long time ago. One job and she was there for 2 months. I don't know why she choice to adapt to this, I'm not adapting. My thing is I'll die trying to get to the point where I'm comfortable in my life. I want my children to be comfortable. I didn't want to bring childrens up in the world if they have to suffer like I did. I'm 25 years old, I should be out experiencing life as a young adult and do all things. I experienced like the hard way. The very hard way. It's hard for me everyday, I struggle everyday.

Patrice shares her mother's story as the anti-appropriate behavior. Patrice acknowledges that her mother had one job the entire time Patrice lived with her; Patrice also states that

her mother assimilated to life on public assistance, which Patrice views a decision that her mother made. This is echoed in the depictions of the “welfare mother” that rose in recognition in the 1980s and 1990s (Collins & Mayer, 2010; Hayes, 2003).

The descriptions of parental employment are limited because of the lack of information the participants had on the topic. Additionally, these questions come toward the beginning of the interviews, which could have impacted the level of openness the participants have while sharing their experiences and understanding. The feelings of pride and shame that are expressed by participants in respect to their parents’ employment provide clarity on the perceptions of the participants about acceptable employment. There is only one participant who clearly depicts her mother as not working at all, however, she does note that her mother had job briefly, but her mother refused to work for very long.

Perspectives on service work (food, housekeeping, retail)

The majority of the employment described by the participants center on the service industry. Below the perspectives on the service industry are broken down by most recent job, first job, favorite job, and least favorite job. Overwhelmingly, the positions discuss in most recent job and first job are reflective of service work. Many women are tracked into service positions through workfare programs (Collins & Mayer, 2010; Hayes, 2003). A few participants discuss lacking any formal work experience, but citing volunteer experience as their only form of experience. Additionally, there is little discussion of vocational programs through schools. Bettie (2003) discusses the benefits and shortcomings of vocational tracking within high schools. Bettie views vocational tracks as a way to separate students and literally track poor students into specific career tracks, specifically hair styling and food service are tracks Bettie describes. Alynn, for

example, went through a vocational high school for food services, “Well for one when I went to high school I was in vocational food services. Then I took that skill and started putting applications in where I feels at. Then I worked in them jobs for like 5 or 4 years. 3 years. Now you know um, it is hard to find them jobs hard to find them jobs out there. I haven’t worked in a while.” Unfortunately, obtaining employment in the recession economy with her vocational training is a challenge. Shawntae shares that she has traditionally sought employment in housekeeping, which is not what she wants to make a career out of, but what she continues to look for as a position because she views it as a stable position and something she can continue to do.

Most Recent Job

In order to gauge the kind of employment the participants are most familiar with, the participants are asked about their most recent employment. This largely consists of positions in the service industry. The service industry includes employment in retail stores, food service, housekeeping, and childcare. There are of course exceptions; Karen for example was employed in the marketing and branding of luxury items. Additionally, a few of the women interviewed lacks formal work experience; they only had volunteer experience and experience with informal domestic labor. Case mangers are not informed of informal domestic labor performed by participants in their own homes, but with the WORK Act of 2012 this may change. One participant shared that her most recent employment was as a volunteer with a church, where she performed kitchen and administrative duties. Another participant worked in a factory, though she did not share what kind or which one, and one participant worked in the shipping department of a factory. There are three participants who discuss their experience in sales, which is

actually with one company. Two participants went door-to-door soliciting, and the third made telemarketing calls. None of these participants are particularly satisfied with this line of work. Additionally, many of the participants report their experience tending to their own children and the children of friends and family as experience in childcare. This is in stark contrast to the requirements of TANF, which requires recipients work outside the home often performing childcare for others.

Four participants have experience with retail work; however, at times they would only say the name of the company and move to continue to the next interview question. Lauren, for example, shares that she worked at two different retail stores, which is very common given the low rate of pay and the quick turnover of employees for these companies (Collins & Mayer, 2010; Goldsmith & Blakely, 2010, Williams, 2006). Candace shares her experiences as an employee of a very large “big box” box retail chain, “I think they was a good company like if you want to go back to school they would help you. If something was going on and you needed money they’d let you get pay advancements. So they kind of really helped you.” Candace and Ivory both provide initial positive reviews of employment with this company, however these discussions quickly cease in both interviews upon discussion of why they left their positions with this corporation. Unfortunately, these discussions occurred during the lunch hour and were explored in the formal interview. Shay was employed with a discount furniture retail chain while she was pregnant in 2008, however her pregnancy was not her reason for leaving that position. Instead she cited scheduling issues, “There were scheduling issues, and I just wanted to finish school. Like I was going to XX [a for-profit college] for billing and coding, and um, I told my supervisor, I get out of school at four. It’s going to take me

time to get to the job, and they had me scheduled to come in at four.” Shay’s point of view is that her supervisor refused to work with her to accommodate her class schedule; however, perhaps she does not see the difference in perspective that her supervisor might have that it is not the company’s responsibility to ensure you can make classes. Shay does not elaborate on whether she had arranged a change in her availability with her supervisor before she enrolled in classes.

Food service positions held are similar to retail positions in that the participants often work more than one job, and in one case is a seasonal worker. Three participants share experiences in food services. Lisa 22 works as a seasonal food services job on a local university campus. She has had this job for three years, and she continues to work there. However, she only works for 10 months out of the year, and during the other 2 months she does not qualify for unemployment. Lisa 22 saw her employment as secure, “It’s nice I’ve been there for 3 years. So I wanna go back, but I really wanna move on to something else, but it’s nice.” However, Lisa 22 wants to pursue a different line of employment. Lisa 2 worked for a school district as a lunch attendant:

Lisa 2: I work for the XX School District. I’m a lunch attendant so basically I help prep student lunches and students snacks and help with just the flow of lunch period. Making sure that they got everything on their tray, educating them about nutrition, showing them the stars. You need three stars to eat whether that milk, an entrée, and an apple, or milk, entrée, and bread. Anything like its basically child nutrition.

Lisa 2 views her employment as educational as well as the traditional food preparation.

Angel had two positions: home health aid and in a fast food pancake chain. Angel briefly

described her responsibilities, “Well for XX, I cooked, stocked food, and different things, washed dishes and put dishes up. Um, for the home health aid, I went to the grocery store for my client, gave medical, cleaned, cooked, and washed.” Angel is the only participant who recently worked as a home health aid, although several participants seek positions as home health aids viewing these positions as well paying, and many have expressed interested in or already received degrees from for-profit colleges in this field.

Largely, participants who work in the medical field worked in a housekeeping capacity as in the example of Angel. Six participants have varying forms of housekeeping positions. These include housekeeping in hotels, janitorial positions, and in house domestics. Keisha did laundry for an assisted living facility. Patrice had a janitorial position, which transitioned into more, “I was doing a little bit of everything. The original position was janitorial, but I found myself filing papers, shredding papers, mopping, basically cleaning, anything they needed me to do, I basically kept the place together.” Patrice sees this position as transitional to obtain more responsibilities within the company. Shawntae worked for a cleaning company, which focused on specialized in cleaning daycares; she is particularly fond of working independently of others. Aspen also worked for a cleaning company; she enjoys the work and associated it with the duties she performs for free at home. Aspen’s likening housekeeping to the work she performs within her home is fairly consistent with other studies on women receiving public assistance (Collins & Mayer, 2010; Hayes, 2003).

Olivia cites childcare as her most recent employment as well because she had been fired from her place of employ while pregnant and ill. Olivia does not however cite her pregnancy as the reason for her dismissal, “2007. I was doing childcare. I was

pregnant so I had a job before that, but I ended up getting fired because I got sick. I was pregnant and sick, sick, sick in the hospital at the time. So I got fired, then I got the job doing childcare, then I had my kids so I quit. I'd be going to school or whatever. Because I haven't really had a job." After her dismissal, she continued to work in childcare. For Olivia, there is a disconnection between her pregnancy and her dismissal. Olivia does not provide information about the length of her employment in this position or whether she would have been covered by the Family Medical Leave Act, 1993 or the Pregnancy Discrimination Act.

Ivory discusses her most recent employment not as employment at all but instead as volunteer work. It less than a year from August 2010 to March 2011; for this church she performed administrative work and a little work in their kitchen, "Well, actually it wasn't a paid job it was like a volunteer job and I worked there from...And it was pretty nice. I did some of the secretarial work and I worked in their kitchen. And they also sent me out to different places, to help other agencies out with some things. It was pretty good I like it." Ivory enjoyed this position, but obviously could not stay in this position for a lengthy period time because it was unpaid. This inclusion of volunteer work as employment was initially surprising, but not inconsistent with other findings (Collins & Mayer, 2010; Hayes, 2003). Many workfare programs encourage the participants to include volunteer work as employment on their resumes. TANF eligibility can include unpaid work or subsidized work. However, in this case Ivory and other participants are encouraged to include unwaged labor as work history to build their resumes.

The sales and solicitation positions warrant brief discussion. Alynn, Chloe, and Seven, all held positions with a specific company; none of these participants enjoyed

these positions for notable reasons. Alynn was attempting sales for the first time and looking for a different form of labor than she was accustomed to, and of course it was a job. With employment opportunities lacking she thought she would try something different. Seven describes the work as heavily focused on customer service, but noted that customer service was in a different department. She also describes the work as boring:

Seven: I worked at XX, which is selling XX. We don't go door to door, we sit in an office; it's a call center so it's like customer service, because we don't call it...

KO: Telemarketing?

Seven: Yeah, telemarketing. I mean they have customer service too, but that people who have been there in sales so yeah; I was just a sales rep.

Seven also took the position because she needed employment, but she did not stay because she was disinterested in the work. Additionally, she alludes to challenges with management having a negative impact on her work there. Chloe articulates in a clearer way when she shares her experience with the same company by specifically referencing managerial problems. However, she was not performing telemarketing instead she went door-to-door:

Chloe: Yes it was XX. And I quit cuz I didn't like the structure. It was really unprofessional and it seemed all broke and I was just getting a job because I was so anxious just to find something and then their call centers are so quick to get into, but even though I need a job there was too much

to handle. It was too unprofessional. Seemed like they didn't have no structure like they make the rules as they came. One of them type of jobs.

In addition to the trouble with the structure of this company, Chloe shares a personal experience with sexual discrimination from a potential client where she was soliciting sales for a position, which she mistook as racism at first only upon his clarification that his issues with her were not racial, but instead because she is female. He is clear because she was a woman she is not welcome in his store. Chloe describes the store owner as a white man, which is why she mistook his disgust at having her in his store as racism until he clarified women were not welcome to shop there. Chloe describes being shocked and made the decision not to confront the owner, but instead she exited quickly. This speaks directly to the complexities of intersectionality in daily experience. Based on her experience, Chloe assumes the discrimination is based on her race only to be surprised that it is her gender that was found offensive by the storeowner. It is the intersection of Chloe's race, class, and gender that determine how she is perceived by the storeowner and influences how she understands the situation.

First Job

The participants are asked about their first employment opportunities, and similar to their most recent employment, service employment is common. Eleven participants state their employment history in food service ranging from fast food workers to dietary workers in hospitals. Additionally, two participants are retail workers, and two participants are housekeeping/janitorial workers. The participants' first employment opportunities also include two administrative positions, one paper delivery person, one military servicewoman, and an internship. Once again participants indicate that

participants worked multiple jobs at a time. The paper delivery job was a part-time job as a child, delivering papers while her mother worked for the small local Cleveland newspaper. As shown in Table 1, the participants began working as young as 8 years old with a parent to having never been formally employed. However, most participants went to work in their late teens.

The food service employment is largely traditional low wage food handling. Most of the participants work for fast food chains, and frequently the participants switch between various chains. Lauren discusses working for a chicken fast food restaurant and then a department retailer. She began working because she had a child at 15:

Lauren: I had a child at 15. So that was my...I didn't want my mother to do anything for me. So when I couldn't go back to school because I went to regular school, but then I went to attend parenting school um, and I just didn't want my mother to do nothing for me. Nope, this is my child and you don't have to do nothing. That's why I got a job. She didn't even know I applied. I came home and said I got a job, she went you got a job, what you need a job for I told you. No I got a job. How you going to? I'm not going to school. Do this and go to work and everything is fine. Ever since I've had a job.

This sentiment of the desire for independence is echoed by several of the participants when asked why they joined the workforce in their teens, and is not limited to the food service industry or having a child in their teens. The desire for independence for Keisha is a desire to have expendable income when her mother refused to continue paying for Keisha's interests and time with friends, which appears to be very common. Keisha took

a job with a burger fast food chain and remained there for 10 years. In contrast, most of the participants view these jobs as temporary, and are quick to quit in the hopes of something better. Of course this changes during the 2008 Recession. Previously, an individual could quit a job and immediately find a new one.

Aspen opts for employment because her mother encouraged her to seek employment:

Aspen: I worked at XX [burger fast food chain]. My mother made me. Yeah. Me and my twin. We started working. Back then you needed a work permit...I started working at XX [burger fast food chain] at 15, after school, on the weekends, early in the morning. And from then on I worked fast food, XX [another burger fast food chain], XX [chicken fast food chain], by the time I worked at XX [the chicken fast food chain], though I was an adult and I had two children. And that was when I had my own place. My mom had passed on by then. That was for me. But when I was 15 years old that money was coming into the house. We paid bills...I got the job. I was able to go on the bus it was more freedom not that the money was free, but it was more freedom.

Aspen contributes to the collective within her home until she lived on her own. This is echoed by Patrice, except her mother has not instructed her to obtain employment, but because of financial restraints she feels she have to find employment anyway, “When I got by first job I was 15 ...Um, I felt like I liked nice things, I liked the shoes a lot of my friends’ parents was buying for them. My mother wasn’t going to do that. You know, so I felt like if I get a job, um, you know, it would not only help around the house, but I could

get whatever, I want, whatever, I need.” Patrice feels that she needs to obtain employment if she wants to purchase things and contribute to her household.

Lisa 22 views her employment as seasonal, being able to easily accommodate her school schedule while working, “It was just something to do in the summer when I wasn’t in school and then when I pretty much got to high school I started working at XX [a grocery chain]. I worked in the bakery. That was more like part-time just because when I got to high school I didn’t have that many classes. I get out at 2 o’clock and I go to work from 4 and get out at 9 and still have that 5 hours a day.” Lisa 22 does not articulate any drawbacks to this position while she was in school.

Tonya briefly describes her housekeeping work and her displeasure with it, “Housekeeping at a hotel, it was pretty ok. It’s all that bending, and you had to be done with the rooms by a certain time. [The physical labor] It was hard.” This is notable because it was echoed by most of the participants about housekeeping work, that it is physically demanding regardless of their age. This is a common complaint and concern surrounding housekeeping labor from the participants.

Chloe and Sherrie began working in administrative positions. Chloe worked with her mother in a bail bonds office as a receptionist. Sherrie’s first employment was doing payroll for a neighborhood police station in New Jersey. Monique describes her internship as an attempt to teach her and the other interns a variety of skills interestingly: the skills all appear to be limited to the service industry, “First they was teaching us a lot of different things, car washes, they had us doing cash washes, giving, making food, and whatever, then selling the food, and the car wash, then we was playing, it was just like.”

Monique enjoys this position and feels that it provided her with the necessary experience to obtain another position.

Olivia's employment opportunity comes by way of the military; she joins the Air Force after she graduated high school:

Olivia: I went to the military. That was ok. But at that time I wasn't mature enough. I didn't want to listen to no body. You know when I was starting to listen to people there was a whole bunch of problems I was already involved too head hard to just you know sit back and you know there is a lot of benefits to this if you sit back and take it sometimes. I would just like no I don't take nothing from nobody. I was like I'm out of here.

KO: Can I ask why you enlisted?

Olivia: I don't know. Um, I went and talked to a recruiter and it just seemed like something that was interesting to me, and I enjoyed it. I enjoyed it. Back on it. I wish I would have stayed in, I wish I would have been more willing to change and do things differently because things would have been a lot different.

Olivia could not provide a specific reason for enlisting, but is adamant about enjoying her time there after the fact. She continues to express regret over leaving but mentions she felt too immature at the time indicates she feels she would have benefited from staying in military service.

As mentioned, the participants do not see the full picture of service work or the limitations within their employment positions. The idea of being able to transfer from one job to another at any time was perfectly reasonable until the 2008 recession.

Favorite Job

I was curious as to the kind of work desired by the participants; I wanted to see which forms of employment were the most desirable, why, and what steps (if any) were being taken to obtain these forms of employment again. The participants' favorite employment opportunities were more varied than their first employment and most recent employment, however the service industry was still overwhelmingly present with ten participants citing service positions as their favorite. Five participants named retail positions as their favorite employment; three participants cited caregiving positions. An additional three cited food service positions as their favorite, but not necessarily the fast food industry. Two participants cited administrative positions as their favorite position, and then two participants cited manual labor as their favorite. Additionally, one participant noted her favorite job required she perform a variety of responsibilities and duties.

The participants who cited retail positions as their favorite did not note anything about the management of the stores or benefits from working for the companies. Instead, they emphasized the interpersonal relationships, specific responsibilities, and that the jobs were entertaining. This is consistent with other studies of retail and low-income employment (Boushey, Fremstad, Gragg, & Waller, 2007; Krieger, Waterman, Hartman, Bates, Stoddard, Quinn, Sorensen, & Barbeau, 2006; Bettie, 2003). Lauren mentions she enjoyed the rate of pay she received from her favorite position; she also shares that she

enjoyed working with her co-workers. Aspen echoes the friendly atmosphere with her co-workers, describing it as a family, “It was just really fun and everybody here really got along; it was more of a family type atmosphere. It wasn’t weird. You know how some jobs can clique up.” Leda also enjoys working in retail because she was able to interact with people in the specific position she cited, “XX [major department store]. I don’t know [why] I think I was able to connect to a lot of different people there. I was good at it.” Leda also enjoys the position because she feels that she have the skills necessary to perform this work.

Olivia enjoys the retail position she had because she feels invested in the store, although that investment appears to be for her store alone not the corporation:

Olivia: Um, probably when I worked at XX [a clothing retail company for young people]. Well, we actually got to build the store, not build the store, but put it together completely. And then you got to work in it. It was a really friendly environment. You know the people who came in there were really friendly, and the people we worked with. People was really friendly, and laid back, and just to have pride in the fact that you were there from the beginning at the store and you put the store together and all this stuff.

That was probably the best job. Most favorite other than military.

Olivia feels that because she helps develop the store with her co-workers they are all invested together. Of course, as she mentions, Olivia feels that the retail position is her second favorite position. Chloe had a paid internship with a Chicago-based firm. Chloe’s degree is in retail management, and this position spoke directly to that. She enjoys the experience and the skills she obtains while there:

Chloe: XX [Chicago-based retail/fashion firm]. It was a paid internship in Chicago. So that was my favorite jobs. The visual displays, the table displays. Register, stock, planning events. And one thing I loved about my boss was he let me think on my own. It wasn't just instruction like move those shoes here. He would tweak it and make it a little bit better, but if I did something like it was up to you to budget for the supplies, you go get the supplies, you do what you like, you do the displays, you do the table displays, you help plan events so it is kind of free.

Chloe is one of the few participants that note interactions with a manager, and she views her manager in a positive light. Chloe is describing merchandising work in the fashion industry, which is her field of study for her bachelor's degree.

Participants who describes their favorite employment in the food industry does not mention a specific corporation or company that employed them. Instead, the participants focus on the security, potential for promotions, and personal relationships. Lisa 22 feels her employment, while seasonal, is secure. Additionally, she feels that she have a variety of changing duties that prevented boredom. Lisa 2 feels that have she stayed in her position she would have been promoted quickly, "XX [a local hospital]. That's why I say XX was my favorite job. If I stayed there most likely I would have been assistant dietary supervisor. There were just certain situations that prevented me from doing that. And if I knew then what I know now. I would have never did it." However, she alludes to regret of leaving the position, which could have led to a supervisory position. Alynn enjoys her position because she is promoted for a job well done and feels respected in her position, "My favorite job was XX [fast food chain]. Like I said when I

was there I was there for five years. When I went in there I was a crewmember and I moved up to shift leader and then moved up to shift manager. So they gave me the opportunity to move up.” The opportunity to be promoted in a company makes the positions more favorable than other positions in the same field.

Caregiving positions are also viewed in a positive light, but largely because the participants in these positions feel a calling to work with others and enjoyed working with other people. Angel and Tonya note the desire to help people and chat with those who need their assistance; Tonya specifically mentions that the clients enjoy taking with the home health aids, “Most of the clients they don’t, most of the time they want company. They don’t really want you to do much. Like laundry, but other stuff they can do their selves, what they really want conversation and company. Just to talk.” Shawntae states she prefers working with people because she likes taking care of others, but she indicates this was her ideal position.

Sherrie notes that her favorite position is while she participated in Job Corps where she learned brick laying. Sherrie likes this position because she work with a different group of people than she was usually exposed to:

Sherrie: My favorite job was in Atlanta. I went to job corps, and my trade was brick laying. And I got my certification, and it was my job away from home. So we built a truck stop and every one that worked on the job except the contractor were Mexicans, and I couldn’t speak Mexican. They couldn’t speak English and we just did our job. With that language barrier we were able to get the job done and they were actually nice. You know so that was my favorite job ever.

Sherrie enjoys this work because of the output, not because of the relationships she develops with her co-workers. This is a minority point of view held during the interviews. Sherrie is not the only participant to prefer manual labor. Candace enjoys her factory job working on children's products. She finds the position to be easy and consistent, which she found desirable.

Administrative positions are also favorites among the participants. Tasha enjoys her position as a receptionist where she assists young women in finding employment, "I was a receptionist. It was just. It was a great environment. I could talk to the young girls and get them jobs." Patrice also enjoys her administrative position at XX [local community college]. As mentioned earlier this is a temporary position:

Patrice: XX [local community college]. I did a summer job at XX, and it was perfect. I can't say one bad thing about this place. I was working their customer service, where I answer phones, where I helped the students out if they needed a parking pass or directions, I was on the computer where I felt goal oriented. I had my own cubicle, my own computer, I had my work told to me the day before so when I was in I went right to work, a professional environment, the people there were role models, everyone did their work, they wasn't ashamed to help you. They made you feel comfortable, I treated it not just like a summer job, but I treated it like my job. Once the summer was over with she extended me a month, only thing is that once that month was over with it was gone, but that was by far my best job ever.

Patrice enjoys her position because she feels encouraged by the other staff; she feels that the professional environment is beneficial to her career development. Patrice also notes that not only was this her favorite job and one she would like to have again, but that her supervisor extends her employment by a month.

Ivory notes that her favorite employment was for XX [local Cleveland area firm], though she does not explicitly say what the position was, “I think at XX. When I had all these different jobs. I did, everybody we were like a family there. Nobody would let anybody do anything wrong there. And if you were doing it wrong, they explained to get you to do it right. You know we took care of each other. And got the jobs done.” She notes that she enjoyed this position because of the variety and the familial feel about the position.

The participants enjoys sharing their experiences and focusing on their favorite positions and employment. They provide insight into why they take specific position and the incentives to stay with a company in a position. The participants value employment opportunities where they could be promoted and have feelings of job security. Several participants also note enjoying jobs where their managers were supportive.

Least Favorite Job

Some participants view various service jobs as their least favorite positions opposed to their peers who view these as their favorite positions. Like the participants’ most favorite jobs, the least favorite are dominated by service industry positions. Five participants cite that fast food positions are their least favorite positions; universally these food service positions are fast food. Two participants cite care giving as their least favorite jobs; one participant mentions housekeeping as her least favorite position. Three

participants cite factory work and sales as their least favorite jobs. Only one participant detests working in an administrative capacity.

The rationale for the dislike of fast food service varies greatly, from just indescribable dislike to boredom, and to the irrational behavior of those being served food. Lauren could not give a specific reason for her dislike of food services, “It had to be XX [chicken fast food chain]. I just didn’t like I don’t know fast food just isn’t my thing.” She simplifies her dislike of food service by saying it is not for her, but she does not provide a specific reason for this. Angel disliked standing in a kitchen all day and the repetition. Tammy speaks about the interpersonal drama associated with working in the fast food industry, “XX [Burger fast food chain]. [laughs] Because I was pregnant at the time for one. And I had to do what I had to do and I was pregnant the time. And there was drama. Everybody’s the boss of everybody there gots to be drama.” Upon further questioning, Tammy acknowledges that the drama was both company related and interpersonal between colleagues. Tammy also notes that she was pregnant during her time there, which implies that her pregnancy is somehow associated with her displeasure with her employment. However, she does not elaborate on either the “drama” or the relationship her pregnancy has to the situation and her dislike for the labor performed. Patrice discusses her difficulties with food service revolve around the interaction with the customers:

Patrice: I had to not only deal with the inside people, but I had to deal with the outside people. The way people act for fast food is beyond crazy...It’s beyond crazy. Um, you’re yelled at, and told to smile when someone is yelling in your face. You’re constantly, if the draw is short, being accused

of stealing. Where someone went wrong with their counting. I was always offered to stay later, I mean not offered, told to stay later than my time. So every time I left there my bus only ran a certain point and I had to walk from them all the way home. The only reason I accepted this job and took it was because I was graduating out of the 12th grade. And if I didn't make the money myself, I wouldn't have been able to enjoy things like prom and graduation because my mother was not paying for this. Nothing.

Patrice also provides a more complete portrayal of working in the food service industry. The expectations the companies have for their employees coupled with the lack of respect the employees feel from their employers resulted tension between the two. Additionally, she touches on being required to work extra hours and the difficulty women in this population face while commuting to and from employment. Patrice's concerns and complaints are echoed through the contemporary research (Collins & Mayer, 2010; Hayes, 2003).

Tonya cites housekeeping as being her least favorite job because it was physically demanding, but also because of the time constraints put on her by her employer, "you got to be done by a certain time and if you're [not] done you got to stay." Additionally, two participants cite caregiving positions as their least favorite positions. Keisha suggests her difficulty with working with the disabled, "Cuz I just don't like I mean maybe because I don't like working with people who are like disabled. Or like just washing. It was mainly when I was washing their clothes it was like the stains on the clothes and the smell. I really didn't like that and it wasn't my forte." This is a personal response and does not reflect challenges within the industry.

Three participants cite sales and specifically commission sales as their least favorite position. Alynn cites the commission as her reason for disliking the position. Tasha finds the door-to-door solicitation a greater challenge mentioning the Cleveland weather specifically. Chloe provides the harshest critique of the sales positions:

Chloe: Only because they trick people. Their calling to a different cable company so we have to switch them over. And if we don't switch them over we don't get that sale. They send you home if you don't get the sale. So it is kind of like a no win situation because if you're in a contract then you can't switch them over so you can't get the sale. You have to convince these people to switch over to Direct TV, which I don't like because, if goes off anyway when the storm comes. So. Just my personal opinion. Makin money.

She views the company as dishonest, and that the employees are in a no win situation. The employees have little power to control the outcome of their situations, at least from her perspective and are at the mercy of the company.

The three participants who note the challenges of factory work note the psychically difficult work. Aspen explains that the building is hot with concrete floors; she describes the work as "backbreaking". However she also mentions that the pay was great, though she did not elaborate; it was for a printing company in Slavic Village. Sherrie notes that the factory she worked in relied heavily on the employees to provide their own equipment:

Sherrie: My least favorite job was I worked in a factory where they make the q-tips. The machine they expected you to be as fast as the machine and

there was such a high demand to meet the quota. But you didn't have the right supplies and tools to get it done. Like you had to have your own tape gun and make your own boxes. And pack, and make sure everything was in line. There was no help it was just so unorganized. And it was just horrible.

Sherrie feels the company was disorganized, which left her feeling out of place. Also, she states difficulties with quotas and the speed of the machines, which is a traditional complaint about factory work (Hasle, 2011). Candace worked in a factory producing medical supplies; she notes that everything was very small for the products and the sanitization requirements were rigid.

Finally, Seven dislikes working in an administrative setting. She dislikes the stationary work, "I'm energetic; I need to be up moving and stuff, just sitting at the computer I get sleepy because I'm used to moving and the hands on."

Many of the participants note service positions as their favorite and least favorite positions, and the distinction largely focuses on personal experiences opposed to critiques of the industries. The participants also provide less information about their least favorite positions than their favorite. The discussions of employment the women dislike and are reluctant to take again assists in developing an understanding of these situations. Post welfare reform, the emphasis for women to obtain a job; any job is better than receiving benefits. However, that is not the case in practice. Taking low-wage, dead-end employment and being treated as disposable workers only leaves recipients frustrated and reluctant to take these poor positions again.

Perspectives on gaining employment

The perceptions of gaining employment for the participants were grim. Many participants feel that they will not be employed or at least not in long-term positions. Others have audible panic in their voices as they discuss their cash assistance running out. It is important to understand how the participants view their ability to obtain employment when discussing why they currently do not have it. The participants have pessimistic views on gaining employment, however the perceived challenges to gaining employment are largely varied. Additionally, many of the participants feel they would inevitably find employment when the economy improves; they note that the fields and employment options they look for were prolific once and easy to obtain. Lauren states that companies are not taking on new hires at this time, “Like where I live at now a lot of stuff is closed or oh like they’re not hiring. And I’m like ok, I have experience, and I’ve always had a job until now. Until I had my son, then I couldn’t find a job.” Lauren contextualizes the employment situation in Cleveland through her own perspective. She sees Cleveland’s economy as fine until she no longer could find employment, even with her work history. She provides no context for why this might be; she could not provide insight outside her own personal experiences. Keisha believes that the difficulty in finding employment stems from the presentation of potential employees and how their employers perceive them. Keisha feels limited in how to control this situation:

Keisah: You have to present yourself right, it’s like I remember back in the day you just had to fill out the applications. Where now you have to have a resume before they even see your face. Your resume, and then they want to put a face to your resume and that is how it is now. Well ok stay

by the phone somebody is going to call me back, going to call me back, going to call me back. I've put in about 50 job applications. The resume in, everything, and then when I went to social security, no just don't feel out for a job, good to school, but in the end I'm like I gotta still pay my bills and take care of my house. I still need to do this for my son, and I'm stuck in between so I'm like what am I supposed to do?

Keisha devolves from discussions of the challenges to obtaining employment to insecurities as to whether she will be able to obtain employment. However, her point resonates, perception is important, and the longer an individual is out of work the more futile the prospect feels. Keisha is literally stuck and unsure how to proceed. Diamond says something similar noting the tedious nature of the application process. She is told that someone will follow up with her in two-weeks, but that never happens. Diamond attempts to follow-up with the corporation, and still hears nothing. She concludes by sharing a personal story of a situation she believes hiring her would rectify:

Diamond: No! Like I never got through it's crazy. They'll say call back in two weeks and I'll call back in two weeks, and they say call back in two weeks, and I call back in two weeks. And the next two weeks, and I call back in the next two weeks. I'm not going to keep on calling you every two weeks, it's been a month now. Clearly, you're not going to hire me, you haven't even...I've been to XX [a discount grocery store], when I get my food stamps and there are 2 cash registers open and I don't know if you've been in a store at the beginning of the month, but there is a lot of people in there, a whole bunch of people. People with cash and people

with food stamps all in there. And there is only 2 people running the register. I put in an application at XX [a discount grocery store], every XX, that I shop at I put in an application online. Why won't they here me. You only have 2 people working the register, I will. I'll start right then and there while I'm in the store. You know.

Of course Diamond does not articulate a full understanding of the situation. A company cannot necessarily hire an employee because they are busy one day, perhaps they could staff better, but Diamond is looking for something to rectify her specific situation.

Aspen feels that nepotism was largely responsible for the difficulties in finding employment. She also presents the discussion from a personal place of experience:

Aspen: I think right now the jobs is based on who you know. My...the people I know who got jobs have jobs because of somebody already work there and got them in. Like I said, I've been actively looking for work for 3 years, and I don't have a whole lot of work experience or history. I only worked part- time, when I did work. I was basically a homemaker my whole life. So when I was I was only working part-time, but it was in the cleaning field. And most places that I know you have to know somebody to get on with that, and if I don't have the skills then get another job, I'm kind of like caught between a rock and a hard place.

Aspen notes that she has limited work history, but asserts that nepotism is responsible for the difficulty in obtaining employment. While that could very well be the case, it is no more likely the cause of her unemployment than her limited work experience.

The participants present a variety of personal experiences regarding labor. Many of the participants have consistently performed service work including retail, food services, and caregiving. The participants have varying opinions of these positions. Often the discussions centered on their specific experiences, and they were able to give little clarification of the industries. The participants prefer positions that gave them the opportunity to rise through promotions and where the management is supportive. They find employment that is physically demanding to be less desirable even when the pay was better. There is an overwhelming concern about the length of time they remain unemployed. However, for the participants who have had multiple jobs throughout their life, they are less likely to take a job solely because it is a job, when they know they will be out of work shortly. It is also important to note that many participants have work experience and are eager to find jobs. I asked how participants viewed the obstacles within the labor market might play a role, but most were reluctant to discuss specific obstacles.

Chapter 5: Views on Public Assistance

When crafting this research project, it was not my intention to spend a great deal of time discussing public assistance. Initially, I thought the participants and I could discuss their work experience with limited discussion of TANF. However, once I began the project I discovered the participants were very interested in discussing these topics. The questions on public assistance began as broad and open-ended. These questions included participant's feelings on receiving public assistance, community reactions and

acceptance of public assistance, and participant's feeling of responsibility for their situation receiving public assistance and being unemployed.

In their responses to the questions on public assistance participants also present a general belief that retirement benefits would be available to them. My intention was to discuss long-term employment goals and retirement plans participants were considering, but participants took these questions on retirement to include plans through employers, saving on an individual level, and social security. Additionally, the women interviewed had mixed views on public assistance as recipients and on the "system" meaning TANF and "welfare". Finally, this section investigates the relationship between women and the system. The participants provide a variety of responses to questions on their responsibility and that of the system to them. The participants present a complex and comprehensive understanding of their situation even though at times their understanding and their situations are challenging and contradictory.

Perspectives on retirement

The participants have a fairly split response to the question regarding retirement. Nine participants who respond to the question thought they would retire, and seven participants think they would not retire even when they achieved retirement age. Questions on retirement are included to gauge the participants' thoughts on labor, lifetime employment, and social programs. Many of the participants cite they have not had employment where retirement benefits are offered and if so they are reluctant to participate in their company's benefit package because of the initial costs.

Those who thought they would not retire focused on the concept that they liked to work, and would work till they could no longer work rather than retirement age. Lauren

presents this concept, “I want to get to a point where I can retire and I don’t have to worry about workin. But me sitting around all day I’d probably would prefer to work.” This does not account for old age or any variety of issues that arise as the workforce ages including illness and injury. It is a very simple concept harkening back to the idea that those who do not work, especially those who choose not to work are a burden on the system as mention earlier in this paper. Regardless, the retirement benefit system, paid into through paychecks, and social security benefits, paid into by workers through taxes, and thus owed back to the workers.

Shawntae also expresses interest in working as long as she physically could. She does concede that retirement may not be available for her, and that if she were to desire retirement she would save for it on her own, “It’s probably ain’t. It probably ain’t. It ain’t. You have to save your own money up. You know what I’m saying?” Many of the participants skim over this question in our interviews, but I believe some participants who say they did not see retirement as an option felt that it would not be available to them due to the types of employment sought and benefits available to them, though I lack the data to fully make that assertion. Shay echoes this sentiment, saying that she is comfortable with employment, but also that the demands placed on her by her family require her employment, “I see myself too comfortable with working. Somebody’s always going to want something. If not me, my kids, it’s going to be someone else. I want to be able to do that as long as I can.” Shay feels that she is responsible for her family and that she will have to work until she is no longer employable.

Lisa 22 expresses an interest in retirement; she would like to retire however, she would like to do so on her own rather than through an employer. She is looking into a

privatized social security account believing that will be more effective than paying into the social security system. While Lisa 22 would not be able to opt out of social security, she would rather depend on her ability to save for her future:

Lisa 22: Well, the job that I work for now has retirement benefits so it's like you know once I get to the age to retire I can draw my retirement, but what I'm trying to do is find me a job with a like a 457 deferred plan. Whereas they're not taking my money and putting it in social security and instead putting in my own retirement fund so that way when I do get old enough and I do find a job like Metro Health I can just do 40 maybe 45 years with them when I'm ready to retire I can just retire.

Lisa 22 does not elaborate on why she feels privatization would be superior to the public option, but she does feel that retirement was an option. I think the privatized retirement plan (both 401K and private savings accounts) appeals to some of the participants because of the emphasis placed on women receiving benefits to be self-reliant, which is based on the evidence from Lisa 22 and Karen, who both see retirement as options, but also that it is their responsibility to prepare for it.

Perspectives on public assistance (pro/against)

This section has been divided into views on employment, general public assistance, and roles and responsibilities of individuals and society. Additionally, within these sections participant responses will be divided into in favor of and against for each. Finally, it is prudent to remember that when the participants share views, often they are much harder on the abstract concept of being unemployed and public assistance than

when reflecting on their specific situations. There appears to be a disconnection between reconciling their own personal experiences with their ideological views.

Unemployment

The feelings surrounding unemployment are mixed; no participants share feelings of being proud or happy about being unemployed or receiving unemployment benefits if they qualified. The majority of participants express concern about lengthy unemployment and the inability to find employment. A number of participants also find unemployment to be stressful and frustrating. Additionally, participants share perspectives indicating that unemployment insurance (referred to as “unemployment”) should be reformed. Some suggest that unemployment benefits lasted too long while others said the benefit period was too short.

Not all participants receive unemployment benefits. However, participants do have opinions on unemployment regardless of whether they received it. Keisha expresses displeasure at being unemployed because even with unemployment benefits she has a limited amount of money to spend, and she has to stretch that amount as far as possible. Keisha also uses the term “struggle” to describe her situation, which as mentioned previously it is a loaded term with varying connotations. Lisa 2 feels that she lacks job security, and while she currently has a position, she fears that she could be laid off, “Yes [I’m concerned about lengthy unemployment]. Because the job I work now is basically not guaranteed. I work for the school district and they laying off left and right. So I’m just praying that FedEx don’t pull up to the door and drop that pink notice off. Because at any time they can just lay you off and then they ain’t nothing you can do about it.” Lisa 2 articulates a fear that permeates even individuals who are employed. There is the

possibility of unemployment at anytime; employment security does not exist for these women. These concerns are also articulated the isolation felt by the participants that is rooted in their fear of being unemployed and inability to control their situations. .

Tammy feels that long-term unemployment should exist for those unable to work:

Tammy: Just because some people be out on disability. The people who can't work it's like I think it's unfair to them. If they can't work they can't work. Like unemployment or whatever I understand unemployment because if people can't work. If people need long-term unemployment. So I think they should be able to get money. As much as everybody else should. It arrived since I've been here like I know people who are on unemployment now because they can't work or got laid off or what ever. Like I said I just think it's just unfair.

Tammy is unaware of social security benefits that are sometimes available for those with disabilities. However, she is in favor of public assistance benefits for those with disabilities. In hindsight, I wish I had inquired into her knowledge about qualifying for disability benefits.

Chloe feels that unemployment was too generous, and that it should be even more limited and restrictive because of the number of people depending on it. She is also in favor of workfare programs such as Fast-Track to Employment that provide job skills training for the unemployed. She also notes that people remaining at home for the duration of their unemployment is detrimental:

Chloe: I feel like unemployment should be not so long because people get so dependent on it. And I also think it should be some type of class

because when you're on unemployment some people are like I'm not workin, I'm chillin. But then you have to think about it because you get so dependent on that money because it is comin every week. It still half your pay, but you're still maintaining. So its like you're not working, you're not looking for a job. Well some people are looking for jobs, but some people are in that mentality where they stay home all day and wait until their unemployment run out and then what? They try to use some more assistance; then they have to find a job because they can't save on half a paycheck. So I think people get dependent on it.

Chloe makes reference to abstract individuals whom are content not working. This is a rhetorical device employed by several participants throughout the interviews. It is not my intention to discredit Chloe's perspective, but merely to point out that this device arises several times in the research. At no point does Chloe provide a concrete example of the individuals to whom she is referring.

Leda feels that she must work even though she is currently unemployed, "Well, at first I felt like it sucked, but I mean it is just a learning experience but what to do and what not to do. I can sit up here and blame but that's not going to change anything. In the end it is all up to me." She feels that it is unfortunate, but that the responsibility resides with her for her situation as well. Leda views unemployment as a state of being, and one she resides in temporarily. It does not define her as an individual and is likely to change. Shawntae shares similar thoughts on her unemployment. She would rather be working, but she must function within society.

Candace also feels somewhat responsible for her unemployment because she was fired for scheduling conflicts:

Candace: In a way I do, but in a way I don't. I lost my job at XX because I was also going to school and at the time I was also doing my internship. And they, my hours kept on conflicting with each other. So my manager basically told me I had to make a choice either choose to finish school or continue to work there, which I still was doing both and I was coming in late. I got fired so. I kind of feel like it was my fault, but I kind of don't because I wanted to finish school. If the people had been a little more understanding and tried to work with me on my hours. Then it could have been prevented.

As previously mentioned Candace lost her position because of scheduling conflicts and mix messages from her employer. It is notable, that Candace feels there should be a better understanding between employers and employees so that they work with one another. However, it appeared as though she was looking for more understanding on the behalf of her employers opposed to a willingness on her part to accommodate them. While Candace is unrealistic in her expectation that her employers would be sympathetic, she understands that going to school is a better long-term plan to obtain a job, which had negative short-term consequences.

Aspen perceives her lengthy unemployment (three years) as a drawback in finding future employment. She shares that in the last year her husband's unemployment ceases, and this fear of remaining unemployed manifested as his illness became more pronounced because she lacks the support his income would provide. She wrestles with

frustration and compassion for him, but all the while he is denied disability benefits, which leaves all financial responsibility to her. Aspen's situation is made all the more frustrating because when her husband was denied disability, it is because according to the system he could find new employment, but with his age he is not considered a safe employee (long term employment with few paid out benefits) and he has no experience doing anything but manual labor, which he no longer can perform. Aspen feels as if she has no recourse or available actions left to her.

Frustration is a common feeling about unemployment, both with the system and with lack of employment opportunities. Joblessness and public assistance/TANF are linked and intertwined for the participants. Olivia notes how stressful it was to be without work and with children. She fears that her lack of employment disappoints her children when she cannot provide them with everything they want. Tonya notes frustration with the waiting for a check every month, but also with the change to her routine of going to work everyday. She has no interest in allowing unemployment and public assistance to become her new routine.

Diamond expresses feelings not only of frustration, but also a fear of failure in general. For Diamond this fear of unemployment developed in 2008 immediately after the birth of her daughter. Patrice fears lengthy unemployment, like many of the participants, but she developed this fear immediately. After high school, she attended a for-profit college, and was unable to begin her career even with her degree. She went on to echo aspects of the job search process mentioned by other participants:

Patrice: Now they're doing no more paper applications. Everything is through the computer; another reason I say they belittle a lot of people.

Who can afford a computer with Internet to fill these applications out? There's always the library who changed their rules if you have, if I lost a book when I was 15 years old it's on my library card, and now I can't get on the computer unless I pay for this book so where's there to go to get on a computer to fill out a job application? It's not a walk in the park, which I feel it never should be a walk in the park like that. But it should be a little easier. They hold job fairs, but I feel they are pointless... Job fairs are pointless because you sit there, you talk to a million people, fill out applications, and nothing ever happens.

Patrice finds the expectation of having computers and the Internet for online applications as unreachable. Those in need of employment would not possess a computer. Patrice finishes her observations by noting that job fairs are ineffective, at least from her point of view. During my time observing the Fast-Track to Employment, they have their students attend a job fair with the Cleveland Clinic. At least one participant received a callback, but data are not collected specifically on the Fast-Track program or all participants in the program.

Karen presents a different situation while most of the participants did not feel that they were overqualified for positions, Karen finds herself overqualified for several positions she had applied. She finds her concern over unemployment beginning after the first fourth month, she had not thought too much about it leading up to that, she adjusted by making cuts to the family budget, which she describes as to "live like a company" however a year later the concern is more developed:

Karen: I can still pay bills, I always kept my overhead low so at first it wasn't as big a concern, I always had a little money stored away for a rainy day it was fine; it was ok for a raining day except when it is flooding, and right now it is flooding, so you know you're in that different place. You could have never told me I would be on public um, public welfare system. You know getting public assistance whatsoever like that would not even been a part of my vocabulary I'll figure out something else to do. I'll get a job working at McDonalds before I did that, and then you go and try to apply for a job at McDonalds with three degrees and working on your Ph.D., and they're like let me get this straight, you want to work at McDonalds as a cashier, you don't want to be a manager or anything? That would be great, but any job would be, and I can start on the cashier. They're like no; we're not going to hire you. That changes you're perspective a little bit on things.

Karen provides a specific example of being in a situation where she is over qualified, but she also provides insight into her feelings about the public assistance system. Karen shares that she “dumbed down” her resume in order to look like the appropriate candidate. It is worth noting that when Karen shares her experience, she implies that she has negative associations with public assistance (more on this later). Doing so allows Karen to legitimately distance herself from other participants. Legitimately, because her education and experience is very different from the majority of participants; that is not to say that she perceives herself as superior or looks down on the other participants, but she was a distancing herself from the general group of participants.

Public Assistance and Welfare

Most of the participants view public assistance as having a positive impact. However, four participants are completely opposed to public assistance or at least what they perceive to be the behavior of those receiving public assistance. While these views are similar to those that are opposed to unemployment as well, those opposed to public assistance are more adamant against public assistance and TANF. Additionally, three participants undergo shifts of opinion because their beliefs about public assistance come into direct conflict with their receiving public assistance. Finally, there are four participants who express a negative view of self because they receive public assistance. This feeling cannot be described as shame or embarrassment straight out, instead it runs much deeper and is much more complicated.

Angel and Alynn are very much in favor of public assistance for whoever does not work. This implies Alynn feels the state should support their citizens:

Alynn: I think they should keep the food stamps, help the kids and the mothers. Whoever's not working. Cuz how else are we going to support ourselves. But there is a the downfall too we got say um you need help on like furniture and stuff like that. I think they should be able to help us with furniture and stuff. What we need you see a certain person for you get it. They should come visit your house to see what you need, if you need furniture. You have to prove it. But furniture and all that stuff they need to provide that to.

Alynn feels public assistance should actually do more for the participants instead of less. She feels that the caseworkers should assess what each participant needs and then

accommodate those needs on an individual level. Alynn includes furniture and other items not usually explicitly covered by public assistance; Alynn thinks public assistance should provide more direct and explicit services. Ivory is also in favor of public assistance, but as it currently is, more restrictive allocations of funds. Ivory feels people should not have to worry about how they are going to support themselves, “I feel that people rely on public assistance and I don’t think that people should do that. They should want to move on to not have to worry about public assistance. They don’t give you enough to live by; they just give you enough to support, you know, your child on and yourself for a time, but it’s not nothing to rely on.” Ivory has a more practical idea of public assistance; it should exist for those who require it, but also be temporary. However, Ivory is not in favor of limitations.

Lisa 2 summarizes her feelings on public assistance very clearly, “The way that I feel about it is if you need it, use it. But some people they get it and they abuse it and get so accustomed to it they really don’t know much. Me, personally I’m using it because I need to, but if I didn’t need to then I wouldn’t.” Lisa 2 is not the first or the last to include an after thought of “some people abuse it” concept. Several of the participants incorporate a line similar to this. This is usually indicative of potentially conflicting views from the participant, often sharing a negative interpretation of public assistance while receiving benefits. Candace echoes Lisa 2’s opinion, that some people abuse public assistance, but others need it so it is necessary for participants.

Sherrie is opposed to public assistance across the board; she believes it brings out the worst in people. She wants public assistance to be more restrictive, or it to be

available for those who do not abuse it, but how she would ensure this is unclear. She would like public assistance to change:

Sherrie: I have very strong feelings about public assistance. I think that public assistance make people lazy. I think that there should be a gray area where they see people that are using public assistance for the right way and they should be incentives for people to move forward and not put in the same boat with people who are abusing the system. You understand what I'm saying. I feel that it ain't fair. They hold onto people they know are abusing the public assistance. And it's not pushing them to go forward and past that point. [she goes on to state the need for reform, but doesn't provide suggestions].

It is unfortunate that Sherrie is unable to provide suggestions for improvements to public assistance. She would like an incentives program for participants who are using the system and not abusing it. However, she does not mention what to do with those who abuse the system either just that they should not. I asked Sherrie if she had any suggestions on how to improve the system, but it is not her responsibility to have solutions.

Opposed to Sherrie, Leda has a few suggestions on how to improve the program. Leda expresses concern that people are abusing the system, and when asked how to correct it she responds:

Leda: I just feel like they have a contract now. And the people that work in the program like I tell people you never know who's watching you. And you know just watch the people with what their progress is. Ok she's

really into it or not, and if their not just cut them out. You know because if you don't want to be here why waste somebody's time just to get some money. You know this is something that is supposed to help you and I've learned a lot with in. And I worked at Macy's for 4 years and I didn't know that much changed. So you constantly have to be learning something.

Leda feels that public assistance improved because from her point of view the relationship between client and caseworker with the expectation of information transfer. Leda puts the onus on the client for being aware that her caseworkers are keeping track of her behavior. Also, these improvements place much of responsibility on the caseworkers' discretion. Leda concludes with how beneficial the Fast-Track to Employment and programs similar to this are to the participants. Monique like Leda has seen some improvement within public assistance from AFDC to TANF.

While Lauren expresses displeasure with receiving benefits, like Lisa 2, she shares a brief story of a cousin that abuses public assistance presenting herself as the voice of reason pushing her cousin to "get off it [public assistance]". Lauren explains her situation as one of necessity as well, "And I don't want to be a person who doesn't want to work. That's ok, I'm just going to depend on this check and these food stamps. And not get a job where I can better myself for my kids. Because public assistance is not worth it, it's not...So say if something happens to you and you're 36 months are up then no check anymore." Lauren shares that she has no intention of making a lifestyle of receiving benefits citing that she would rather have it to fall back on when it is necessary opposed to running out of time.

Others such as Tammy feel that public assistance is necessary, but participants receiving benefits should seek employment, which is a reflection of TANF policy, “People who don’t have jobs or are looking for a job. They need something especially if they have all them kids. You know they need to take care of their kids. So I’m on public assistance. I’m on it. But I’m trying to get off it and get a job.” Additionally, Tammy states that she is trying to leave public assistance, which is mandated by the requirements of public assistance.

Keisha is opposed to public assistance, but not because of traditional negative connotations of public assistance instead she disapproves of the limitations put on participants when receiving benefits:

Keisha: I don’t really like it because public assistance you cannot have nothing. You can’t save up nothing that. They have to know everything about everything about your life...I really don’t have no caseworker now because she just had a be on maternity leave. But the one before her, I loved him, but he had left. But the caseworker I had before she went on maternity leave, I didn’t like her at all because I had been there for 2 months. And they was like I had this sickness going on it was like the days that I missed when I had been in this job program before. It was like the days that I missed I had doctor’s excuses. Saying look this is the days that I missed I gave Ms. XX everything, but she like cut me off. I went 2 months without no money no nothing, how can I pay my bills. I have a son... She [the caseworker] was gone so I’m talking to the boss. To where it was just like I want to be like man forget it. I don’t want no assistance. I

don't want nothing from nobody if it's like this, if I didn't need it I don't want to have it. I need it right now, so it's like I'm on assistance. If I didn't need it then I don't want nothing from ya'll. Nothing from the state, but I need it.

Keisha's negative feelings on public assistance focus largely on her caseworkers and the difficulties she experiences while seeking employment. Keisha's experience is not unusual; frequently, women receiving benefits are sanctioned for illness and taking time off for unapproved reasons (Collins & Mayer, 2010; Neubeck, 2006; Hayes, 2003). However, there is little recourse for women who experience this. Keisha expresses a sentiment similar to other participants including Diamond, CJ, Shawntae and Karen, who are frustrated with their caseworkers and feel they have no course of action. Similarly, Shawntae expresses problems with caseworkers as well, but she is in favor of public assistance. Additionally, Shawntae easily separates the two, but she finds that the caseworkers feel like they are removed from their clients and often are condescending. Shay also echoes difficulties with her caseworker, "Sometimes it can be embarrassing because it's like I got to see my case worker and they're like cracking jokes and laughing and talking down, and that makes me not even want to be on it. It's just because of what other people might say or think of me. But at the same time I need the help right now." Shay notes the difficulties, but admits she requires assistance and thus has to deal with the perceived condescension from her caseworker.

Keisha speaks to circumventing her caseworker by going directly to her caseworker's supervisor, but she became so frustrated that she does not see the value in continuing in the system. Additionally, Keisha highlights the issues with the sanctioning

process, which includes the effects sanctioning has on the participants and their children. She points out that the sanctioning does not only affect her, but her son who would also suffer without the assistance, and she is left with few options to provide for her son.

Karen and Chloe's views of public assistance underwent a serious shift because of their own experiences receiving of public assistance. Chloe experiences her shift of opinion when she begins her interacting with caseworkers. She feels her relationship with her caseworker is challenging. Both Karen and Chloe come from a middle/upper middle class background with parents who encourage education and had steady employment histories. When asked about public assistance they both present the traditional negative connotations and embarrassment over receiving public assistance. Both Chloe and Karen come to the conclusion that they must accept benefits for their children even at the risk of their own self-esteem. Additionally, they both note that it is a humbling experience, which they find to be beneficial for their development of self. Karen also notes the invasive nature of public assistance; she feels that caseworkers are granted an obscene amount of information about their clients. This might be attributed to Karen's identification as a Republican and the Republican emphasis on small government removed from their citizen's lives. Karen notes the stigma associated with public assistance, but she also provides a detailed description about the way her life changed on public assistance including how she acclimated to her family's living situation. Karen is also in favor of the 36-month limit within the program. Neither Karen nor Chloe are concise in describing their ideological shifts because this seemed to be a first or early attempt at reasoning it out:

Karen: So to me this has been a learning experience I've always been on the outside looking in judging people, I had no insight on. I've never even had government cheese. So you know I'm making all these wild Reagonomic accusations towards people I didn't understand I really didn't get, I didn't associate myself with these other people and for some of the same reasons I'm in the same boat as these people, they got laid off and what have you, and some people not so much, some people made different choices in their lives, so I think that it's just that like in that instance and being able to see people, who are not what you think of when you think of when you think of the welfare mother, um, being this woman who is just sitting around having children at all, giving anything else to society, give anything else to the community. As many people of all races of all backgrounds are now having to receive public assistance for whatever reason.

However, in this portion of our interview, Karen describes her before and after thought process on public assistance. Essentially, Karen comes to the conclusion that the negative connotations she had known were not always the case and that she has more in common with the other participants than she would have previously thought. It is also interesting to unpack Karen's description of a welfare mother. She wrestles with her notions of self and the connotations she has of who and what welfare mothers look like, specifically the depictions of welfare mothers are under qualified mothers who hurt their children (Hill Collins, 2005; Hayes, 2003).

Patrice echoes Karen's sentiment that gaining public assistance benefits requires sharing a great deal of information with their caseworkers, and she is not comfortable with sharing this much or this kind of information:

Patrice: I feel I started feeling belittled when I first got on welfare. And it wasn't because it was called welfare or they're so many people on it. It's what they have me to do. They have me give them everything that change in my life. Anything that changes I have to report this, which is not just going down there and talking, you have to wait for hours before you can see someone, you can't get to no one on the phone, and then they expect you to do these programs for our part, but it's hard to get them to do their part. They make you feel belittled because I feel like I can get up and find a job, but you throw me into programs and I feel like I graduated you know, I should be able to get a job.

Patrice also describes the sanctioning process in detail noting the difficulties surrounding sanctioning. She speaks on being sanctioned and then having those months count against the total 36-months. Patrice describes the challenges working with her specific caseworker, particularly around communication. Patrice notes that she is happy that public assistance exists, but that it needs reform, "I wish it would be a little more better and a little more organized and a little more professional, it's not...Right, that's right. That's my biggest reason why everyday I get up with I'm going to find a job on my mind because I feel I'm being controlled and belittled, I feel belittled a lot. It's depressing to feel that way when you can't do nothing about it." Patrice describes her situation as

frustrating to the point of refusing assistance. Additionally, Patrice recognizes her role in retaining employment and it's connection to her presentation of self.

Aspen has a unique experience within this sample of receiving with public assistance because she received it as a child and as an adult, but she was able to “get off” public assistance. Aspen indicates in an earlier portion of our interview that her mother received public assistance when she was young. When asked about receiving public assistance she shared this:

Aspen: Not good. Because it's been 12 almost 13 years since I've gotten any financial, I've gotten food stamps but not cash. So I felt good not getting cash, and people were like “oh, how you do it? You got 6 kids.” Oh we working girl. It felt good to be working for the last 13 years. And I'm right back to where I started. [Crying]. It don't feel good. It don't feel good at all.

KO: So you received it when you were a child? In your adolescents?

Aspen: Yes, and when I was on my own. My husband we only got married 6 years ago.

KO: Ok.

Aspen: We've been together for 20 years, but we just got married. In the beginning we had just 2 kids, but we weren't married. So I was getting a check then, because we weren't. Then, but I got past it. Got off.

KO: Did you feel empowered by getting off and now you're back at square one?

Aspen: Yes.

Aspen notes a strong negative feeling about receiving public assistance, but attributes it to returning to public assistance after leaving it. This demonstrates a pride an individual feels when they leave the system only to feel even more negative about herself after finding her way back public assistance.

The participants are largely in favor of assistance, and they wrestle with their conceptions and perceptions of what it means to accept assistance. Additionally, different forms of assistance are viewed differently; my participants have no concerns about accepting food stamps, but cash assistance brought on mixed feelings. The participants opposed to public assistance have a more challenging time wrestling with their feelings with two participants trying to think through the logic they used to oppose public assistance while receiving it. Additionally, the participants express a deep frustration with unemployment insurance and back to work programs. Participants find themselves unable to secure employment even though they perform to the expectations set by these back to work programs. Several participants express the desire to reform in public assistance, but they have difficulty providing concrete example of how to improve the system.

Accountability of women and of systems

The participants have varying views on responsibility of themselves and the public assistance system. When discussing public assistance, the participants are referring to TANF specifically with a few exceptions that would include section 8 housing or assisted childcare. The questions in this section were initially based in intellectual curiosity. I had not expected my participants to want to engage in discussions of public assistance or their accountability in their situations. I assumed people would be reluctant to have these discussions with a stranger. However, as one participant shared people

generally do not ask how recipients feel about their situation. Several of the participants feel they bare a portion or most of the responsibility for their situations. However, after follow up questions that challenge the concept of complete self-determination many of the participants concede they are not entirely in control of their situation. Still other participants feel that they are entirely responsible for their situation regardless of the role of the state economy.

Alynn feels that things are completely out of her hands, and places the situation in the hands of the government. She believes the city does not handle funds well, “I mean my feelings is strong and the city is poor because all these taxes that we doing the street are tearing our cars up...Not like it was before.” Candace sees the economy as to blame for her situation as well. She feels that she has little control over her situation.

Patrice is an example of how a participant takes responsibility for her situation and then relinquishes some of the responsibility when pressed, below is a condensed version of our conversation:

Patrice: I’m in this situation basically because the person I choose to have in my life. The person that I picked to be my significant other led me to be on welfare because I had it together, I had a job, I had no children, and I stayed in a 1 bedroom house. It was up and down, but it was a house, and I could do what I want to do, I make my money, I pay my bills, I could do what I want to do.

KO: Now, do you feel completely responsible, solely responsible or do you feel that there are other factors?

Patrice: Other factors. Because I have my mother here, who is supposed to have my back at all times, who is, if I have to work and my kids get old enough and call me and say I need this I want to be able to provide it. She can't do that. I can barely even get a ride and she has a car. Ok, so I feel she plays a part, and my significant other plays a part.

KO: Do you feel like the economy also plays a role?

Patrice: It does. It does. The economy plays a bigger role because it seems like every time you get your head at least above water the water gets a little higher. Everything is going up and then I hear rumors about, oh they're going to stop welfare. That put a scare in a lot of people...

Patrice cites her upbringing, her relationships, and the economy for her situation, but all as less influential than herself. She is not the only participant to note a strained relationship with her mother as a contributing factor to their situation. When a family system is not in place to assist with childcare or general support recipients have a challenging time trying to navigate the system (Collins & Mayer, 2010; Hayes, 2003). Patrice also mentions a rumor about cutting welfare, but this could not be confirmed.

Ivory also attributes some of her situation to her family and upbringing:

Ivory: In my household at the time when I was growing up as a teenager my mom wasn't around to show me a lot of things...So I tried to live life too fast. I stopped going to school at a certain age after I had my baby and I had a baby early. You know I just think if I had a strong support system at home then maybe I wouldn't have had my son so early or maybe I

would have graduated high school and gone to college and change my act.

But I just think it was the way I grew up.”

Ivory points to a lack of strong support growing up, implying that she is a product of her environment. Ivory also acknowledges the role of a difficult economy on her situation as well, but puts the emphasis on herself and her upbringing.

Sherrie believes that she and the economy are responsible for her situation. Sherrie notes a poor decision on her part and then acknowledges that the economy is challenging for finding employment, “The partly is moving before I was financially stable to move...I would say the economy can be hard, but people are adaptable. We can adapt to a situation and make it work for ourselves.” Sherrie articulates the duality between personal decisions the effects of the economy. Like Patrice and Sherrie, Olivia feels particularly responsible for her situation because of her decisions, but also notes that if the economy improved she would have better luck finding employment. Olivia concludes with a statement on what she is doing to better her situation, “I’m doing everything I can. For a while I was complacent. I was like forget it there were no jobs out here anyway so why try. There is always a job somewhere, you know what I mean. Whether it is a job that you like or a job that you don’t like you just have to go and find it. Like Ms. XX said, she’s like finding a job is a job by itself.” Olivia notes the effort needed to find employment during the present economic climate.

CJ feels that she is entirely responsible for her situation, but admits that if the economy is better she would have an improved chance of receiving employment. Shawntae feels some control over her situation, but not much, “I just know the control I have in applying. I would say going to school, but it really don’t matter. You can be in

school 10 years, but you ain't got no experience. You know what I'm saying so." She can control how many jobs she applies to and how she presents herself as an applicant. However, she cannot make the potential employer hire her or bring her in for an interview.

Shay feels completely responsible for her situation citing that she is working hard to improve her situation, and she can pull herself out. When pressed about the role of the economy the conversation was as follows:

KO: Ok. And do you see any influence on your situation from the economy?

Shay: I don't know what you mean.

KO: Um, cuz you're saying you're completely responsible for you situation, and if you are then why don't you have a job?

Shay: If you're asking if I'm completely responsible then yes I am because I was being lazy.

KO: So you don't see the economy as playing a role at all?

Shay: No, I don't.

KO: Um, what are you doing to better your situation?

Shay: I'm here at this program, and like I said I'm trying to be so reliant on my mother to do things for me. I'm trying not to ask her to stuff, and I try to use my money a little better. It doesn't work.

This conversation demonstrates how reluctant Shay is to place blame on the government, the economy, or anyplace but on herself. However, Shay's determination to take complete responsibility for her situation is not partially logical. If Shay is completely in

control of her situation she would be employed or she would not want or seek employment. However, she does desire employment, which indicated, but she is not in complete control over her situation. In addition, Shay has difficulty completely comprehending how public assistance works. Shay discusses at length the benefits of living in Texas opposed to Ohio because Ohio has a higher tax rate. Shay laments how much income tax she had to pay in her previous position, but then when pressed about where her public assistance comes from, she acknowledges that what is paid into the system then contributes to the benefits she receives. When asked about public assistance in Texas, Shay has little information as to how it compared to Ohio or what was required by Texas to participate. Like Shay, Karen and Tonya feel that they are responsible and can correct her situation.

Tasha feels that she lacks a comprehension and understanding of how people perceive those receiving public assistance experience, “They don’t see what we see I guess. They not going through what we goin through. The struggles and everything.” Tasha also sees the role of the economy in her situation. In both cases Tasha has no suggestions how to improve the situation; she suggests that the government could improve, but not how.

One participant shares a different perspective on her situation attributing the majority to her abusive relationship. Leda begins by taking complete responsibility only to disclose that she was in an abusive relationship. She is staying motivated and positive to find employment, “stay motivated and keep my eyes and ears open because it’s not always what you know it’s who you know. And just having a positive attitude you

know...So I just want to learn a little bit more then I'll be ready to go.” Additionally, Chloe, as discussed later, attributes her situation to her criminal record.

There is an air of frustration from the participants about their situations when discussing them. Participants express examples and feelings of isolation due to their economic situation and dependence on public assistance. They feel frustrated that they are unemployed and receive public assistance, but that assistance is needed. Likewise many participants initially take responsibility for their situations, but then could not dissect this responsibility to reconcile their situations while being what they deemed worthy of assistance. Participants are reluctant to attribute their situations to the economy or structural issues.

Chapter 6: Additional Interview Findings

In addition to information intentionally sought via the interview survey, the participants raise several issues. These areas have been included to articulate the experience of these subjects. Ohio’s Senate Bill 5 of 2010, which became Ohio Ballot Issue 2 for the 2011 election, is of particular interest for this sample due to it’s implications for education and union workers. The second issue consistently discussed is education namely the participants and their children’s relationship to education. This includes concerns about quality of education for children and inadequacies of the participant’s education. Finally, as mentioned in the methodology section, participants share views on criminal records. One participant, Chloe Williams, discloses her criminal record, but there are also discussions of participants’ partners and relationships with those who have criminal records.

Ohio Senate Bill 5

Ohio Senate Bill 5 is a controversial bill, which would have stripped collective bargaining rights from public service workers. The bill became a referendum, Issue 2, and Ohio residents voted down the measure two to one in the fall of 2011. During the summer of 2011 this issue is a very popular topic. All participants who discuss Ohio Senate Bill 5 are opposed to it. Lisa 2 is very much against Ohio Senate Bill 5, “Signed it. I know all about it. I signed it because it is more of like for the union and everything. I don’t have a union but I know a lot of people that do so I signed it. It affects all the teachers, affects all the regular employees, but you see I’m a substitute so I don’t have a union. I’d like to have a union.” Though Lisa 2 works for a school district, she is a temporary employee and not in a union. However, she is very much opposed to the measure. Seven opposes Ohio Senate Bill 5 because of how it affects teachers. Seven believes that teachers should be held to a higher standard, but believes Ohio Senate Bill 5 is detrimental to that, “I’m totally against that. Because you know we need more teachers, and have more students come for the teachers to have work to do because we don’t want them getting paid for nothing... yeah the economy it’s, it’s really jacked up right now, people losing jobs and stuff, important jobs such as teachers laid off, firefighters, police officers, people we really need you know.” Seven believes the value of public service workers will go down if Senate Bill 5 goes into effect. Also present in her concern are overcrowded classrooms, which can be inferred based on her claim more teachers are needed.

One participant, Diamond, articulates a sense of disenfranchisement with respect to Senate Bill 5. Diamond thinks the government bears the responsibility to their citizens,

as previously mentioned. However, she only votes in local elections, refusing to vote in large-scale elections because she feels her vote does not matter,

Diamond: I feel like my one vote will not matter. Everybody told me your vote does count, but yeah, no I don't think so. Cuz I've had people that tell me like. I know me. If I go and vote for somebody then that's who I expect to win. If they don't win, then I'm like why'd I go vote for. That was like 10 or half an hour out of my day for nothing.

However, she does feel that she is enfranchised on the local level. Aspen echoes the sentiment of not being very empowered during elections and a sense of worthlessness. This speaks to the overwhelming sense of disenfranchisement felt by African American women, specifically those receiving public assistance and who are unemployed.

Small Business vs. Corporations

During my first day of observations, the instructor asked the participants to share their views on small business and corporations. This conversation struck me as interesting, and I was curious as to how their views on types of businesses reflected or were reflections of their views on employment. Several participants say they had no preference or opinion because any job would be welcomed. However, among the participants who do have a preference, it is a draw. Five participants are adamant that they preferred small businesses, and six preferred corporations. In both instances the participants often provided little explanation as to why they preferred one to the other. I found this particularly interesting given the treatment of workers within both kinds of companies.

Aspen provides a concrete reason for preferring small businesses, “I kind of prefer small business. More intimate. I’m kind of like a shy.” I inquire whether she feels there is more loyalty in small business than corporations, “Yeah. I think they take care of their people more.” Aspen notes that small businesses are perceived as taking better care of their employees. Monique also feels that small businesses are preferred; her rationale for preferring small businesses is because she hopes to own her own small business.

The rationale for support of corporations varies greatly between those who prefer them. Keisha for example prefers corporations because they are more likely to have unions, and Leda believes corporations have more benefits. Lisa 2 prefers corporations because from her perspective there are few small business thriving, while Tonya believes there is more money in corporations than small businesses. Additionally, Tasha prefers corporations because she wanted to relocate and thought a corporation would allow her to switch to a new location. Olivia echoes Tasha’s sentiment:

Olivia: Probably a corporation. Because, like if I were to get hired at CVS out here when I decide to move because I’m leaving Cleveland, Ohio. It would be easier to transfer. Working for a small business the chances that it is in another state is slim. But if you have a big corporate business then you can have an easier time to transfer to different places. And benefits seems like their more ranges; they have more benefits. A bigger corporation rather than a smaller one I guess.

For Tasha and Olivia this is the driving reason to choose a corporation over small business. Corporations afford them some opportunities for mobility between locations, which makes Tasha and Olivia feel secure. However, neither notes a sense of security

around upward mobility within the company. This is another sign of being accustomed to poor working conditions, culturally conditioned to expect few chances for advancement.

One of the more interesting responses with respect to the discussion of small businesses and corporations comes from Karen. Karen selects small businesses as the superior employers. Karen started her own business at 19; she believes the only way to build wealth is through owning your own business:

Karen: If I work for a corporation even if they pay me \$200k a year they are probably making a million dollars off of me a year. A corporation will never pay me what I'm worth because they will never pay me as much as I would pay myself. So from that perspective I think small business are the way to go. Also, I'm also a Republican so I feel that people if given the opportunity will empower themselves and find a way to survive. So to me I think constantly small business are the wave of the future. I think more along the lines that maybe in the next 20 years we're going to have a lot more small businesses compared to multibillion dollar corporations. The wealth is going to be more evenly distributed. These small businesses with new innovative ways of doing things that traditional ways that have sustained us. I think that, that is just has to...Everything ebbs and flows and when we came from a culture-based predominately on small business, small farmers, you know all these little tiny businesses. Woolworths started as a mom and pop business, all the major corporations we see now as these powerhouses started off somewhere...one person's ideas and thought process they kept developing until they were more successful that

is who we are, as a country so I think we have not choice, but to get back to our roots, and develop individual which is what I think our political system is moving toward as individuals as people of different thought processes and people developing us as individuals so we can be stronger as a unified group and I think some of these powerhouses/super houses that we develop over years are part of what led us to our downfall...I think it will naturally move toward individuals having self-sustaining businesses again are able to sustain the economy without sustenance are able only small businesses it is kind of making up the huge conglomeration that makes up the United States has no choice.

Karen's Republican ideology includes idealized notions of small businesses building back up the US economy; she also goes on to cite all major corporations had once been small businesses as though they are one and the same, or this combination can happen for anyone. For Karen, hard work will turn a small business into a corporation, which is why this response had to be pulled out from the other small business preferences.

Additionally, Karen feels that employment is a kind of competition, and for Karen, a company by definition desires to undercut employees in wages. This is an interesting point of view given the complications surrounding low-wage employees and the companies employing them. Corporations had a strong influence in welfare reform, which was evident in their participation in Family Support Act (Collins & Mayer, 2010).

Education

Discussions of education, Cleveland, and their relationship to employment cover an interesting variation of responses. The only questions included in the interview

concerning education were demographic information, however, several participants brought up their experiences with education in Cleveland, either their own or the education of their children. When we discuss their educational opportunities we focus on the limits of education though the perceived opportunities for their children appeared limitless.

Keisha articulates the need to find the best school for her five-year-old son because education is necessary for upward mobility. Upon pressing Keisha for information about the schools she is considering, she says that she had not made a decision, that she likes his current school, but is considering private and charter schools as opposed to public, “No, like his elementary school, I like it because I work there. Like kindergarten he goes so like I’m hoping Catholic because I heard that is a nice school, and it’s a charter school, so, so the best education because I had the best education.” Keisha is seeking the best school for her son; while Aspen and Karen are seeking to improve the schools their children already attend. Karen started a PTO at her sons’ schools, and Aspen participated in four different schools’ PTOs (she has six children).

Aspen: I don’t know. Earlier this year there was an opening on the school board and I applied for that and was interviewed and all that, but I just don’t know what can be done as far as the schools. I don’t think the school is really the problem. I think it is more the parents. You know if they took a more of an active role of what’s going on with their children then maybe. If I was on the PTO at 4 different schools. There are only 4 schools in Warrensville. I was on PTO at all 4 schools. There was only between 3 and 5 other parents at each of the schools with me on PTO, but

there are at least 3,000/4,000 students. Where are those parents? You know what I'm saying if those parents were involved, actively involved because they say they can't make the evening meeting so we changed it to the weekend in the morning. It was still. There was all kinds of excuses, but they're not involved in what's going on. But everybody is crying about what's not going on. You know what I'm saying? They are crying about the quality of education or their kids passing the tests, that's basically it.

Both Aspen and Karen found the schools to be less of a problem than the lack of involvement by parents of the students. They echo the concern over the emphasis placed on the standardized testing by the state. Aspen is particularly concerned that the curriculum is entirely built around the exams:

Aspen: Yeah, that's it. That's what the curriculum is based around. They don't even teach cursive writing in schools anymore. My child's in the third grade and he still don't know how to write his name in cursive. They're no basing education on what maybe you and I grew up on, which was penmanship, cursive writing, you knew how to write a signature but third or fourth grade, but that's not even part of the curriculum. Everything is about the OAT [Ohio Achievement Testing]. The state tests and preparing them for that, and they still not passing. So.

Aspen's digression on penmanship is a good point of reference to switch over to education's relationship to employment. Essentially, Aspen is lamenting that lack of preparedness the students are for entering the workforce, literally unable to write their own names.

Leda and Lisa 22 note the educational system's inability to prepare students for entry into the workforce. Leda finds that her education was entirely lacking, and she notes that during political campaigns there is so much misinformation that it is up to the individual to learn about everything on their own. Additionally, gaining the information needed to enter the workforce is also the responsibility of the individual. Initially, this may sound like a given; it is in fact an individual's responsibility for giving the information they require to be educated voters and a desirable employment candidate. However, the expectation education enables individuals to do either of these things are also an expectation. Leda and I had a lengthy conversation revolving around the shortcomings of education:

Leda: I just feel like I know you're education is your responsibility, but I just feel like there should be more opportunities for people to learn and even if they don't feel like um, you know like, when you votin' for a president or something you know they give you information. They just throw it out there at you. Where I feel like jobs should be the same thing. If there are certain changes like they should send out pamphlets and say well this is update this, your resume, because people just don't know. You never know when you're going to lose your job. I just feel like they should give out more information as far as jobs as far as education like, like everything.

Leda desires continuing education from the city or county, providing individuals with information needed to continue obtaining gainful employment. Leda is 43 and upon asking about whether her school prepared her for applying for jobs, she said yes, "well I

mean then they just taught you to fill out the regular paper application and how to dress. That's about it. It was pretty basic pretty standard. So I mean jobs were more plentiful then, they didn't as for a whole lot of things that they ask for now." This concept is echoed and elaborated on by Aspen; she asserts that she was taught to fill out paper applications, but because she too is older than many of the participants, and she lacks the education necessary to apply for employment via the technology, which is now required.

Leda also briefly spoke about vocational programming and employment training offered by schools in the Cleveland area. Leda shares her daughter's experience in Richmond Heights, "Actually, my daughter who is 23, she went to Richmond Heights, and they're intertwined a little bit so there was a job training class and they would actually take her to um. They would do a class and learn how to fill out the applications and stuff like that and actually take her on jobs. That is how she was able to land her job." This direct work placement appears to be an easy way to obtain employment, but this is the only instance where this was mentioned.

Lisa 22 felt that the schools in Cleveland are glorified daycares. She feels they should be improved to reflect the changes of employment, "Now, that's something they could change. Those specific changes to make it better. Right now you just go to school, write something down, it's like a daycare. It's not a school, it's a daycare. The kids go to school, but they don't really learn nothing. And then the teachers, they laying teachers off and I think we can do better than that." Lisa 22 concludes in restating her disappointment in Ohio Senate Bill 5, which was mentioned previously in this section.

Benefits and Maternity Leave

As mentioned throughout this study, benefits such as a 401k, retirement plans, and health insurance are rarely offered in the labor fields in which the participants are seeking employment. Jobs with benefits and union protections are considered to be the superior positions and elusive in nature. Of course, retail and fast food service employment can offer benefits, but frequently the employers attempt to keep their employees part time to prevent having to provide benefits (Collins & Mayer, 2010) or the benefits are scarce. Few of the participants had benefits they were aware of or opted into. This is notable because the participants could have not fully been aware of the benefit packages offered or fully understood what “opting out” means. The Family Medical Leave Act, which is enforced in Ohio, requires companies keep positions for women when they go on maternity leave (Family Medical Leave Act, 1993). Tammy lacks a maternity leave option while she was employed with Burger King, however Tammy opts not to return to her position because she wanted to “bond” with her baby, “But like I said I had a baby in December and I had stayed home a couple of months after I had her so you can have that bond or whatever. But ever since then I’ve been back here looking for a job.” This cycle then continues; women leave employment to have children, receive benefits, placed in a position, and repeat.

Criminal Records

Criminal records are a point of interest for a few of the participants. This study had no intention of specifically addressing the topic of criminal records, misdemeanors, or felonies. However, an early interview with Chloe addresses the issue because she views her “record” as a hindrance to obtaining employment. This is a legitimate

complaint; as previously discussed Chloe seeks employment in “fashion” or retail, an area in which she obtained a bachelor’s degree. Additionally, Seven expresses disgust with the treatment of her family members convicted of felonies by the state.

After Chloe shares her history with an arrest, a guilty plea, and conviction, I pushed her to address what she could do to improve her situation, including a career change:

Chloe: Yes, I have thought about that. That’s why I’m really looking for assistant positions because I’m merchandising management so it is a broad thing. Every thing fashion is retail or you design clothes; merchandising is more the business aspects of the fashion world. So I think so. It is so hard because once a thief always a thief you know. Just co-workers and it was just jeans. And I never thought about it like that, but now I’m really am, once a thief, and it’s just. You don’t realize that your past really do affect your future. It really do. And in this world it really is black and white there is not gray area. And I totally, understand with jobs especially that thievin’ and fraud is like number two thing that not aloud. Sometimes I think maybe I should have sold drugs I would have got a felony instead, and I still would get a job, but (laughs). No. Right.

Chloe fully recognizes the ramifications of her actions in retrospect, but that will not remove the conviction. Early in our discussion, Chloe made an off the cuff remark about it being easier to obtain employment with a felony, “You have a felony and you make \$40 thousand.” I was unable to get a full idea of what Chloe meant by this, other than that she is thinking of different kinds of crimes and punishments that are reflective of race,

class, and gender. For example, a white-collar crime is perceived differently than theft in a retail environment.

Seven and I discuss employment opportunities available in Cleveland, and she believes they are limited to men. However, she did not share her feelings that this is discriminatory in practice or that it was intentional. Instead, she brought up the necessity of being a skilled laborer and having no criminal record, specifically no felonies:

Seven: Men, I feel like men in Cleveland have to have some kind of skill, even if it's just cutting grass or something you have to get by, if you don't you won't make it especially with felons and stuff like that because there's not too many jobs for felons. I mean you know people who have felonies go for a job they be like you know you get out just to the right thing get a job and all that, but I just be like how can they. You all don't give them no chance; there are no jobs out here for ex-felons. I'm not one, but my dad he's an ex-felon and my boyfriend is an ex-felon. But it's like there's not jobs out here for them. They say it is but it's really not, really not, very limited on that.

Seven feels that those with felonies are not given any chance to redeem themselves, even after serving their sentence; instead they are punished repetitively. Upon engaging Seven, I inquired as to whether she viewed this as sanctioned discrimination against persons with felonies. She was unsure in her responded, "Yes. I mean, yes and no. Because everybody is responsible for their own actions, but if people want to turn their lives around they can't even do that because they got a felony even name one job that hires felons, they might say so on the applications, but..." Seven trails off not really sure where to take this

portion of our conversation. Seven, like many of the participants, believes that everyone has to take responsibility for their actions; even if this is purely the line indoctrinated by their experience in the “system,” it permeates every line of questioning through the interviews. We conclude this portion of our conversation by briefly describing the things that convicted felons are unable to do, including voting and owning a gun, which Seven assured me was for protection. Finally, Seven makes a striking observation about felons and the government’s relationship to them, though “government” is a monolithic entity, from many perspectives, it certainly feels that way:

Seven: There’s no telling what they did to get that felony so I understand the government is trying to be safe or precautionous or whatever, but the same way the police carry a gun, or another man might carry a gun or another person might carry a gun for their protection for their life because there’s a lot of crazy stuff people dying everyday.

Seven’s observation on the fears and dangers that are a regular part of low-income, African American male’s lives, include the possible need for protections from law enforcement. This is worth further discussion, and perhaps even a study its own given the historical context presented earlier on the Hough race riots.

This section explores the findings that did not fit in the previous sections and that were often unexpected to arise given the interview questions and preliminary research. The participants’ views on Ohio Senate Bill 5 were not unexpected once I had gained an understanding of the political climate and the idealization of union positions. Likewise, the discussions around corporations and small businesses present an interesting understanding of employment and the positions being sought by the participants. Of

course, the opinions of the participants reflect a conceptualization of themselves. In addition to self-conceptualization, the participants express feelings of disenfranchisement based in their views on voting and their lack of access to education. Benefits are seen as something to aspire to, but are rarely provided during employment. Also, evident is a lack of information and understanding participants have about their rights within TANF and as citizens. Finally, criminal records present challenges for the participants both as they limit the opportunities the participants have and how the discrimination against people with criminal records impact their lives. These concerns are valid. They serve to present a broader view of the participants, which is beneficial to the overall research project.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

This research yields a variety of results, which were largely consistent with current research (Collins & Mayer, 2010; Williams, 2006; Hayes, 2003). The interviews with 25 low-income women in Cleveland provides a better understanding of the reality facing people in low-wage and unemployed situations currently participating in welfare programs. Many of the participants provide depictions of service work and general low-wage, temporary employment. These types of employment appear to be generational and institutional. When pressed to discuss the employment histories of their parents and guardians, few participants had family and/or parents with skilled positions. No participants present themselves as proud of receiving public assistance or unemployment. Participants are likely to take full responsibility for their situations. Some participants continue to assert their responsibility after being asked to explain in what ways they kept themselves from obtaining a job, or how they could correct the situation if they had

complete control over it. Participants feel they are at a disadvantage when seeking employment due to the stigma associated with welfare and their lack of current employment. They feel they have to accommodate for their lack of employment or at times employment experience. Additionally, participants initially feel that they have complete control over their employment status and status as welfare recipients. However, upon further discussion many participants acknowledge the roles of outside factors such as the economy on their situations.

This is in reaction to the stigma associated with using programs like TANF and other benefits. Participants share concerns about providing for their children and taking dead-end employment for the sake of having a job. They discuss the difficulties of dealing with the welfare system, particularly the mandatory reporting and the effects it has on their relationships with their partners. However, while many said public assistance needed to change, they had few concrete suggestions.

From the participants' perspectives there is a disconnection between employment and TANF and their daily situations. Participants were frustrated with the welfare system and the back to work programs they were placed in by their caseworkers. However, the participants have few concrete suggestions to repair the welfare system. Participants felt disenfranchised and that they lacked ownership of their involvement within the welfare system.

These findings bring me, as a researcher, back to the glaring shortcomings of public assistance and unemployment, which in turn leads to me to two potential possibilities with respect to public assistance programs: policy makers and the public continued current policies with only minor revisions; and a complete reinvention of the

public assistance policy and programs.

The current policy is deeply rooted in society and both policymakers and the public would be uncomfortable with ending without providing a new structure to take its place (Karger, 2003). If this model is to continue, several aspects must be studied to truly understand how the model functions. An internal audit of social welfare programs must be conducted; this would make the dispersal of funds, workload of caseworkers, recommendations for recipients, and the reasoning behind those recommendations transparent. As Collins & Mayer assert, many caseworkers have relationships with specific employers, which results in the funneling of TANF recipients directly into these organizations, regardless of skills or interests (2010). Each state is required to review and audit their TANF program yearly, however these change from state to state and report back to the federal government. This study should also include surveys for employees who administer these benefits, concerning the race, socioeconomic status, and gender of recipients. I could not find this information being collected for this purpose. This information would provide a stronger understanding of not only the “program’s” view of beneficiaries, but also of the facilitators such as caseworkers and employers and any impact that might have on services received. Perhaps this would demonstrate any potential issues rooted in the system itself such as such as tracking participants into specific low-wage position or sanctioning practices. Studies similar to this have been done on a small scale (Brodkin, 1997), but a comprehensive, large-scale study should be done. The next step would be to conduct a study of the participants, caseworkers, and program facilitators, in order to demonstrate awareness of the programs, any potential issues, and their perceptions of societal constructs, which should be done by an

independent third party. The majority of information generated on public welfare programs focuses on the number of individuals receiving benefits, but the focus should be why and how to improve, instead of how to decrease the numbers (Tickamy, Henderson, White, & Tadlock, 2000). The point of studies of this nature is to demonstrate any potential contradictions between political programming and community ideological discipline.

The second option would be to completely overturn the current structure and create a new social welfare program, while keeping societal constructs such as race, class, and gender, systems, and their impacts in mind. Societal constructs are social categories created by society or culture to organize itself. A program assessment is required for the development of a new societal structure, which includes pre- and post-assessments, evaluations, and progress reports along the way. Developing a new social structure would include both participatory input and budgeting by those receiving benefits. This would ensure that the participants felt they were invested in the success of programming and had meaningful relationships with the administrators of the programs. A new social structure would include community benefit agreements, ensuring that the community shaped the development of the structure. However, it is highly unlikely that either of these options will come to fruition. More information must be gathered on these populations to gain a comprehensive picture of public assistance and low wage work from inside these systems.

In April 2012, Representative Stark (D-CA) introduced the Women's Option to Raise Children, or WORK Act, Women's Option to Raise Children. This legislation would allow women receiving TANF benefits to collect benefits while staying at home to

raise children under 5 years old. This bill has to potential to reshape TANF policy and feminized labor within the home. The WORK Act stems from the resurgence of the “mommy wars” during the 2012 presidential campaign season. However, the fact remains that when childcare is viewed as labor within the home, opportunities are created for women receiving TANF benefits who have been performing care work both in and out of the home. Prior to the WORK Act, only work performed outside of the home is deemed labor. The WORK Act would allow women receiving benefits to stay home with their children for 3 years while collecting benefits. One of the concerns regarding this change in what qualifies as work is whether or not this time will count toward the five year maximum during which an individual can receive benefits. The assumption is that it would, but that could leave the women who choose this option vulnerable in the job market after being at home for up to three years. Additionally, if raising children is considered labor, then, by extension, women should no longer be punished for having children while receiving benefits. Under current policy, children that are conceived and delivered while a mother is receiving benefits would not qualify for benefits.

I feel that my participants were honest and shared a great deal with me during the interview process. My hope is that this project assists in developing an accurate understanding of this population and their experiences.

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Appendix A: Survey and Consent Form

Survey/Interview Questions

The interview questions should encourage the women interviewed to open up and discuss at length their thoughts and opinions on the subject topics. Included below are prompts in case a question leaves a participant feeling as though they need more information or an example to answer, and additional questions to encourage subjects to elaborate further.

1. What are you feelings about Cleveland's economy?
 - a. Do you think Cleveland's economy has gotten worse from the recent recession or was it bad before?
 - b. Was there ever a time when you considered Cleveland's economy good?
 - c. Do you feel like you'd have more opportunities in another location?
 - d. Does Cleveland have limited job opportunities? How so or not?
 - e. Do you see evidence of Cleveland's reincarnation?
 - i. Prompt: Examples such as:
 1. The stadiums of the 90s.
 2. The clean energy economy.
2. Please define/explain your socioeconomic status. How do you see your own situation?
 - a. Describe your level of education.
 - b. Describe your neighborhood.
 - i. Prompt: The one you grew up in and the one you live in now.
 - ii. Prompt: Explain your relationship to the city.
 - c. Describe your employment or recent employment.
 - d. Describe the relationship your family had to work.
 - i. Was unemployment a problem in your parents' day?
 - ii. Did anyone in your family work in the factories and plants before then closed? Or currently?
 - iii. What is the historical context of your family's relation to work?
 - iv. Do you have similar employment to your parents or other family members?
 1. Prompt: Kinds of employment:
 - a. Plants
 - b. Service industry
 - c. Other low wage work
3. Please talk about your relationship to employment?
 - a. What age did you first start working?
 - b. What would you consider your favorite job and least favorite job?
 - c. How long do you believe you will work?
 - i. Do you see retirement as an option for you?
 - d. Do you see your employment as a career or a job?
 - i. Prompt: A career being long term and a job being something to do for right now.

- e. How do you feel about your employment?
 - i. Do you see promotion in the future?
 - ii. What are the positive aspects of your employment and the negative?
 - f. If you don't see any room for growth, why continue to pursue this line of work?
 - i. Do you see yourself getting a raise or moving up?
 - g. Do you feel compelled to work even in a line of work you dislike for the pay?
4. Do you feel concerned about the possibility of unemployment or remaining unemployed for a lengthy period?
 - a. Why?
 - b. When did this concern develop?
 - i. Prompt: With the downward economy or was it something you grew up being aware of?
 5. Are you receiving any public assistance? If so what kind and how long have you been receiving it?
 - a. How do you and your community perceive public assistance?
 - b. Reference: The various types of public assistance in Ohio:
 - i. Ohio Food Assistance Program
 - ii. Ohio Head Start
 - iii. Ohio Healthy Start
 - iv. Ohio Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP)
 - v. Ohio School Breakfast and Lunch Program
 - vi. Ohio Special Milk Program
 - vii. Ohio Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women
 - viii. Infant, and Children (WIC)
 - ix. Ohio Summer Food Service
 - x. Ohio Unemployment Compensation
 - xi. Ohio Weatherization Assistance Program
 - xii. Ohio Works First (OWF)
 - xiii. Ohio's Temporary Assistance to Needy Families Program (TANF)
 - xiv. Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, etc.
 6. What do you feel is responsible for your economic status?
 - a. Is there anything you can do to affect change in your class?
 - b. Are you at the mercy of the economy?
 - c. Is there someone or something to blame for your current economic situation or on a larger scale?
 - d. What can you do to better your situation?
 7. Demographic Information about the participant.
 - a. Age
 - b. Race
 - c. Economic Status
 - d. Employment/Profession

Informed Consent Form
Interviews with Cleveland's Working Women
IRB #061103

Principal Investigator: Cynthia Deitch, Ph.D., 202-994-7438
Principal Contact/Sub Investigator: Kari O'Donnell, 216-570-7056

Introduction:

You are invited to take part in a research study being conducted by Kari O'Donnell under the supervision of Cynthia Deitch, Ph.D. of The George Washington University.

You are being asked if you want to take part in this study because you are involved with the Lutheran Ministry's Back to Work Program. Please read this form and ask us any questions that will help you decide if you want to be in the study. Taking part is completely voluntary and even if you decide you want to, you can quit at any time. Your standing in this program will not be affected in any way should you choose not to take part or to withdraw at any time.

You must be at least 18 years old to take part in this study. You are 1 of approximately 25 people taking part in this study. If you decide to take part and then change your mind you can quit at any time.

Purpose Statement:

This study aims to discuss the realities of low wage female workers. The study will establish first person accounts of low wage employment experiences and the perceived reactions to their situations.

Procedures:

The total amount of time you will spend in this study is 60 minutes over the course of 1 day. The interviews will follow an open-ended semi structured format. It is anticipated that you will receive a follow up for transcription review within 4 weeks. This is expected to take no more than 5 minutes.

Break down duration of individual activities as appropriate, per (9) suggested language.

All participants will be asked demographic questions even if they choose not to take part in this research. If you choose to take part in this research, you will also:

1. Be asked a series of questions concerning your relationship to work, employment, and services (55 minutes).
2. Be asked for contact information for the purpose of transcription review and a potential follow up interview (5 minutes).

Risks and Confidentiality:

The study has the following risks:

You may feel some emotional stress/discomfort answering the interview questions. You are free to skip any questions or stop interview at any point.

There is a small chance that someone not on our research team could find out that you took part in the study or somehow connect your name with the information we collect about you, however the following steps are being taken to reduce this risk. Any information obtained in connection with this research study that could identify you will be kept confidential. In any written reports or publications, no one will be identified or identifiable and only group data will be presented. Direct quotes will be published, and the quotes will be attributed to a pseudonym of your choosing.

The research results will be kept in a password-protected computer only the Primary Investigator and Research Assistant will have access to the records. All hard copy files will be kept locked in a file cabinet. The data will be analyzed by October 2011. Only the Primary Investigator and Research Assistant will have access to the recorded interviews, and there is for no foreseeable reason to release the recording to anyone.

The records of this study will be kept private. In any published articles or presentations, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you as a subject. Your records for the study may be reviewed by departments of the University responsible for overseeing research safety and compliance.

Benefits

Taking part in this research will not help you directly, however the benefit to society will be a better understanding of women's waged labor in Cleveland.

Compensation

You will receive \$ 5.00 for travel costs for taking part in this study to compensate you for your time and effort.

Questions

Talk to the research team if you have questions, concerns, complaints, or think you have been harmed. You can contact the Sub Investigator at 216-570-7056 or the Principal Investigator at 202-994-7438. For questions regarding your rights as a participant in human research call the GWU Office of Human Research at 202-994-2715.

The research team will provide you with a copy. Please keep it in case you want to read it again or call someone about the study.