"The End of Welfare As We Know It": Re-Envisioning Welfare As Democratic Empowerment

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Abstract

AMANDA GRIGG: "The End of Welfare As We Know It": Re-Envisioning Welfare As
Democratic Empowerment
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This work evaluates welfare through the lens of democratic empowerment by

exploring how programs of state support encourage or discourage active political

participation in recipients. The author argues that this view offers both a valuable and

previously overlooked position from which to evaluate welfare and a means by which

to adjudicate between competing conceptions of the state. Under this view, the most

empirically accurate and politically fruitful conceptualizations of the state are those

which chart a middle course between absolute rejection of the liberating potential of

the state and wholehearted embrace of state power. In the case of welfare, this more

complex view of the state allows us to recognize that the design of welfare programs

has profound democratic implications. This understanding of welfare is valuable for

feminists who hope to intervene meaningfully in welfare discourse and design and

vital for anyone concerned with the future of democracy in America.

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In debates over welfare in The United States nearly everyone is a critic. Over the past several decades conservatives and progressives have disagreed over the purpose, design and necessity of welfare but have somehow managed to agree that welfare is, in significantly divergent ways, deeply flawed. One of the common themes in this cacophony of criticism has been the issue of dependence. Welfare has been framed as one of the key sites of dependence in contemporary American life, a form of dependence nearly impossible to reconcile with American emphases on self-reliance and independence. Critics have emphasized welfare's links to dependency in attempts to garner support for drastic cuts in funding and increases in regulations. Anyone advocating for welfare's liberating potential has had to address these worries of dependence; thus even the staunchest supporters of welfare have adopted and adapted this emphasis on dependence. Feminist scholars have argued, for example, that welfare has replaced women's dependence on men with an only slightly less problematic dependence on the state. These dual emphases, on criticism and dependence, have rendered welfare scholarship a largely censorious field.

In this thesis, I argue for a radical shift away from both of these trends in welfare scholarship. Rather than focusing on criticisms of welfare, I incorporate critiques and constructive visions of welfare's potential. And, rather than viewing welfare through the lens of dependence, I explore welfare as a site of democratic empowerment. I suggest that we think of welfare (or at least one of welfare's functions) as a political institution whose effects are best understood in terms of deliberative and participatory democratic theory. While this is a radical shift in emphasis, this work also supports existing research. I argue, for example,

that many welfare programs are deeply flawed. I also incorporate the valuable work feminists have done to illuminate the gender and racial disparities between these programs in my analysis of welfare programs' current effects on democratic empowerment. Even with these points of convergence with existing scholarship, I contend that a democratic view of welfare requires moving beyond the language of dependence, beyond a focus on criticizing welfare, and towards an understanding of welfare as consisting of many different programs with frequently contrasting aims and effects. This view of welfare as multidimensional provides us a more accurate and optimistic position from which to pursue feminist aims, and a position from which to negotiate between conflicting feminist notions of the state.

I begin to do this work here, through an analysis of welfare that employs several tenets of participatory and deliberative democratic theory. [1] Of particular interest are the theories' concerns about the equal political empowerment of citizens and equal inclusion of citizens in public deliberation. Focusing on these issues, I explore the political education drawn from experiences with welfare and the ways in which it can empower recipients to engage in political action and identify themselves as political actors. At this argument's core is a participatory democratic notion of the "wide definition of the political." Starting from Dahl's notion of politics as "any persistent pattern of human relationships that involves to a significant extent power, rule or authority," I suggest that the everyday activities of welfare claiming and receipt constitute political action. [2] Under such a broad view of the political,

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[1] Though deliberative democratic theorists and participatory democratic theorists share similar concerns, they have worked to differentiate themselves from one another (Hauptman, 2001). In recent years, each group of theorists has suggested that their respective models provide the best strategy for democratic action (Hilmer, 2010). In this paper I focus on the overlapping and complementary concerns of these two theories.

[2] Pateman 1970, 44; Dahl 1963, 6.

welfare (which is characterized by complex rules, significant bureaucratic power, and relationships of expert and legislative authority) becomes clearly political.

Participation in welfare programs is also broadly politically educative, in the sense that theorists like Pateman describe. This education includes both a "psychological aspect," which supports one's conception of oneself as a citizen entitled to participate in political action, and also the "gaining of practice in democratic skills and procedures."[3] As recipients interact with welfare programs they learn lessons about how the agencies work, how bureaucrats make decisions, how representatives respond to claims, how recipients are treated and how recipients are expected to act. Through these interactions recipients can develop political skills or be discouraged from developing such skills, and accordingly be encouraged or discouraged from developing an understanding of themselves as political actors. As they interact with their fellow citizens and their representatives, welfare recipients learn lessons about how they are perceived by others. These interactions provide recipients with cues about the legitimacy of their claims, the responsiveness of government to their needs and their legitimacy as political actors. Thus welfare participation is educative in ways that shape whether recipients conceive of themselves as political actors, and in ways that shape whether, how, and to what extent they are capable of and welcome to participate in decision-making procedures. These consequences make welfare a significant political institution, and highlight its potential to democratically empower.

Need-based welfare is unique as a democratic educative institution because its agencies, bureaucrats and services regularly interact with and influence the most vulnerable,

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[3]Pateman 1970, 42.

marginalized and least engaged citizens.[4] It is also unique in its predominance among women and racial minorities, who make up a majority of America's poor and a majority of those making claims on need-based support programs.[5] When need-based welfare discourages democratic participation and identification, it inevitably does so with gendered, raced and classed effects. Thus welfare is not simply a vital democratic institution, it is one deeply embedded in issues of racial, sexual, and class equality.

More broadly, a view of welfare in terms of democratic empowerment implicates welfare programs as institutions of justice. This connection is particularly clear if we adopt Iris Marion Young's notion of justice as the equal provision of "the institutional conditions necessary for the development and exercise of individual capacities and collective communication and cooperation."[6] Oppression, under this view, is the hampering of one's ability "to develop and exercise their capacities and express their needs, thoughts and feelings."[7] And empowerment is the reverse, the cultivation of the capacities to participate in decision-making, both deliberative and non-deliberative and the positioning of individuals as legitimate sources of knowledge in public deliberation.[8] Justice requires comparability in democratic empowerment across state programs. Further, this view might make us particularly suspect of programs targeting the poor, who are generally the least likely to

[4]Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995.

[5]"Demographic and Financial Characteristics of Families Receiving Assistance," The Administration of Children and Families.

[6]Young 1990, 39.

[7]Young, 40.

[8]Ibid, 37.

experience the institutional conditions necessary for political self-development and participation.

Feminists have long made similar arguments, suggesting that welfare institutionalizes social values and thus engages recipients in social learning, with political effects. Through their extensive analysis of welfare, feminist scholars have illuminated the gendered and raced origins of welfare programs, the ways in which they have failed women and the elements of gendered and raced social control inherent in program design. This emphasis on institutionalized, structural control has also worked to produce an implicit view of the state within much of feminist scholarship on welfare. To view the welfare state writ large as operating only as a controlling structure, an institution imbued with and reinforcing race and gender inequalities, we must conceptualize the state as a relatively cohesive structure that can be characterized in a singular way (as oppressive).

As a result of this scholarly emphasis on regulation and social control, there has been less attention paid by feminists to the successes of welfare for poor women and minorities than there has on its failure. Equally little attention has been paid to the ways feminists might disrupt oppressive programs or build on empowering programs to bring welfare into line with their aims. Where feminists have explored the differences between empowering and oppressive programs they have focused on gender and race differences between the program constituencies, origins, and design, opting for criticism over construction.[9] A look at welfare through the lens of democratic empowerment complicates both the solely critical bent of feminist welfare scholarship and the implicit view of the state as a coherent structure of control and oppression

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[9]Gordon, 1994; Nelson 1992.

To help illuminate how welfare policy design affects political learning I turn to empirical work, predominantly that of political scientist Joe Soss. Much of Soss's work is aimed at shifting the focus of scholarship on welfare politics away from the contentious debates over welfare legislation and towards the everyday activities of welfare recipients. Soss's work offers a useful empirical resource for this project because it incorporates themes of participatory and deliberative democratic theory. This is particularly evident in Soss's characterization of welfare as political and educative and his concern over the political participation and efficacy of marginalized individuals. I also turn to empirical work in my efforts to explore the ways in which welfare discourse and public perceptions of welfare can hamper or cultivate recipient participation in deliberations about welfare policies. Several feminist scholars have, through analysis of welfare discourse, demonstrated that the pejorative connotations of welfare, the popular imagery of the welfare queen and the political reactions to black female stereotypes work to delegitimize welfare recipients as citizens and significantly influence welfare reform debates.[10] I engage with this research in an attempt to explore the way that welfare discourse can shape the potential for democratic identity and political engagement among welfare recipients.

The idea for this paper first arose when I was introduced to policy feedback scholarship. I was particularly struck by a call by Smith and Ingram, two leaders in the field, for policy scholars to "envision a democracy in which policy plays a new role: to empower, enlighten, and engage citizens in the process of self-government."[11] I argue that feminists should embrace a similar effort in their work on welfare. In addition to asking whether

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[10]Hancock 2004; Jordan-Zachery 2009; Williams 1995.

[11]Smith and Ingram 1993, 1.

welfare adequately supports women, whether it makes unfair or impossible claims on women, and whether it institutionalizes race and gender inequalities, we should ask what kinds of citizens welfare creates and how known inequalities influence the way welfare positions the poor as citizens. Even more constructively, we should seek out the sites of empowerment in welfare programs in an attempt to envision a welfare system that empowers, enlightens and engages recipients in self-government. My aim is to offer a more holistic framework for feminist analyses of welfare – one both critical and constructive, whose analytic and normative core is democratic empowerment. In addition, I argue that this democratic empowerment analysis of welfare is also valuable because it provides some purchase for adjudicating between competing feminist theories of the state.

FEMINIST CRITIQUES OF WELFARE

Most students of the U.S. welfare system characterize it as a stratified or dual-track system made up of an "upper" and a "lower track". For our purposes these tracks will be referred to as the entitlement and need-based tracks, respectively.[12] The dual-track nature of the U.S. welfare state has been key in most feminist analyses of welfare. The generosity of the historically white, male entitlement track has repeatedly been contrasted with the limited benefits of the female and minority-dominated need-based track in order to demonstrate the raced and gendered origins of welfare. These traditionally male-dominated entitlement track programs include Social Security and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) as well as Veterans Benefits. They are often referred to as upper track programs because they offer more generous benefits and are (quite problematically, as feminists suggest) much more popular among the public.[13] These programs are federally administered, with relatively stable nationally uniform requirements. Traditionally female and minority-dominated need-based programs include Food Stamps, Medicaid, and Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). After the welfare reform efforts of the 1990s, AFDC was replaced with Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF, the program people generally refer to when speaking of "welfare"). These programs tend to be less generous in the amount and form of benefits

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[12]Gordon 1994.

[13]Glendon 1991.

offered, and much less popular among the public. They rarely offer cash assistance and often

include demanding application processes and extensive surveillance of recipients.

Recognition of the dual tracks of the welfare state was a key component of early

feminist critiques of welfare as structurally oppressive or patriarchal.[14] It was through

comparison to male directed and dominated benefits that the benefits aimed at women were

most clearly and convincingly identified as problematically gendered and unequal. In an

early historical comparison of the dual track system, Barbara Nelson describes the welfare

state as follows:

> "The political, economic, and household conditions of the Progressive period gave
> rise to a two-channel welfare state…Workmen's Compensation set the tone for the
> first channel of the welfare state, which was male, judicial, public, and routinized in
> origin… [Mother's Aid] set the tone for the second channel of the welfare state,
> which was female, administrative, private, and nonroutinized in origin."[15]

Nelson's approach here is similar to many early critiques, simultaneously identifying the dual

track and exploring its gendered origins. In the same volume, Virginia Sapiro suggests that

the dual track welfare system views individuals "in terms of functional roles depending upon

gender," encouraging male independence and female dependence on working men.[16] Other

scholars similarly argued that welfare programs were designed to maintain an economic

system based on a single male earner and characterized by female dependence.[17] Again, the

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[14]Cumming 1980; King 1982; Law 1983' Pateman 1988, 136; Pearce 1985. My characterization of feminist
welfare scholarship owes a great deal to Gordon's "three stages" of welfare criticism in her introduction to
*Women, the State, and Welfare (*1990).

[15]Nelson 1990, 133.

[16]Sapiro 1990, 40.

[17]Gordon 1988.

dual tracks were linked to female dependence and sexual inequalities. Eventually scholars

began to incorporate considerations of racial difference, arguing that early welfare program

designs regulated white women and intentionally excluded minority women.[18] One common

critique of this early period suggested that vague, racialized criteria for home "suitability"

and "propriety" were used to exclude Black women from receiving benefits.[19]

      After cataloguing many of the inequalities present in welfare policies, scholars began

to argue that the very structure of welfare was imbued with assumptions about sex and race,

and that welfare programs inevitably (and in some cases intentionally) resulted in the

entrenchment of sexual and racial inequalities. Early welfare scholarship thus quickly

evolved into structural critiques of welfare. These critiques posited that the entire dual-track

welfare system functioned to reinforce racial and gender inequalities.[20] Under this view, the

welfare state could be understood as a complex structure made up of norms, habits, symbols,

policies, regulations and assumptions, which operated collectively to entrench racial and

gender inequalities.[21] Critiques of formal regulations, policy implementation, legislative

discourse, caseworker behavior and unspoken norms came together to form a critique of the

welfare state as a coherent structure of oppression. Structural views assumed that there was a

coherent (if complex) core of welfare policy. Gendered and racial ideologies were at the

roots of welfare design and implementation and as a result the operations of the welfare state

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[18]Mink 1992; Gordon and Fraser 1993.

[19]Mink 1992; Oliver and Shapiro 1995.

[20]Linda Gordon identifies this trend in her chapter on "The New Feminist Scholarship on the Welfare State" in *Women, The State and Welfare* (1990).

[21]Young 2000.

consistently worked to oppress women and minorities and maintain systems of inequality. Structural arguments thus identify the welfare state as fundamentally racist and sexist (and occasionally problematically capitalist).[22]

We can look to arguments about the inherently discriminatory nature of the entire welfare state as examples of this kind of structural critique. Carole Pateman herself, for example, wrote a piece identifying "the patriarchal structure of the welfare state," arguing that "the position of men as breadwinner-workers has been built into the welfare state."[23] In defense of this position Pateman posits a foundational character of welfare (patriarchy) and characterizes the welfare state as a coherently and intentionally oppressive structure. We might also look to Mimi Ambramovitz's argument that the ideology of women's traditional roles "became encoded within the rules and regulations of the welfare state" and had been shaping public policy and regulating the lives of women ever since.[24] Linda Gordon emphasized the racist, sexist and capitalist assumptions of welfare in her structural argument that "family-wage assumptions have been embedded in these [welfare] programs so deeply that they would be hard to subvert."[25] Occasionally this structure was described as the result of a conscious effort to maintain the status quo, as in Zillah Eisenstein's critique of Reagan's

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[22]This structural view of welfare can incorporate assumptions of intent, but do not necessarily need to incorporate such assumptions. We can imagine an individual who acts within a system of structural oppression, and even acts to maintain that system, without awareness or intent.

[23]Pateman 1988, 238, 136.

[24]Abramovitz 1996, 13.

[25]Gordon 1988, 619.

welfare plan as an attempt to "restabilize patriarchy."[26] Many scholars supported this characterization of the modern welfare state as a coherent structure of sexual, racial and class inequality, attributing varying degrees of intent to the creators of modern welfare.[27]

In many ways, the dominant discourse in these early feminist criticism of the welfare state implied a particular view of the state. Arguments about welfare's structurally oppressive nature assumed a unified, and often intentionally oppressive state structure. Around the same time that structural critiques emerged (and sometimes in the same works) feminist scholars began arguing that not only welfare, but the entire state, was oppressive, gendered and male. Eisenstein, for example, argued that the state was multiple only in its oppression, suggesting that the state is "structured by its simultaneous commitments to patriarchy, capitalism, and racism."[28]

Feminist analyses of reformed welfare programs have closely paralleled early critiques. Scholars have critiqued TANF extensively for its punitive and coercive requirements and for its raced and gendered origins.[29] Many have embraced the understanding of welfare as intentionally and structurally oppressive. In a volume published in 2000, Eileen Boris calls welfare reform at state and federal levels "social engineering from the political right" which she argues "intervenes in the lives of the poor as much as did the therapeutic regimes of the Charity Organization Societies and welfare caseworkers of the

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[26]Eisenstein 1984, 125.

[27]Pateman 1970, Abramovitz 1988; Eisenstein 1984; Brown 1981; Nelson 1990; Fraser 1990; Gordon 1988.

[28]Eisenstein 1984, 89.

[29]Boris 1999; Smith 2007, Smith 2006.

past."[30] Mary Ann Jimenez argues that welfare reform legislation, particularly the Personal

Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), was consciously

designed to "discipline poor women who seemed to challenge traditional gender roles and

deep-seated values about women's place in American society."[31] She discusses the

"ideological underpinnings" of PRWORA, the social norms "embedded' in the legislation

and "the explicit goal of welfare reform."[32] Dionne Bensonsmith similarly argues that the

welfare state has, since the 1960s, "became explicitly defined around stereotypes of African-

American women which have since mediated public debate over welfare."[33] Scholars have

thus continued to incorporate an understanding of the "sexist, racist, and classist history of

welfare" into their analyses of recent reform efforts, suggesting that welfare's roots and its

continued institutionalization of biases influence both the policy directions taken by

legislators and the public response. [34]

     Some work has begun to shift away from structural critiques by recognizing instances

of activism by welfare participants and welfare programs that operate outside of the social

control model. Annelise Orleck's historical exploration of welfare activism begins by

characterizing the past several decades of welfare reform as fundamentally detrimental to

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[30]Boris 1999, 40.

[31]Jiminez 1999, 278.

[32]Jiminez 1999, 282.

[33]Bensonsmith 2005, 244.

[34]Smith 2006, 151.

women of color, and intentionally so.[35] Although Orleck characterizes welfare policy as

stable and punitive across time and political parties, her work also focuses on the potential

for women to influence welfare policy. Orleck looks to the grassroots activism of poor black

women in Nevada as "an alternative model for fighting poverty that affirms and supports

poor families instead of demeaning and humiliating them."[36] The alternative model, called

"Operation Nevada" was a series of civil disobedience actions, supported by civil and legal

rights advocates, that gained national attention and led to a federal court reversal of Nevada's

extreme welfare cutbacks. The activists in Las Vegas are, for Orleck, "poster women for a

new model of welfare reform – from the bottom up."[37] According to Orleck, welfare may be

consistently punitive, but women can still make their voices heard and influence state action.

In this way Orleck represents a shift away from fully pessimistic views of welfare. But even

in Orleck's optimistic history of welfare activism, the potential for feminist action is only

found once women begin to work outside of the state. Feminist change is accomplished by

working against what is still seen as a largely unresponsive, and even anti-feminist state.

     Though they offer powerful critiques of welfare's failures and identify the

problematic assumptions at the base of many welfare programs, structural critiques largely

disregard the state as an avenue for positive feminist action. Frances Fox Piven describes this

as a mistake of feminist welfare scholarship:

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[35]Orleck 2005, 5.

[36]Orleck 2005, 5.

[37]Orleck 2005, 3. In the titular example of civil disobedience, 1,500 protestors (including Jane Fonda and civil rights leader Reverend Ralph Abernathy) led a protest through Caesars Palace, halting gambling for over an hour and drawing national attention to Nevada's attempts to slash welfare benefits.

"Very little that has been written about the relationship of women to the state suggests we look to it for sources of power. To the contrary, the main characterization is of a state that exercises social control over women, supplanting the eroding patriarchal relations of the family with a patriarchal relationship with the state. In my opinion, the determination to affirm this conclusion is generally much stronger than the evidence for it. Even in the nineteenth century, state policies had a more complicated bearing on the situation of women."[38]

Piven's critique is equally applicable to what I have called structural critiques of welfare. By suggesting that the many operations of welfare programs can be characterized uniformly, structural critiques offer an understanding of the state as unified and consistent, and largely without contradiction. By suggesting that the predominant effect of the welfare state is oppression, these arguments suggest that the state is something to be resisted and worked against. While I agree that social control, sexism, and racism play significant roles in the modern welfare state, and that we must be aware and critical of their presence, I also argue that feminists should seek out the positive potential in welfare programs. In order to fully understand the impact of welfare on women, and to move past criticism and towards change, feminists must seek out sources of state power.

Viewing the welfare state in terms of its potential to empower – that is, examining which welfare programs encourage or at least permit self-definition, collective organization, and political engagement - complicates feminist critiques of structural oppression and the concomitant view of a monolithic state. It also supports feminist critiques of the significance of gender and race inequalities in the different tracks of welfare. It draws attention to the links between poverty, welfare participation and political marginalization, suggesting that political empowerment should be a key concern of anyone evaluating welfare programs.[39]

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[38]Piven 1990, 255.

[39]Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995.

And it illuminates the ways in which low participation rates by the poor can be compounded by the design and implementation of institutions that dominate the poor's interaction with the state. This is a neglected story – one important not only for scholars of welfare, but for anyone concerned with democracy or citizenship.

THEORIZING WELFARE THROUGH THE LENS OF DEMOCRATIC
EMPOWERMENT

I suggest that we analyze welfare as a major political institution, one that is

particularly important because of its unique relationship with the least engaged, most

vulnerable citizens. Such an effort will include critiques of welfare (particularly, identifying

those places where welfare is functioning to suppress democratic identification or activity)

but will also contain a constructive element that seeks out empowering practices and aims to

develop and expand these practices. We should, then, evaluate welfare programs in terms of

their ability to further the democratic empowerment of citizens. We must ask whether or to

what extent welfare cultivates citizens' capacities to participate in decision-making, both

deliberative and non-deliberative, and positions citizens as legitimate sources of knowledge

in public deliberations. Once we recognize the significant role that welfare plays and will

continue to play in democratic life, we can reframe welfare as a potentially empowering

institution, and reposition the state as a potential tool of feminists rather than simply a

permanent opponent.

To begin this evaluation, we must carefully consider the kinds of democratic

empowerment most relevant to welfare programs. As noted above, participatory democratic

theory posits the educative nature of political participation. Thus we will look to the

educative effects of welfare participation, and consider the ways the cultivation of political

skills might encourage individuals to conceive of themselves as political actors and to

participate in public decision-making. Addressing these concerns will require exploring the

design of welfare programs. We might investigate, for example, whether TANF programs allow for recipient definition of their needs, or whether caseworkers are receptive to active recipient involvement in the application process.

One important means of cultivating political skills and political identities for both participatory and deliberative democrats is participation in decision-making processes.[40] For deliberative democratic theorists, decision-making processes take the form of dialogue between interested parties. Democratic process is "primarily a discussion of problems, conflicts, and claims of need or interest," a means of testing and challenging one another's proposal and positions through dialogue.[41] The democratic legitimacy, and the equal development of citizens' conceptions of themselves a political actors requires the inclusion of "all those affected" in the process of "discussion and decision-making."[42] Thus we must consider the extent to which welfare programs and discourses position recipients as legitimate actors in public deliberations about welfare. Specific concerns about the way public discourse positions citizens as legitimate political actors (or not), and thus determines their capacity to participate in deliberation, will be referred to as issues of "democratic identity."[43] Addressing these concerns will require exploring the discourse surrounding welfare and the public portrayal of welfare recipients in a "deep" democratic sense. That is, we will need to explore the way welfare recipients are treated in democratic deliberations

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[40]Pateman 1970, 43; Young 2000, 6.

[41]Young 2000, 22.

[42]Ibid, 23.

[43]This concept draws on Iris Marion Young's work on Inclusion and Democracy and Ange Marie Hancock's work on the public identity of the "welfare queen."

from formal legislative hearings to casual conversations between individuals about welfare reform.

A full conception of democratic empowerment incorporates both concerns about "democratic identity" and concerns about the participatory lessons and self-conceptions cultivated by welfare programs and discourses. The latter component of empowerment requires that programs be designed in ways that prepare citizens for participation, teach them the skills necessary "to develop and exercise their capacities and express their needs, thoughts, and feelings."[44] The democratic identity component requires discourses and programs that position welfare recipients as legitimate political speakers. Here we might think of Nancy Fraser's critiques of the way welfare currently positions citizens. Fraser critiques the welfare system for working against collective identification, preventing self-definition and self-determination and for positioning recipients as passive recipients of benefits rather than as "active co-participants involved in shaping their life conditions."[45] We can take the mirror image of Fraser's critique to clearly delineate a potentially empowering democratic identity for welfare recipients. Welfare recipients should be encouraged to organize collectively around their shared identity, and to actively participate in discussions about their conditions and welfare programs. They should be permitted to participate in shaping their public identity. Treating welfare recipients as legitimate political actors (and thus incorporating their own conceptions of themselves in public conceptions of their identity) would guarantee a reasonable amount of autonomy in the inevitably mutual process

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[44]Young 1990, 40.

[45]Fraser 1987, 115.

of public identity creation. Finally, the public should recognize the experience of welfare

recipients as providing valuable insight in the decision-making process and should legitimize

these considerations in ways that empower recipients.[46]

Democratic Identity and Discourse

The public discourse surrounding each welfare track, and the positive and negative

connotations attached to the tracks through this discourse, have a significant influence on

recipients' democratic identities and the possibility of deliberative inclusion. The public

conception of welfare receipt shapes how recipients are positioned as citizens, and thus has a

significant influence on public willingness to include the voices of welfare recipients in

decision-making processes. Addressing issues of deliberative inclusion and democratic

identity thus requires us to consider the discourses and public images surrounding welfare

programs.

The political discourse surrounding upper-track programs, their methods of benefit

distribution, and the public conceptions of these programs all reinforce a view of entitlement

program recipients as deserving and entitled. Entitlement programs tend to be contributory in

nature, basing receipt on a lifetime of contributions to the pool from which benefits are

drawn. Consequently recipients consider themselves entitled to benefits. Need-based

program benefits are generally not viewed as the right of recipients and tend to label

recipients as undeserving, both in public discourse and in policy design. As Theda Skocpol

explains,

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[46]Fraser 1990, 155.

"The word "welfare" has a pejorative connotation in the United States. It refers to *unearned* public assistance benefits, possibly *undeserved* and certainly *demeaning*, to be avoided if at all possible by all "independent," self-respecting citizens."[47]

Framing need-based programs as programs that benefit undeserving and irresponsible citizens, in turn, positions recipients of such programs in ways that delegitimizes them as political actors. Individuals who are not deserving of our support, who are irresponsible and who may even take advantage of public aid, are not those we turn to in making important public decisions. We may even have reason to ignore the voices of these individuals when they present themselves.

Feminist scholars have explored the effects of negative welfare discourse extensively, arguing that the rhetoric surrounding the welfare reform debate and the language of the bill itself were raced and gendered in ways that stigmatize welfare recipients and delegitimize their claims on the state. Critics have also suggested that changes in welfare reform were largely based on mistaken and often racialized stereotypes about welfare recipients.[48] Ange Marie Hancock offers a particularly fitting analysis for this project. Hancock explores the public identity of welfare recipients through extensive discursive analysis of welfare reform debates, legislation, media coverage and interviews with welfare recipients. Hancock suggests that the imagery of the welfare queen invokes political reactions of disgust, and that both the welfare queen imagery and the public response draw on false stereotypes to delegitimize welfare recipients as citizens. She argues that this "distortion of political legitimacy" provides the public, welfare workers and legislators with "a justification for

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[47]Skocpol 1992, 5 (emphasis mine).

[48]Brush 1997; Hancock 2004; Gueztkow 2010; Polakow 1999; Rank 1994.

denying welfare recipients any empowered participation in the process."[49] Hancock's analysis of congressional discourse saw frequent use of the welfare queen image and a lack of solidarity and general failure of representation by longtime advocates of women, African Americans and the poor.[50] The public image of the "welfare queen" was a consistent part of the 1996 welfare reform debate among media outlets and representatives and, Hancock argues, the associated deviance of the welfare queen conditioned the available policy options. Just as the public is not likely to encourage the participation of someone perceived to be deviant, legislators are unlikely to develop generous benefit programs for deviant or undeserving groups.

One prominent democratic effect of all of this is that welfare recipients are often left with almost no control over their public identity, and without the ability to participate in the discourse that shapes that identity. As Williams suggests, the discursive hegemony of the imagery of the welfare queen overwhelms welfare recipients with "demeaning imagery of who society says she is."[51] This tendency to delegitimize their political speech leaves recipients with little agency in the political realm. Here we might think of Patricia Hill Collin's use of the term "controlling images" to describe common stereotypes of black women. Insofar as the image of the "welfare queen" control recipients' potential to be recognized, represented and self-defining, they work directly against democratic aims. In rendering democratic self-definition unavailable to recipients and identifying recipients as

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[49]Hancock 2004, 142.

[50]Ibid, 115.

[51]Williams 1995; see also Steele and Sherman, 1999; Hancock 2002.

illegitimate participants in deliberation, the welfare discourse works in direct opposition to

the discourse surrounding entitlements. Entitlement discourse tends to emphasize the

deservedness of beneficiaries and the legitimacy of their claims on government support,

encouraging political action and recipients' conception of themselves as legitimate political

actors.[52] We should not be surprised then, that welfare recipients participate at lower levels

than recipients of any other need based program, or that they demonstrate lower levels of

psychological well-being than similarly situated non-recipients. [53] Within need-based

programs the discursive hegemony of the imagery of the welfare leaves little space for

understanding oneself as a valued citizen and little reason to engage in political

participation.[54]

Differences in Empowerment between Entitlement and Needs-based Programs

Discourse that labels welfare benefits as "undeserved" goes beyond stigmatizing

recipients to bolster the development of particular structures of welfare distribution. Popular

dislike for need-based programs and respect for entitlement programs supports the

maintenance of significant structural differences between the two. Individuals are much more

likely to support generous benefits for groups they deem deserving. Thus discourses that

label welfare recipients undeserving, Cadillac-driving "welfare queens" direct public support

[52]Lubiano 1992: Wahneema Lubiano suggests that the image of the "welfare queen" influences public opinion of all black women and influences discourses far beyond that of welfare. She suggest that the public responds to black women making public claims by attempting to categorize them into available stereotypes, which then conditions our willingness to believe, support that claim, legitimize her as a speaker.

[53]Bruch 2000; Swartz et. al. 2009.

[54]Wahneema Lubiano 1992.

toward less generous, more restrictive welfare programs for the poor.[55] This helps to explain why entitlement programs tend to have extremely limited supervision, cash benefits and unlimited benefit periods, while need-based programs tend to have extensive supervision, significantly regulated benefits and lifetime limits on receipt of benefits. These differences, in turn, lead to significant differences in the lessons of democratic empowerment gained from participation in the two tracks.

Before exploring these democratic effects, I offer a brief characterization of need-based welfare programs. Recipients of need-based programs interact with their agency through caseworkers, who have significant discretion in determining whether they will continue to receive benefits and when and how often recipients must attend case meetings. Caseworkers represent an intimate and relatively constant presence in the life of need-based program recipients, one that is almost entirely missing in the distant federal apparatus of entitlement program benefits. This relatively complete caseworker control over the recipient/agency relationship and over receipt of benefits leaves many recipients feeling insecure and powerless.[56] Recipients also face strict restrictions on their behavior including requirements that they engage in certain types of work and job training, restrictions on the types of child care they can pay for with benefits and even "family caps" aimed at discouraging recipients from having more children.[57] These differences in program design determine the extent to which entitlement and need-based programs democratically empower recipients.

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[55]Appelbaum 2001.
[56]Soss 2001 Abramovitz 1999, Gordon 1990.

[57]Hays 2003; The most common means of determining a "suitable home" under early welfare programs was judgment of women's sexual behavior. Gordon 1990, 298.

To help illuminate how welfare program design affects democratic empowerment I turn to the work of political scientist Joe Soss. In his work most closely related to this project, *Unwanted Claims,* Soss investigates the "political dimension of welfare participation" arguing that welfare institutions are political in their "potential to empower or marginalize their clients" and "contribute to a more capable and engaged citizenry or reinforce political inequalities and quiescence."[58] After asserting that welfare constitutes a political institution with significant power over individual lives, Soss moves on to evaluate welfare's effects on the political life of clients using the same criteria applied to major democratic political institutions. In doing so, Soss compares the political participation levels and feelings of political efficacy of those claiming social insurance benefits (SSDI) and those claiming social assistance benefits (AFDC). Soss find that "relative to SSDI, the AFDC program constructs a decidedly inferior form of social citizenship for its recipients, and it does so in a way that has far-reaching political implications."[59] His conclusions are based on in-depth interviews with 25 AFDC recipients and 25 SSDI recipients between 1994 and 1995 and supplemental ethnographic fieldwork (in disability support groups and homeless shelters) as well as observation in welfare agency offices. I take Soss as (in his own words) "an empirical starting point" for a discussion about how "welfare policy design may affect democracy," using his work to fuel a theoretical discussion about how we should understand welfare, the state, and the potential of both to further feminist democratic aims.[60]

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[58]Soss 2000, 1-2.

[59]Ibid, 184.

[60]Soss 2000, 184.

Recipients of entitlement programs like Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) are overwhelmingly more likely to view the government as open, democratic, and responsive to their needs.[61] They are also more likely to believe that their individual participation is effective, that collective movements could be effective and that the government listens to people like themselves. [62]Among those SSDI and AFDC recipients who agreed that collective action would be effective, most disagreed on why collective action would work. SSDI recipients explained collective action's efficacy by referring the government's receptiveness to interest groups, perhaps thinking of the many successes entitlement program interest groups (like AARP and National Disability Rights Network) have had in pushing back against proposed restrictions of benefits. AFDC recipients tended to see collective action as the only way to jar a largely unresponsive system. Common explanations from AFDC respondents suggested not that the government was open to or encouraging collective action but that collective action would amount to "too many people not to listen."[63]

If we shift from considerations of the efficacy of collective action to political action more generally, welfare recipients hold similar views about government unresponsiveness. Often these views are connected to their unique position as welfare clients. In Soss's work, SSDI recipients linked government unresponsiveness to the government being "out of touch," while a majority of AFDC recipients linked it to their status as welfare clients. Public officials, one woman explained "would listen even less because I'm in this group of people

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[61]Soss 2000, 172.

[62]Ibid., 173: Sixty percent of SSDI recipients felt that the government listened to people like themselves compared to only eight percent of AFDC recipients.

[63]Ibid., 174.

that they're trying to – that they have these stereotypes against…I'm looked at totally differently because of the fact that I'm a recipient."[64] As already noted, there is a strong scholarship on welfare stigma that supports this recipient's experience.[65]

The structure of AFDC (and most TANF programs) requires recipients to enter into case work relationships and gives significant discretion to case workers in determining eligibility for benefits. Case work relationships leave recipients with very little control over the timing, location and content of their interactions with welfare agencies. The discretion of case workers leaves many recipients feeling that they must cater to case workers and cannot resist them or complain without facing punishments. The history of heavy surveillance and discipline within welfare programs continues to worry many recipients, who in turn fear for their privacy and autonomy. One AFDC applicant expressed concerns for her privacy, explaining that she had encountered "surprise visits" and recalling hiding her family's iron and telephone so that case workers would not think they were no longer in need of aid.[66] In his work with AFDC and SSDI recipients, Joe Soss found that AFDC applicants tended to worry that case-workers and welfare guidelines would "strip them of their ability to direct their own lives."[67] AFDC applicants also tended to have "more intense and specific fears about autonomy in relation to the welfare state" than similarly situated SSDI recipients. [68]

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[64]Soss 2000, 147.

[65]Shapiro and Young 1989; Gilens 1999; Hancock 2004; Collins 2000, Quadagno 1984.

[66]Soss 2000, 30.

[67]Ibid.

[68]Ibid.

One woman explained, "It's like you apply for AFDC and you're owned by them. They own you now. That's what one of the girls in line told me when I went to apply. She told me, "Once you apply, girl, they're going to *own* you."[69]

Together, scholarship on welfare design and discourse suggest that welfare recipients are positioned both in the community and within welfare agencies as illegitimate political actors in way that makes self-definition nearly impossible and which profoundly discourage political participation. The structure of these welfare programs grants recipients minimal control, emphasizing the power of caseworkers through the use of arbitrary meetings and flexible standards for maintaining benefits. This bureaucratic power discourages participation in and contestation existing procedures by creating an environment of insecurity and invisibility. Through participation in AFDC and TANF, the ability to participate in defining oneself as a political actor, and participates in shaping one's own life conditions is frustrated. In addition, the design of these programs discourages the cultivation of deliberative skills, self-advocacy and political participation more generally.

These differences in empowerment between tracks should not be surprising to anyone familiar with the notion of the dual track welfare state. The entitlement track is called the "upper-track" or "superior-track" due to the greater generosity of benefits and relative absence of surveillance and is widely recognized as offering a less stigmatized form of government support. As discussed, feminist scholars have more than adequately addressed the gender and race inequalities upon which the division of the two tracks was built.[70] Thus

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[69]Ibid, 34.

[70]Skocpol 1992.

far, viewing welfare through the lens of empowerment supports the dominant feminist construction of welfare.

Entitlement programs, however, are becoming increasingly racially and ethnically diverse. At first glance, the presence of women and minorities simply reflects the makeup of the American poor. Given the overrepresentation of women, African Americans and Hispanics among the poor in the United States, it is almost inevitable that they will dominate public support programs. But, if we accept a view of the state as complex, and think of welfare programs as both constituting and constituted by changing constituencies, we can discern a potential site of feminist action. Structurally, a recipient's involvement with both programs that marginalize and programs that empower greatly complicates legislative attempts to differentiate welfare programs based on constituency. Discursively, constituency changes might undermine the gendered and raced view of the dual tracks, or redeploy the reverence attached to programs like Social Security to complicate the image of black women as inherently undeserving. In addition to shifting public views of welfare, the increasing numbers of poor women and minorities in entitlement constituencies complicates the notion that recipient experiences are dominated by a single track. Changing constituencies require that we explore how welfare state programs interact with one another to shape recipient experiences. We might, for example, investigate whether participation in the entitlement track encourages recipient to engaging in self-definition and self-advocacy even in less participatory means-tested agencies or, whether participation in means-tested programs is so

repressive that it discourages active involvement even in programs that welcome participant control.[71]

With all of this in mind, even if we recognize the divisions of the dual tracks we cannot assume that the state operates similarly within or among groups. When we recognize the complex ways in which individuals make claims on welfare programs in order to fill their needs, we begin to see that the dual track itself – which before exemplified the gendered and raced social control of the state – complicates any view of the state as unified or engaging systematically in any particular way.

Differences in Empowerment Among Need-based Programs

Even more challenging to this view of a uniformly oppressive state are the sites of empowerment that already exist within the means-tested track. These programs undermine feminist arguments against the state by demonstrating the potential for welfare programs to democratically empower. The best example of this may be Head Start, a means-tested program that provides nutritional, educational, health and social services to young children from low-income families. Head Start services are unique among welfare benefits, enjoying public and bipartisan support since their creation 1964.[72] Unlike TANF programs, Head Start programs were founded on a belief in the value of recipient participation and control. Head Start programs encourage parents to "identify their own strengths, needs and interests, and

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[71]Here we can return to Soss, who found that several of the recipients he encountered were reluctant to make claims on SSDI because of the lessons they had learned about the futility of self-definition while in AFDC. Soss, 2000.

[72]Though the program has enjoyed public support and recipients have faced little stigmatization, Head Start shares need-based programs' vulnerability to cuts in the current economic climate.

find their own solutions"[73] and "strongly emphasize the involvement of families and the local community to assure that programs are responsive to the unique needs of each community."[74] The Head Start Planning committee made parent involvement a key component of early program design aiming for "genuine participation in the administration and day-to-day activities of the program."[75] An early program designer explains, "Disadvantaged families were no longer seen as passive recipients of services dispensed by professionals. Instead they were viewed as active, respected participants and decision makers, roles they assumed with an unexpected degree of success."[76]

To achieve these goals Head Start programs engage parents in classroom activities, field trips, curriculum planning and policy councils. Community policy councils, which offer the most obviously political educative experience, are groups that meet to discuss and vote on all major changes to the local Head Start program.[77] Policy councils must be made up of a majority of parents of current Head Start students who work with community members and to review, approve, or disapprove all funding applications for Head Start programs, program personnel policies, and decisions to hire or terminate any Head Start employees in addition to

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[73]Head Start, "About Head Start." Available at: http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/About%20Head%20Start.

[74]CRS-2 CRS Report for Congress, Head Start Issues in the 108th Congress. Updated June 25, 2003. Melinda Gish and Alice Butler Domestic Social Policy Division (http://assets.opencrs.com/rpts/RL30952_20030625.pdf).

[75]Zigler 1979.

[76]Ibid.

[77]Like TANF programs, Head Start programs are funded through block grants to states, but the potential discouragement to collectively organize seems to be offset by the programs participatory design.

engage in strategic planning and making decisions about with whom the Head Start agency partners.[78] Through the policy councils, Head Start provides poor parents with a venue for collective deliberation and political action. By making parental input a vital part of its program design and encouraging parents to employ their experiences in collective deliberation, Head Start (at least in design) recognizes the legitimacy of recipient claims and their value as material for consciousness raising and program improvement.[79]

Much of the scholarship on Head Start has focused on outcomes for children. These studies have demonstrated that putting parent participation at the core of Head Start has had a powerful influence on the educational achievements of Head Start children. As evidence of the dominance of this concern in the scholarship we need only look to Steven Barnett's review of 36 major Head Start studies focusing on Head Start's effects for children's cognitive development.[80] Head Start has also had a significant effect on the personal growth and development of parents, effects which scholars have only recently begun to address. Parental involvement in Head Start has been shown to increase parents' self-confidence, decrease the occurrence of depression, and increase feelings of control and satisfaction with their lives.[81] Studies have consistently found that more involved Head Start parents have higher self-esteem and ego development than similarly situated parents with lower levels of

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[78]Head Start Policy Council Doc. Available at:
www.paheadstart.org/UserFiles/File/.../Head_Start_Policy_Council.doc.

[79]Just as the design of block grant TANF programs differ, the designs of Head Start programs differ, though grants are given based on recipient ability to achieve the aims of the program, which emphasize parent engagement.

[80]Barnett 1995.

[81]Parket et al. 1987; Sissel 1997.

involvement.[82] They also have more positive self-conceptions than recipients of other need-based programs. Parker, Piotrkowski and Peay found that "mothers who participated more in Head Start programs reported "fewer psychological symptoms, greater feelings of mastery, and greater current life satisfaction at the end of the program year."[83] Parents surveyed by Oden and Ricks found their involvement in Head Start to be energizing and empowering.[84] These findings are clearly related to concerns about welfare recipient's democratic empowerment. Attitudes of mastery, psychological well-being and confidence certainly lend themselves to active citizenship as do the skills learned through participation in policy councils and leadership positions.

Scholars have also begun to study the political consequences of parental involvement and found that parents involved in Head Start tend to be more politically engaged and more willing to express their needs to welfare agencies than their similarly situated non-Head Start peers. Early work on parents' political engagement has found that survey respondents in Head Start demonstrate higher levels of activity in voting, political participation and civic participation than their counterparts in TANF and public housing.[85] Even among Head Start parents, more engaged parents are more likely to engage in other community volunteer work, belong to other community organizations and have fewer negative feelings about social

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[82]Collins & Deloria, 1983; Skerry 1983; Slaughter et. al. 1989; Parker, Piotrowski and Peay 1987; Bruce and Kenney 1991; Pizzo and Tufankjian 2004.

[83]Parkert, Piotrowski and Peay 1987.

[84]Oden and Ricks 1990.

[85]Bruch 2009.

services received in the community.[86] Scholars have also found that receipt of TANF was associated with a significant reduction in rates of civic participation (16%) while Head Start was associated with a significant (23%) increase in the odds of recipient parents participating in civic organization.[87] The authors explain that "overall levels of civic and political participation are significantly diminished by participation in TANF, significantly enhanced by involvement with Head Start, and unaffected by receipt of public housing benefits."[88] Returning to the work of Joe Soss, we find similar results: parents involved with Head Start programs were generally more willing to express complaints to their welfare agency than those receiving traditional "welfare" programs.[89]

Personal anecdotes from those engaged in Head Start programs also draw attention to welfare's potential for democratic empowerment. In his interviews Soss found that Head Start recipients often emphasized the participatory nature of the program in descriptions of their experience. One Head Start mother, Lisa, explains,

> "You get to be more involved with Head Start. They don't tell you that you have to do it. They just give you the opportunity to get involved. So I feel like I'm wanted, like I'm needed to do something."[90]

Another parent appreciated that the workers at Head Start valued her opinion and that they "give you the opportunity to go to a meeting where *you* are making decisions."[91] One

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[86]Womack 1993.

[87]Bruch 2009, 19.

[88]Ibid.

[89]Soss, 2000.

[90]Ibid.

particularly striking account of Head Start's potential to empower comes from a former Head Start parent whose life is changed through involvement in the program.[92] Glenna Zeak tells the story of her own experience in the third person, from the perspective of an anonymous Head Start parent, "Mrs. M." After attending a small committee meeting to plan a holiday party "Mrs. M. felt pretty proud of herself. Not only had she spoken up, but the other parents had listened, and her opinion had been valued."[93] Involvement in minor meetings leads Mrs. M to join the policy council, where her organizational skills are noticed and she is appointed secretary. This involvement leads Mrs. M's self-esteem to grow "her personality began to change with her involvement in Heard Start."[94] Mrs. M joins more committees, enrolls another child in Head Start and is elected state representative and policy council chairperson.[95] At an out of town conference Mrs. M. has "an awakening" and realizes that "she did not have to live in an abusive environment. She saw that she was worthwhile and valued." After a particularly violent encounter with her partner Mrs. M turns to Head Start for help, leaves her abusive partner and after years of rebuilding, becomes a Head Start instructor.

Empirical work on Head Start thus demonstrates, quite convincingly, that need-based programs can and already do democratically empower recipients. Of course Head Start does not completely undermine feminist critiques of welfare programs. There have been

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[91]Ibid.

[92]Zeak 1996.

[93]Zeak 1996, 247.

[94]Zeak 1996.

[95]Zeak 1996.

conflicting ideas about what role parents should play, ranging from that of fellow students (learning child care techniques by participating in the classroom) to the more democratic position of community leaders (wielding significant control over local Head Start programs). There have, accordingly, been differences in the extent to which programs engage parents and the extent to which parents benefit from involvement with their local Head Start center. It also seems problematic that the only need-based program that encourages participation only provides benefits to women through their children. Though the skills learned in Head Start councils are applicable to a broad range of activities (including political activity), access to Head Start leadership positions is largely limited to parents of young children. Despite these flaws, analysis of welfare demonstrates that empowerment occurs even within traditionally denigrated need-based programs, and that such programs can enjoy long term public support. Moving forward, we might consider how to expand the empowering aspects of Head Start and incorporate their methods into programs directed towards individuals as individuals (rather than as parents).

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This analysis suggests that we cannot understand those welfare programs that have historically benefitted (and controlled) women without understanding their position in the broader welfare state. Nor can we understand welfare, or its "tracks" as comprehensively oppressive, even in light of its many oppressive elements. To demonstrate the complexity of welfare programs we need only compare the democratic empowerment of Head Start to that of SSDI. From a democratic empowerment view, Head Start's design is much more attractive. SSDI's benefits stem more from the program's lack of intervention than from anything like Head Start designers' intentional incorporation of recipients. Under this view

SSDI (an entitlement program) seems surprisingly inferior to Head Start (a need-based program) insofar as it positions citizens as respected clients, but rarely as engaged co-participants.

Perhaps more importantly, the view of the state necessitated by such a shift directs our attention to the contradictions of the welfare state, to the ways in which women's expanding relationships with the state create both active and regulated subjects and to sites where activists might redeploy (or help sustain deployment of) the welfare state for feminist aims. I argue that we should look to existing structures of welfare and relationships with the state as sites of both empowerment and disempowerment. We should understand welfare as a complex, multidirectional and often contradictory set of programs and discourses that warrant both feminist criticism and feminist support. In an effort to bolster the relatively anemic scholarship on the latter view, I have explored the work of policy feedback scholars on the significant role of the upper track of welfare in producing active political subjects and on the potential of lower-track programs to do the same.

A view of welfare as political empowerment thus suggests that the state cannot be understood as a cohesive structure of oppression. The sheer complexity of state programs and the ease with which changes in program constituencies and local implementation methods can shift the meaning of federal welfare legislation discourages any such singular understanding of the state. The realization that there are empowering components of means-tested programs, and that entitlement programs can empower those most dependent on benefits. With this understanding we can begin to evaluate and negotiate between differing feminist conceptions of the state, as I discuss in the next section.

FEMINISTS THEORIZING THE STATE

Allison Jagger suggests that while feminists share a commitment to ending the subordination of women, they offer different accounts of this subordination and different prescriptions for ending it.[96] This is certainly true in the case of feminist theories of the state. Feminists seem to disagree over two overlapping issues. They differ, first, on whether the state is inherently oppressive or whether we can look to the state as a way of ending discrimination and inequality. Second, they differ in terms of conceptualizing the form of the state, or whether the state should be understood as a cohesive entity with universal characteristics (male, sexist, racist, etc.) or as a multifaceted entity with no fixed aim or, as something in between.

Liberal feminists have been most willing to recognize the positive potential of state power. Scholars and activists of the liberal bent have identified the state as a source of power for women and sought formal rights as a means of ending oppressive practices. Some liberal feminists emphasize the need for the state to ensure women's freedom from coercion. Other liberal feminists focus their critique of the state on its institutionalization of inequality and seek equal treatment by the state as the solution to women's oppression.[97] Still others conceive of freedom as women's ability to live a self-directed life. In almost all forms of liberal feminism, the state is seen as a potentially positive source of support for women's

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[96]Jagger 1983, 5.

[97]Wendy McElroy, for example, explains that she would "stop writing about women's issues" if the government "acknowledged the full equal rights of women without paternalistic protection or oppression." McElroy 1998.

efforts to gain equality. The state offers solutions to sexual oppression when it grants women

equal protection from coercion (public and private), grants women equal legal rights, and

recognizes women as autonomous individuals. Abortion rights, rape law, equal protection

law, and sexual harassment law all represent successful attempts by liberal feminists to use

the law to improve the position and conditions of women.

To the extent that this view of the state emphasizes legalistic solutions to women's

oppression and focuses on law as the primary mediator of oppressive tendencies, it is

difficult to reconcile with the understanding of the state developed here. Analysis of welfare

and empowerment suggest that we must look far beyond the traditionally evaluated state

institutions (like laws, constitutions and legislative bodies) if we want to address state

paternalism and in seeking sites for feminist redeployment. Women's equal access to welfare

benefits clearly does not amount to an equal position in society when women make up the

majority of the poor and of those learning the political lessons of acquiescence. We might

also question whether the liberal feminist emphasis on legalistic solutions ignores the

potential for contradictions within the state. As my analysis of welfare suggests, even in the

presence of equal access to state benefits, we find programs and discourses that

fundamentally oppress women.

Democratic feminists have similarly suggested that the inclusion of women in the state

will lead to their liberation, though they go beyond this to argue for equal inclusion in a range

of democratic practices from small-scale community deliberations up to formal legislative

bodies. Deliberative democratic theorists argue that this inclusion is the only way for our

democracy to gain legitimacy. Democratic institutions are only legitimate when they

represent the interest of all citizens. Democratic decisions are legitimate only insofar as they

are open to "appropriate public processes of deliberation by free and equal citizens."[98] Under democratic feminist recommendations, the solution to women's oppression is their inclusion in political debate that allows women to be recognized, valued, and represented in the political decisions made by the community. In this way democratic feminists offer another positive view of the state, as one institution in which women should seek incorporation.

My analysis of the welfare state largely supports this view. This is in part because my measure of empowerment largely accords with democratic feminist theorists' calls for women's political engagement. It also draws from and supports democratic theorists' broad notion of the political and of where participation and deliberation should occur. This analysis suggests that democratic theorists are correct in arguing that we cannot simply focus on major democratic institutions (like Congress) or even lesser institutions (local governments and school boards). Individuals can be silenced in significant and damaging ways through their interaction with bureaucrats and caseworkers and through public discourse. This analysis of welfare empowerment also contributes to our understanding of the extensive work that would be involved in any real efforts to position women as active participants in political life and in their own lives. Political empowerment would require an understanding of the multiple sites of political learning and their potential to contradict one another. It would require, at the least, a combination of equal legal protections, equal treatment as citizens (or positioning as citizens) in one's interactions with the state, and the vigorous contestation of public rhetoric that unreasonably delegitimizes marginalized citizens. In this way my analysis of welfare and empowerment also suggests that liberal feminist efforts to ensure women's autonomy would require action far beyond legalistic solutions.

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[98]Benhabib 1996, 71.

However, my analysis also suggests that we needn't be wholly skeptical of the existing structure of the state or of political discourse that incorporates marginalized voices. While the best recognized deliberative institutions might resist the incorporation of marginalized or non-traditional voices, other deliberative institutions are able to draw out, incorporate and strengthen marginalized voices. The policy councils of Head Start offer an example of this potential and suggest that those deliberative institutions that are formed within marginalized communities might be particularly suited to the incorporation of non-traditional voices.

Unlike liberal and democratic feminists, who recognize state power as a potential resource for women's liberation, radical feminists often see state power as fundamentally linked to relationships of domination and subordination or as intrinsically and problematically male. Marilyn Frye, for example, argues that "differences of power are always manifested in asymmetrical access" and describes feminist separatism in the stark terms of a slave denying her master.[99] In accordance with this view of power, radical feminists criticize the state as a site of patriarchal power and social control. Despite this, some radical feminists have identified locations and structures within the state that may be amenable to feminist aims. Catharine MacKinnon, for example, has played a pivotal role in theorizing and implementing formal legal protections against sexual harassment.[100] These optimistic or constructive radical critiques more closely parallel the work done here, suggesting that there is room for feminist activity even within state structures that have historically worked to oppress women.

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[99]Frye 1983 103, 105.

[100]Mackinnon 1979.

Maternal feminists like Carol Gilligan, Eva Kittay and Sara Ruddick offer a similar critique in presenting a maternal alternative to liberalism.[101] Maternal feminist arguments suggest that feminists must reject the values of traditional liberal individualistic politics and draw their conceptions of public morality and citizenship from the unique experiences of women in the historically depoliticized private realm. Maternalist feminists would replace the autonomous liberal individual with a relational character and an ethic emphasizing virtues of care. They aim to incorporate values and orientations which have been traditionally obscured in the public realm into state action and decision making. Like radical feminists, maternal feminists see the state as predominantly male and advocate a radical shift from current structures of state power and current political values.

Socialist feminists have been similarly skeptical of state power.[102] Feminists working in this tradition have sought to reveal "the capitalist and patriarchal foundations of the liberal state" in addition to illuminating the oppression inherent in the sexual division of labor.[103] In their critiques of the state, socialist feminists have addressed the "state's involvement in protecting patriarchy as a system of power, much in the same way it protects capitalism and racism."[104]Under this view the state is deeply, and inherently patriarchal. The liberation of women then, requires a complete overthrow of the liberal capitalist state and the breakdown of the patriarchal structures it supports.

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[101]Gilligan 1982; Kittay 1999; Ruddick 1995.
[102]Hennessy, Rosemary, 1997, Holmstrom, Nancy, 2002. Meuleneelt, Anja, 1984. Radical Women. *The Radical Women Manifesto: Socialist Feminist Theory, Program, and Organizational Structure*. Red Letter Press, 2001.

[103]Dietz 2002, 28.

[104]Eisenstein 1981, 223.

At their core, socialist theories offer a deeply pessimistic view of the state (at least as it is currently structured). They, like feminists in most camps, recognize the positive potential of the state. Unlike most of their peers, socialist feminists solutions require the radical transformation of state structures, incremental change is futile. Here socialist feminist theorists of the state may be helpful, insofar as they remind us that all state institutions are linked and that real change requires comprehensive revisions (though perhaps not class revolution). We cannot, for example, rely on Head Start programs to change the way the poor conceive of themselves as citizens because other programs, like TANF, are simultaneously working to discourage full political participation.

Exploring welfare as a form of democratic empowerment illuminates the complexities and contradictions of state programs, complicating these feminist theories of the state. The understanding of welfare presented here suggests that those feminists who see some potential in state power offer us an optimistic and accurate understanding of the state. We also see that where socialist, radical and maternal theories suggest that the state can be understood as inherently oppressive or male, they fail to address the contradictions and complexities uncovered in this analysis. This final insight brings us to yet another set of debates that the analysis presented here can help adjudicate between – debates over whether the state is best understood as cohesive or as multidimensional.

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Feminists have disagreed on the extent to which the state can be characterized as a unified agent. We might consider this the feminist debate over conceptualizations of the state. Judith Allen has argued that state entities are too multiple and particular to allow for a single theory of the state. We cannot, for example, theorize the police in the same way that

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we theorize jurisprudence or bureaucracy.[105] Wendy Brown argues that it is exactly this

multidimensionality that gives the state its hegemonic influence/power.[106] The state's

dominance, according to Brown, "lies in the combination of strategies and arenas in which

power is exercised."[107] Brown goes on to suggest that the multiple dimensions of state power

make it "difficult to circumscribe and difficult to injure. There is no single thread that, when

snapped, unravels the whole of state or masculine dominance."[108] According to Brown the

state's multiple, hegemonic power is inevitably gendered and systematically sexist. Under

this view state power may be complex and multidimensional, but all of these elements work

together to oppress women, and this multidimensionality makes liberation extremely difficult

to achieve.

A slightly more positive view of state power can be found in the work of Frances Fox

Piven and Davina Cooper.[109] Piven argues, "All social relationships involve elements of

control, and yet there is no possibility for power except in social relationships. In fact…the

main opportunities for women to exercise power today inhere precisely in their "dependent"

relationships with the state."[110] According to Piven the growing reach of the state in modern

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[105]Judith Allen 1990.

[106]Brown 1995.

[107]Ibid, 179.

[108]Brown 1995.

[109]Piven 1990; Cooper 1995.

[110]Piven 1990, 250-1.

life and women's concentration in the welfare state make exercising power through the state vital. Davina Cooper's understanding of the state is similarly helpful. Cooper, like Brown conceives of the state as a "multifaceted phenomena" but goes beyond Brown to suggest that the state has "no fixed form, essence or core" and can simultaneously oppress and unfetter women.[111] Rather than identifying the state with a particular form, Cooper argues that we should seek to understand "the wide *range* of relations that constitute the state's identity at particular historical and social junctures."[112] The state may, for example, behave paternalistically towards welfare recipients while behaving deferentially towards social security recipients. Even more complicated, state actors may engage in a discourse of entitlement and dis-entitlement while state programs might empower and marginalize in much more complex and unpredictable ways. Shifting constituencies of entitlement programs might undermine the sexism and racism at the root of welfare program divisions and changes in welfare discourse might open up space for changes in program design. Only such a view of the state as flexible, multidimensional and occasionally contradictory can accommodate the complex effects of welfare programs on participant empowerment. Beyond its accuracy this view is attractive because of its inherent optimism. Understanding the state as constantly re-negotiated and never wholly oppressive suggests that marginalized groups may be able to mobilize some aspects of the state in support of their efforts even while other elements of the state work against them.

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[111]Cooper 1995, 61.

[112]Cooper 1995, 72.

Feminist theories of the state have become increasingly imperative to feminist politics with the rise of the modern welfare state and the feminization of poverty. Together these shifts have left an unprecedented number of women exposed to state authority and given the state a "historically unparalleled prominence" in women's lives.[113] To understand the conditions and experiences of women in the modern welfare state, we must have a rich understanding of state power. And to determine when we should criticize or reject state power and when state power might have the potential to empower women, we must have a nuanced understanding of state power.

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[113]Brown 1995.

CONCLUSION

In 1988 Joan Scott called for a new feminist theory of the state, arguing that the

discipline needed:

> "theory that can analyze the workings of patriarchy in all its manifestations - ideological, institutional, organizational, subjective - accounting not only for continuities but also for change over time. We need theory that will let us think in terms of pluralities and diversities rather than unities and universals....We need theory that will enable us to articulate alternative ways of thinking about (and thus acting upon) gender without either simply reversing the old hierarchies or confirming them. And we need theory that will be useful and relevant for political practice."[114]

The same can be said for the existing feminist scholarship on welfare. We remain in need of

theory that can analyze the workings of patriarchy in the welfare state, theory that will

identify, analyze and historicize the multiple ways in which sexism and racism function in

the welfare state. Feminists have already built a rich scholarship towards this end, exploring

the history of the welfare system, and the way structures of power, language and discourse

exert control over women. To the extent that they have explored multiple sources of power

they have begin to think in terms of "pluralities and diversities" of oppression. Unfortunately

few have engaged in the work of building a theory that will allow us to develop new ways of

conceptualizing and acting through the welfare state. A theory that focuses on the way

welfare state programs shape citizens' identity begins to do this work.

In the midst of early feminist scholarship on welfare, Frances Fox Piven argued that the

prevailing feminist characterization of the state was of a structure that controls women,

replacing the patriarchal power of individual men with the equally patriarchal power of the

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[114]Scott 1988, 33.

state. Feminist views of the state have since diversified, but overwhelming feminist skepticism towards the state has remained particularly resilient in the case of welfare. A democratic empowerment view helps us to see the consequences of the fact that the entitlement track can be empowering while means-tested programs are oppressive. Recipients of Social Security can be respected, largely through their disassociation with traditional welfare while welfare recipients are stigmatized and stereotyped. Strategically, feminists might attempt to draw on the inherent respect of Social Security, or undermine it by unmasking its status as a welfare program, or its growing female and minority populations. This work also draws our attention to spaces within the need-based track that have been designed to be empowering, as in the case of need-based Head Start. Exploring welfare's democratic effects thus complicates inherently structural or pessimistic views of the state. Fortunately, the analysis of welfare programs as democratic empowerment also provides a position from which to adjudicate between theories of the state and directs us towards a more complex and accurate understanding of the state.

This work does not attempt to justify welfare, but we could imagine an argument similarly grounded in democratic theory that would suggest that the institutions reaching those most likely to be marginalized by society should be monitored closely for their empowering or disempowering effects. In the meantime this work provides us with a valuable and previously overlooked standard with which to evaluate welfare programs. Considering welfare through the lens of democratic empowerment suggests that conservative and feminist arguments alike err, insofar as they embrace unqualified criticisms of state power and obscure the state's multiple and contradicting aspects. The most empirically accurate and politically fruitful conceptualizations of the state are those which chart a middle

course between absolute rejection of the liberating potential of the state and wholehearted embrace of state power. In the case of welfare, this more complex view allows us to recognize that the design of welfare programs has profound democratic implications. This view also allows us to recognize welfare's potential to positively impact citizens, encourage democratic participation and undermine participatory inequalities. This understanding of welfare is valuable for feminists who hope to intervene meaningfully in welfare discourse and design and vital for anyone concerned with the future of democracy in America.

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